

Some kind of hero

This column is about a Spanish hero whom I honor today. On July 17, 50 years ago, Gen. Francisco Franco led the garrisons of Spanish Morocco in revolt against a central government at Madrid that was fast falling under leftist control. So began the Spanish Civil War.

The following day, an obscure, middle-aged commander of a small army garrison in the provincial backwater of Toledo named Col. Moscardo answered Franco's call to revolt by ordering his 1,000 troops and cadets to take up positions in the city's medieval fortress, the Alcazar.

Three days later Moscardo was ordered by Madrid to hand over his arms and position to Toledo's communist Workers' Militia. Moscardo refused and told his superiors in Madrid that their government was no longer Spanish but under the control of the Soviet Union.

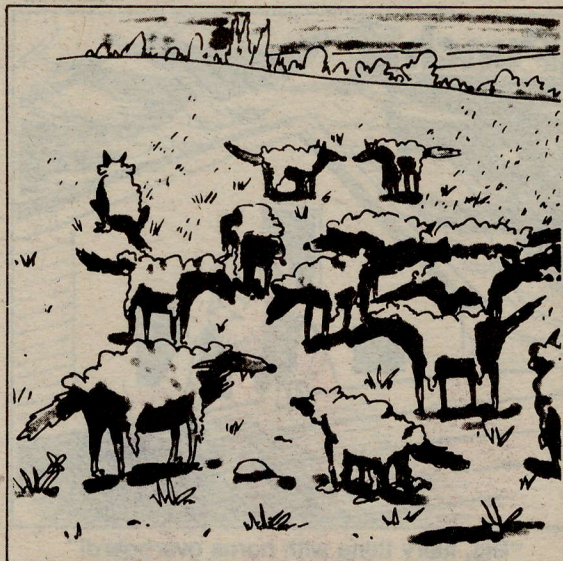
The next morning aircraft from the Republican-Left government bombed the Alcazar and shortly after it was invested by about 7,000 troops from Madrid — regulars, communists, anarchists and Trotskyites. Moscardo refused repeated demands to surrender.

Then, on July 23, Moscardo received a telephone call from the chief of the communist Workers' Militia. They had captured Moscardo's son. Unless the Alcazar was surrendered within 10 minutes, Moscardo was told, his son would be shot.

Moscardo asked to talk to his son to ensure that he was truly in enemy hands. They spoke in hushed tones for a few seconds. Then, more audibly to others around the phone, the young Moscardo asked, "Father, what should I do?"

A moment of inexpressible horror for a father, for a human being, for a soldier. A moment that, for me, will always epitomize the sombre hues, the Toledo steel, the deep passions and pride that infuse the Spanish soul.

Punch



"Wait a minute! You mean everybody here is a wolf?"

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



"Stand at attention," Moscardo said over the phone to his boy, "shout '*Arriba España*' and die like a man."

The son replied, "That is quite simple. I will do as you say, father."

Then the father spoke to the head of the Workers' Militia and told him there was no need to wait the allotted 10 minutes. The Alcazar would not surrender. A few minutes later the leftist forces called back to tell Moscardo his son had been shot.

For the next 70 days the Alcazar was subjected to incessant shelling, mining, air attack and ground assaults. The medieval fortress soon became a symbol of traditional, Catholic Spain fighting against the forces of 20th-century Marxism and social revolution.

No matter how much favorable propaganda Spain's leftist forces received from the western media — all the songs and glory about the International Brigades, *La Passionara* and the defence of Madrid, the Alcazar reminded the outside world that there were two sides in Spain's civil war. Equally, the heroic defence mounted by Moscardo and his men captured the admiration and awe of the watching world.

The besieged garrison also served as a magnet for Nationalist forces advancing from the south. Each battalion went into battle urged to "save the garrison of the Alcazar." The Republicans were just as determined to pluck out this sharp thorn in their sides.

The Alcazar was to be a small precursor of greater sieges to come a few years later at Stalingrad, Leningrad, Bataan and Berlin.

On Sept. 27, 1936, advancing elements of the Spanish Foreign Legion and the Army of Africa commanded by Gen. Franco broke the siege and relieved the beleaguered fortress. Every member of the garrison was awarded Spain's highest military honor, the Cross of San Fernando, the equivalent of the Victoria Cross.

Col. Moscardo bade farewell to his garrison and slipped away into obscurity, broken by sickness and tragedy.

After years of residual bitterness, Spain's civil war has now well and truly ended. Its old soldiers are largely reconciled or in their dotage, young Spaniards are unconcerned: Time, as always, has turned violent passions into dry history.

And then there was old Nationalist Gen. Queipo de Llano whose confessor asked him on his deathbed, "Do you forgive your enemies, general?"

"No!"

"You must, your immortal soul is in danger," warned the priest.

"But I have no more enemies," replied de Llano sweetly, "I had them all shot!"