

This German Fights For Liberty

BECAUSE he could "see the way things were going," in 1929 a young student of architecture left Germany. He believed in the liberty of man.

Then 20 years old, Hermann Bottcher came to Australia. He joined the Carpenters' Union, but could not work because there was strike on, and Hermann Bottcher was no scab. The strike over, he worked for a while round Young, then got a job on a station in Howes Valley, near Singleton.

He said he liked Australia and Australians, although his father had been killed by men of the A.I.F. during World War I in France.

But he had always wanted to see America, so he left Australia for U.S. in 1931. His English was still slow and faltering.

In the States, the stocky, sandy-haired, quiet-faced, young man entered San Francisco State College and later the University of California. He studied sociology and psychology for four years.

Then came the Spanish Civil War. Hermann Bottcher, who believed in the liberty of man, decided that the time had come to leave the classroom and fight for it.

IN 1937 he went to Spain. He spent 25 months there, 18 of them at the front.

Bottcher served with the Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigade. At Belchite he was wounded, and at Fuentes, on the Ebro. He fought at Guadalupe and at Madrid. He rose to captain. The Cruz de Valor was awarded him for heroism in Catalonia.

The Spanish War ended. Hermann Bottcher found that his fight for freedom had won him a place in a concentration camp at St. Cyprien, France. He was there for six weeks and was released only through the intervention of the United States authorities.

They were very good, he said, because he was not a United States citizen, and the U.S. had frowned on any of its residents fighting in Spain.

In 1939 he arrived back in America. From there, sad at heart, he watched the whole of Europe crumble into war. Two years went by, two bad years for the liberty of man.

Then the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Next day Hermann Bottcher enlisted in the United States Army.

Last November found Sergeant Bottcher struggling over the Owen Stanley Range to outflank the Japs at Buna.

AS they lugged machine-guns and mortars over mountain razorbacks, supply planes dropped the American unit its bully beef, biscuits and, sometimes, chocolates.

On December 6 Sergeant Bottcher led 29 men in an attack on Buna beach. He cut the Jap lines, cut off communications between Buna village and the beach. He knew they would counter-attack.

Before dawn 29 Japs came silently through the drizzling-rain and jumped the Americans in their shallow foxholes—14 of them left out of the 29.

The fighting was bloody—bayo-

Bottcher was wounded in the right hand. He kept firing his tommy-gun with his left hand from his hip. The Japs went back.

Two nights later the Japs came again, determined to wipe out the thin line of Americans. Machine-gun crossfire weaved a deadly pattern over the Americans' heads to keep them under cover. Spain had taught Bottcher that this meant attack. Vague silhouettes took shape above the sand.

"WILL I open up?" said the machine-gunner beside Bottcher.

"Hold it," the sergeant said, and then, when the Japs formed a skirmishing party and swept down screaming like Red Indians to within 30 yards. "Now's your chance!"

A stream of bullets cut into the enemy line, made it waver long enough for the Americans to hurl in a shower of grenades.

The Japs, who had started 60 strong, broke and went back. A third counter-attack was beaten, too.

When he was relieved on December 12, Sergeant Bottcher had been reinforced and had charge of 70 men—the Beach Defence Task Force.

Fourteen Jap pillboxes formed a triangle with sides 100 yards long.

Fire from the triangle was killing and wounding many Americans. They could make no headway against it.

ON the night of December 17, Sergeant Bottcher was promoted to captain. He is the first man in the U.S. Army in the South-West Pacific to be promoted from sergeant to captain in the field.

Three days later Captain Bottcher's unit was taken out of the triangle area. They had suffered heavy losses, but they had taken three Jap pillboxes, broken the murderous triangle.

Bottcher was left behind to show relieving troops the ropes. With them, he was wounded again. Two machine-gun bullets tore into his arm.

Captain Bottcher was evacuated, then, from New Guinea. He got malaria before he reached the mainland.

To his Spanish Cross of Valor had been added the American D.S.C. (Distinguished Service Cross) and the Purple Heart.

The young German—he is now 34—who left Germany because he believed in the liberty of man, wants, when the fighting for that liberty is over, to return to America and continue his studies.

He wants to become a doctor of philosophy.



Capt. Hermann Bottcher, D.S.C.