

Civil War in Spain Republican Mail; Refugees in France

In the Spanish civil war, a coalition of nationalist, monarchist, clerical Roman Catholic, and fascist forces overthrew the elected Republican government and established General Francisco Franco's Falangist dictatorship. The war lasted from July 1936 to April 1939, and became a testing ground and rehearsal for Nazi military aggression in Europe. Fascist Italy sent an army of approximately 50,000 troops, known as the *Corpo Truppe Volontari*, to aid Franco's Nationalist cause. Nazi Germany sent a smaller, more elite force of 14,000 pilots, organized as the Condor Legion, whose terror bombings of civilians gave a foretaste of World War II. Anti-fascists from all over the world — communists, socialists, and anarchists — rallied to support the Spanish republic, by joining International Brigades. As Franco's Nationalist forces overran all of Spain, approximately 400,000 Spanish Republicans and their supporters fled to Southern France, where they were interned in camps. The largest one, Camp de Gurs, later became a concentration camp for Jews destined for transport to death camps in Poland after France fell to Germany in 1940.

The 1936 or 1937 letter from Spain to the United States has a boxed magenta Republican military censor mark over the tape seal. On the July 3, 1939, envelope from Camp de Gurs is a 90-centime blue peace stamp of France overprinted with a black "F," which was issued for the exclusive use of Spanish refugees. Each refugee received two stamps per month. Despite the denomination, mail franked by these franchise stamps went postage free within France.

