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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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[Narrator:] A quite, moon-shining night greeted the volunteers slipping across the Pyrenees Mountains. A cool mountain air stirred the dry leaves. No snow or ice was visible, except what could be seen on distant peaks. The volunteers sworn to silence and no smoking could only hear the hard crunch of dead leaves underfoot. To talk or light a match was to risk discovery by the French police patrols sealing the border to such crossings.

The first and second waves of Lincolns arrived in winter's midst. Alonzo Watson, Douglas Roach, Oscar Hunter, Walter Garland, and Oliver Law, were the first Afro-American Lincolns to reach Spain. All would play leading roles in the months ahead. Others would arrive: Crawford Morgan, Milton Herndon, Salaria Kee, Barney Rucker, and Aaron Johnson. History would record their deeds. They came from all walks of life; different parts of the U.S.; ech with varied levels of conviction and understanding as to why they were there, in Spain.

They were Communists, socialists, trade unionists, unemployed, unorganized, organizers of the unorganized, lynch-law fighters, and community activists. Abe Lewis, Vaughn Love, James Yates, Charles Parker, Pat Roosevelt, Luchel McDaniels, Basilio Cueria, Youngblood Nance, Admiral Kilpatrick, Sterling Rochester and Amos Archer-- certain factors cast them together, almost as one. They came from similar struggles; some had met during them. Scottsboro. Herndon. Hoovervilles. Hunger Marches. Lynchings. They represented the nation's deepest convictions, and were and inseverable, if unrecognized, link in the best, richest traditions of its history.

Alongside their white fellow countrymen, they would lock horns with fascism in Jarama's bloody valley. Jarama would become their Lexington-Concord, where these Afro-Americans and whites, the nations finest sons, would lay down their lives.

At Jarama, Alonzo Watson would earn the nickname "Crispus Attucks", as the first Afro-American to be killed fighting fascism, defending democracy in Spain. Alonzo, slight and quiet in his mannerisms, was a son of struggle. He saw fascism as they all did, as the personification of racism. He had volunteered to fight in Ethiopia, but the war ended. When the call came for volunteers for Spain, where Mussolini's troops, emboldened by Ethiopia's defeat, had been sent, Alonzo answered.

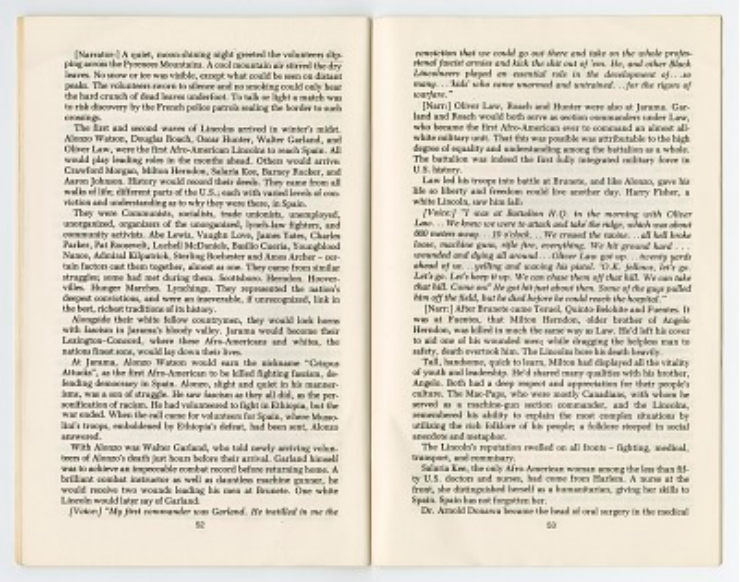
With Alonzo was Walter Garland, who told newly arriving volunteers of Alonzo's death just hours before their arrival. Garland himself was to achieve an impeccable combat record before returning home. A brilliant combat instructor as well as dauntless machine gunner, he would receive two wounds leading his men at Brunete. One white Lincoln would later say of Garland:

[Voice:] "My first commander was Garland. He instilled in me the

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conviction that we could go out there and take on the whole professional fascist armies and kick the shit out of 'em. He, and other Black



Lincolneers played an essential role in the development of...so many...'kids' who came unarmed and untrained...for the rigors of warfare."

[Narr:] Oliver Law, Roach and Hunter were also at Jarama. Garland and Roach would both serve as section commanders under Law, who became the first Afro-American ever to command an almost all-white military unit. That this was possible was attributable to the high degree of equality and understanding among the battalion as a whole. The battalion was indeed the first fully integrated military force in U.S. history.

Law led his troops into battle at Brunete, and like Alonzo, gave his life so liberty and freedom could live another day. Harry Fisher, a white Lincoln, saw him fall:

[Voice:] "I was at Battalion H.Q. in the morning with Oliver Law...We knew we were to attack and take the ridge, which was about 600 meters away...10 o'clock...We crossed the ravine...all hell broke loose, machine guns, rifle fire, everything. We hit ground hard...wounded and dying all around...Oliver Law got up...twenty yards ahead of us...yelling and waving his pistol. 'O.K. fellows, let's go. Let's go. Let's keep it up. We can chase them off that hill. We can take that hill. Come on!' He got hit just about them. Some of the guys pulled him off the field, but he died before he could reach the hospital."

[Narr:] After Brunete came Teruel, Quinto-Belchite and Fuentes. It was at Fuentes, that Milton Herndon, older brother of Angelo Herndon, was killed in much the same way as Law. He'd left his cover to aid one of his wounded men; while dragging the helpless man to safety, death overtook him. The Lincolns bore his death heavily.

Tall, handsome, quick to learn, Milton had displayed all the vitality of youth and leadership. He'd shared many qualities with his brother, Angelo. Both had a deep respect and appreciation for their people's culture. The Mac-Paps, who were mostly Canadians, with whom he served as a machine-gun section commander, and the Lincolns, remembered his ability to explain the most complex situations by utilizing the rich folklore of his people; a folklore steeped in social anecdote and metaphor.

The Lincoln's reputation swelled on all fronts - fighting, medical, transport, and commissary.

Salara Kee, the only Afro-American woman among the less than fifty U.S. doctors and nurses, had come from Harlem. A nurse at the front, she distinguished herself as a humanitarian, giving her skills to Spain. Spain has not forgotten her.

Dr. Arnold Donawa became the head of oral surgery in the medical



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