The British battalion of the international brigades and the Spanish civil war, 1936–39

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In 1995 the film Land and Freedom brought the Spanish Civil War to life on screen while offering a view of the war as being a popular revolution crushed by unfettered Stalinism in the form of a regular Republican army. However, Dr Hughes here argues that the lack of unity and discipline within the Republican camp was just as much to blame for Franco’s victory as the strength of Franco’s forces. In fact, Franco took advantage of the lack of organisation in the Republican ranks and experienced little difficulty in outflanking the militia units defending the road to Madrid. Dr Hughes challenges the view that badly-disciplined, poorly-equipped, ill-led popular militias stood any chance against Franco’s Morocce regulars and Spanish Foreign Legion. The British Battalion and the other foreign supporters for the Republican cause performed prodigious feats of bravery in these trying conditions, and the International Brigades as a whole were a great help to the Republic. But this was not enough since the Republic was disjointed and unable to pull together at the critical moments.

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DR MATTHEW HUGHES

Ken Loach’s 1995 film Land and Freedom broke new ground in bringing the Spanish Civil War on to the screen. It also gives a very particular view of the conflict in Spain from 1936-39. The film follows closely George Orwell’s experiences in Spain in the Republican militia of the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM—United Marxist Workers’ Party) as outlined in his Homage to Catalonia (1938). At the film’s end there is a memorable scene where well-disciplined, smartly-uniformed Communist troops brutally disarm the populist militia force. The militia members plead with the faceless New Model Army of the Spanish Republic but to no avail. Loach offers the vision of a popular revolution crushed by unfettered Stalinism in the form of a regular Republican army. The ‘regular’ forces only appear on the screen to bully hapless militia members. Loach prefers to focus on the personal experiences of an English working-class man, David Carr, in the POUM militia on the quiet, peripheral Aragon front. Reviews of Loach’s film, both by historians and ex-Brigaders, make this point, although with different degrees of vigour. Paul Preston encapsulated the feelings of many Republican veterans who felt ‘diminished by the political and personal self-indulgence on the Aragon front of the attractive boys and girls of the POUM’.

Reality behind the vision

The reality was that groups like the POUM obstructed Republican victory. General Franco stifled Nationalist opposition in his zone from groups such as the Carlists and the Falange to present a solid front. By contrast, the Republic failed to use its considerable resources to full effect. POUM-type units were part of the problem. The time that the Republic took to establish itself allowed Franco the breathing space to organise his forces. Franco’s military background, coupled with the failure to capture Madrid in 1936, made him realise the significance of regular forces in what would be a drawn-out war of attrition. James Albrighton, a 19-year-old British volunteer in the Muerte y Maestro Cen- turia, summed up the difference between the two sides when he noted in his diary how Anarchist militiamen told to carry out an order ‘refused and instead of being sent to the guard house (now I come to think of it, we have no guard room) . . . held a discussion, and in the end voted to see if they should obey the cabo [corporal].’ One Catalan Anarchist militiaman, who subsequently served in the French Foreign Legion and the British Army, admitted that his unit would have done better considering what he learnt during the Second World War. William Alexander, one of the commanders of the British battalion, wrote in 1937 to his sister in Catalonia, where anarchism was strongest: ‘When the anarchists start doing things—and by that I mean fighting—they will . . . realise the need for unity of command, discipline and effort.’

The worry of being in the line next to an Anarchist unit was remarked on by one veteran of the war: ‘Nobody in Madrid felt easy with an anarchist formation on his flank.’ Technical branches of the Republican forces such as the navy were particularly badly served by radicalism. Sailors’ Soviets kept run-down ships languishing in port and a superior Republican navy contributed little to the war effort. Many in the Republican zone, including the middle classes and army officers accustomed to discipline, looked to the Communists to present a tough, united exterior. LEO Charlton, a former British air attaché in America, summarised the problems inherent in the untrained militia system in a report which looked at the situation in 1936: ‘The Militia
which attempted to stem the rebel onrush in the plains of Toledo, and in Estremadura, was not a disciplined army. Lacking officers, and without training, they comported themselves with heroism, it is true, but a spirit of individualism permeated their ranks which does not count for very much in a modern army. Tom Wintringham, one of the British Battalion commanders, in his account of the war, "English Captain," again pointed to fundamental inadequacies in the militia where they failed to zigzag their trenches to prevent fire being directed down the length of the trench. As a result of this lack of basic field craft, Nationalist planes easily routed militia columns by strafing these simple trenches from the air. Franco's "Army of Africa" had little difficulty outflanking and routing the militia units defending the road to Madrid. This was the context of the emotionally charged scene of uniformed, conscript soldiers disarm ing the idealistic POUM volunteers in Loach's film.

The Soviet Union had her set of priorities in Spain and the evolution of a conventional Republican army was used by the Soviets as a means to usurp power. The Republic was faced with something of a Hobson's choice: either leave the militia system intact and lose the war, or build a Soviet-trained army that might win the war but could be used for control afterwards. Burnett Bolloten's argument that by May 1937 the Soviet-dominated Communists controlled Republican Spain is convincing. Franco always claimed he was fighting international communism; assuming Bolloten's detailed argument to be correct, Franco was fighting a democracy in July 1936, but by late 1937 he was indeed confronted by the Comintern. For this reason, when it was first published in 1961, the undemocratic and censorious Francoist régime, not usually known for its promotion of foreign books, seized upon and advanced Bolloten's work.

