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National Museum of African American History and Culture

Pamphlet: Black Americans in the Spanish People's War Against Fascism 1936-1939

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Note: Following is an abridged article by the late Ben Davis, Jr., member National Committee CPUSA and first elected Black Communist member of the New York City Council. (From the DAILY WORKER July 14, 1938)

[[image]]

The Death of a Black Communist

by Benjamin J. Davis, Jr.

Doug Roach, Negro hero of Lincoln Brigade, dies here. Douglas Roach, valiant son of the Negro people and one of the outstanding heroes of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain, died of pneumonia in Mt. Sinai hospital yesterday.

Affectionately known to his friends and comrades as "Doug," he died at the untimely age of 29. He was a native of Provincetown, Mass., where he was an active member of the Communist Party since 1932-- beloved and respected by the labor movement and his community. He graduated from the Massachusetts Agricultural College in Amherst, where he was a star wrestler. At Provincetown High School, he was "ace" end on the football team.

He was one of the first Americans to volunteer in defense of Spanish democracy in the early days of the Madrid siege.

An outstanding member of the Tom Mooney machinegun company, he often carried his machinegun single-handedly during long marches.

At the fierce counter-offensive launched by the fascists at Brunete, he often went for water and supplies for his comrades under heavy fire.

On the Jarama front, he inspired the members of the Lincoln Battalion. Time and again he held his position in the repeated charges of Franco's Moorish cavalry, saving the men in the lines back of him. These were but a few examples of his great courage.

Wounded by shrapnel, he returned to the U.S. He immediately

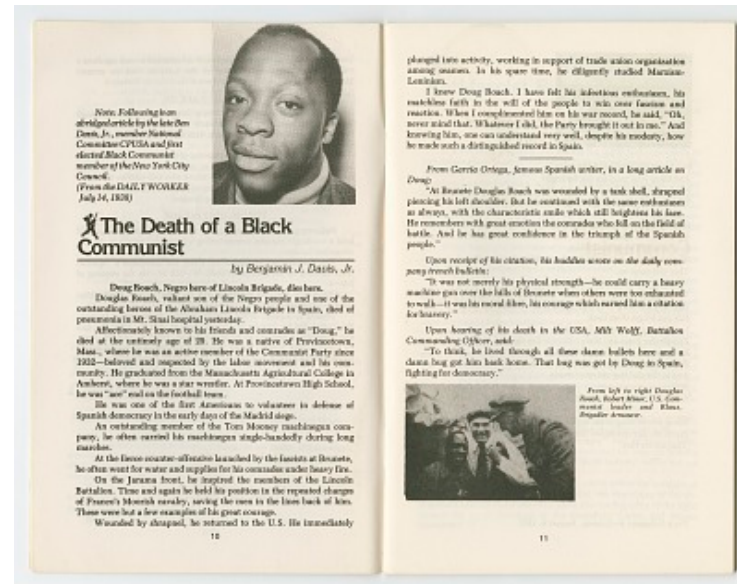
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plunged into activity, working in support of trade union organization among seamen. In his spare time, he diligently studied Marxism-Leninism.

I knew Doug Roach. I have felt his infectious enthusiasm, his matchless faith in the will of the people to win over fascism and reaction. When I complimented him on his war record, he said, "Oh, never mind that. Whatever I did, the Party brought it out in me." And knowing him, one can understand very well, despite his modesty, how he made such a distinguished record in Spain.



From Garcia Ortega, famous Spanish writer, in a long article on Doug:

"At Brunete Douglas Roach was wounded by a tank shell, shrapnel piercing his left shoulder. But he continued with the same enthusiasm as always, with the characteristic smile which still brightens his face. He remembers with great emotion the comrades who fell on the field of battle. And he has great confidence in the triumph of the Spanish people."

Upon receipt of his citation, his buddies wrote on the daily company trench bulletin:

"It was not merely his physical strength-- he could carry a heavy machine gun over the hills of Brunete when others were too exhausted to walk-- it was his moral fibre, his courage which earned him a citation for bravery."

Upon hearing of his death in the USA, Milt Wolff, Battalion Commanding Officer, said:

"To think, he lived through all these damn bullets here and a damn bug got him back home. That bug was got by Doug in Spain, fighting for democracy."

[[image - From left to right Douglas Roach, Robert Minor, U.S. Communist leader and Klaus, Brigadier Armourer.]]

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