

This is the story, based on fact, of a Spanish volunteer officer who fought with a division known as the Division Azul, or Blue Division, in World War II on the Russian Front. Our hero goes through several battles on the northern sector of the Russian Front, south of Leningrad. He makes friends and has a romance with a Russian woman, just as many men of the division did. He also meets with a German officer to explain his motivation for joining the division, including avenging his murdered sister, killed by Russians in the Spanish Civil War. The hero also fights to save his men in the famous Battle of Krasny Bor.

Face to the Sun

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FACE TO THE SUN

A Novel of the Division Azul



Anthony Genualdi

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The following is based on a true unit that existed in World War II. Some of the events are based on fact, and some of the characters are based on real persons, but for the most part are changed to remove any resemblance to anyone living or dead.

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CHAPTER TEN

13 NOVEMBER 1941

The men of Fifth Company had no time to rest. They had saved Russa for their country and cause, but there was a whole front to deal with. The Soviets worked to push the Spanish division, and the part of the German division with them, back across the Volkhov. Further east, at Posad, the deepest penetration of the *Division Azul* was in deadly peril. Soviet artillery, armor and infantry were hammering the Spaniards, who were with First Battalion of Regiment 269. General Muñoz Grandes had ordered Colonel Esparza to send troops to help relieve its defenders. Esparza in turn sent the balance of his command to help. That meant no rest for Adolfo and his men, among others.

By Noon on the 13th, Fifth Company, together with Seventh Company, had slugged through the snow and the enemy to reach Posad. Adolfo and his platoon barely had time to sit down and eat. They could only eat horsemeat they had hacked off of dead animals around them. They ate the snow to give themselves water. They stripped the dead and the wounded of ammunition.

At 1310, the enemy hit hard from east and west. Adolfo saw some of his men drop, but he rallied the rest. He took Baranovsky and three other men to support the only antitank gun left in the town. It was a 37mm gun, a little piece that could stop most of the Soviet light armor. If the Russians brought out T-34s, then it would do no good.

The 37mm faced east, on a narrow trail that led from Poselok. Adolfo could hear enemy tanks rolling up the trail. The lead tank came around the bend from behind some trees. It was a T-26, which Adolfo had dealt with back home. He could hear the gun captain tell his gunner, "Steady, my boy. Let him come up closer... Let him come up closer. *Now*, let him have it!"

The gun barked, and the T-26 exploded in a spectacular blaze. Everyone cheered, for now the column this tank led was blocked. Adolfo and the men got up and ran around the trees on either flank. Seven tanks were sitting on the trail, unable to move forward or off to the side. Baranovsky led a man to the left, while Adolfo led another man to the right. They closed on the tanks,

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and Adolfo climbed up on the second tank, pulling a grenade from his belt. He pulled the cord, then opened the commander's hatch on the turret, dropped the grenade in, and closed the hatch, leaning on it. He was rewarded with an explosion, and the cries of the crew as the shrapnel and blast killed them. From his perch, he covered Baranovsky as he did the same to the third tank. The other men did the same to the next two tanks, then the process was repeated, until Baranovsky himself dealt with the last tank. "Times like this," the old soldier said, "make me miss the cavalry. We'd have ridden right around these guys."

"Too bad the world keeps inventing new toys," Adolfo replied.

Torreón, who'd gotten his promotion to *Sargento Primero* (Staff Sergeant) before they left Russa, had led the rest of the platoon in defending their sector of the perimeter. Russians attacked, and Torreón and the men hurled them back, but at such a price. When Adolfo was relieved by men of another company of First Battalion, he came back to find Torreón alone in a shell hole.

"What happened, *sargento*?"

"*Mi teniente*, I had a dozen men with me on this section. All *legionarios*. As they were hit, I heard them cry out, '*A mi la legion*.' That's what we say, *mi teniente*, when we need help."

"I know, *sargento*. I've heard it before, in Spain, and at Russa, and here too." Adolfo looked down and away for a moment, then continued. "I find you alone. Where is everyone?"

Torreón looked up with tears on his dirty face. "They tried to attack us, and we fought them, *mi teniente*. *La Legion* fought like it was Spain! That's what they told us, right?"

"Yes. 'Posad is Spain.' But where are the men?"

Torreón pointed. "Look at the snow. It's come to cover the men."

Adolfo looked at the snow. It was full of lumps where the men had fallen. Arms and legs stuck up from the white landscape. Beyond those lumps, however, were many dead men in brown uniforms, some with caps missing, some with boots taken off. "They tried to strip them," he asked.

"Yes, *mi teniente*. They were crazy for something to keep them warm. They also tried to take ammo for the Russian guns they had." Torreón wiped his face. "When do we get relief, *mi teniente*?"

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“I don’t know, *sargento*. But we will hold here.” At this point, artillery started to fall. “Get back to the houses. *Andale!*”

Adolfo’s party and Torreon made it to the closest house as the shells fell around them.

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