The International Brigades as 'shock troops'

This article is not primarily concerned with the political machinations of the Spanish Civil War. Rather, it seeks to challenge the view portrayed in Land and Freedom that badly-disciplined, poorly-equipped, ill-led popular militias stood any chance of success against Franco's Moroccan regulars and Spanish Foreign Legion (or Tercio) troops. If the Republic were to defeat the Nationalist rebels, did they need the discipline of a modern army? Leon Trotsky's organisation of the Red Army in the Russian Civil War, 1918-22, with Tsarist officers re-employed and old-style discipline re-imposed provides a historical parallel. The irony is that the POUM was portrayed by its opponents as a Trotskyist front organisation.

The International Brigades provide an exemplar of the change that occurred in the Republic from 1936 as it attempted to form a conventional army. Foreign volunteers eager to fight fascism arrived in Spain soon after the military uprising in July 1936. By October 1936 there were sufficient numbers in the Republican zone to form International Brigades, whose battalions, or 'legions of babel', were based loosely around common language. By late 1936 there was a British company, by January 1937 there were sufficient English-speaking soldiers to form a British battalion. Figures for the International Brigades vary according to the author's political standpoint, but 35-40,000 Brigaders as a total for the whole war is broadly accurate. Nationalist claims of 125,000 'red hooligans' with the Republic should be ignored. No more than 20,000 volunteers served in the International Brigade at any one time. That the Republican forces by April 1937 exceeded 350,000 in total puts the International Brigades' contribution in proportion: a maximum of eight brigades in the Republican Army were primarily international. By September 1938 there were only 12,000 volunteers left in Spain and the Brigades had been leavened with Spanish conscripts. In total, 10,000 Brigaders died in Spain.

The Brigades were used as defensive and offensive 'shock' troops at critical moments in the fighting. Until the Republic organised and trained regular mixed brigades (with four infantry battalions), the International Brigades were among their best troops. POUM-type units were garrisoned on inactive sectors of the front while the International Brigades acted as the Republic's mobile reserve, moving between emergencies. After over two years' fighting in Spain the International Brigades were withdrawn in November 1938 in a 'last desperate effort' by the Republic to gain goodwill and force Franco to expel his Italian and German forces.

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one reflecting the intensity of the battles in which the British were involved. The British fought as a unit in four key actions of the war: the battles of Jarama (February 1937), Brunete (July 1937), Teruel (January-February 1938) and Ebro (July-August 1938). This article will examine the development of the International Brigades with particular emphasis on the British battalion in the overall context of a changing Republican Army. Stress will be placed on the evolution of a 'conventional' army as a necessary means of defeating the Nationalists.

British volunteers arriving in Spain were a mixed group of Communists and non-Communists. The Communist Party organised the journey to Spain for party members; others made their own way to the border, including Winston Churchill's nephew, Esmond Romilly, who described his experiences in Spain in Bodalla (1937), and the author Laurie Lee whose adventures in Spain are colourfully outlined in A Moment of War (1991). There were undoubtedly some dilettantes and rogues among those who bought their tickets for a 'weekend' in Paris, but the idea that unemployed men from the Embankment in London were press-ganged into going to Spain has never been proved: 'I left a good comfortable home to come out here . . . we were not compelled to fight, but on the contrary, are eager to get to grips with the fascists. The best friend I have here is my machine gun, and the more fascists it kills the more I love it.' The issue of modern Soviet armament on the firing ranges service besides ideological fervour. Among the British, however, some had fought in the First World War, some had trained in the OTC (Officers' Training Corps), or had served in the regular British Forces or Territorials. Many of our men had experience in the last war and others came from countries where they had military training.'

Volunteers from countries such as France and Germany had experience of peacetime conscription besides ideological fervour. Among the British, however, some had fought in the First World War, some had trained in the OTC (Officers' Training Corps), or had served in the regular British Forces or Territorials. 'Many of our men had experience in the last war and others came from countries where they had military training.' The British battalion was comprised of men who had made the decision to go to Spain. They were motivated and this was to give them considerable élan in battle. By contrast, Italians fighting for Franco and taken prisoner at Guadalajara told their captors that they had been otherwise unemployed in Italy and 'had no idea where they were going until they arrived in Spain.' One British battalion member explained his decision to go to Spain with the lines: 'My short period of University life was useful. But in a world of wars and revolutions new tasks are on the agenda. Let us see that they are carried out.' This idealism was not atypical and reflected a genuine feeling of revulsion at fascism among volunteers for the International Brigades.

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The lack of training and equipment

The British battalion had been hastily put together for Jarama, and so by the end of 12 February, an original complement of 600, only 225 were left in the line. This haste was not the only reason for the heavy casualties suffered by the British battalion at Jarama. The losses reflected their lack of training and the generally inchoate state of the Republican Army. Recruits were lucky to have fired three to five rounds of live ammunition on the firing ranges before going into battle: 'without weapons [the OTC] training at Madrigueras [the British base near Albacete] was rudimentary; a route march each day to harden us. Then cases of guns arrived . . . we were dismayed at their age—made in Steyr, Austria, and date stamped 1886! There was no ammunition so we couldn't practise firing.' The issue of modern Soviet rifles to the British before Jarama to replace the dated rifles provided some compensation, but training was still rudimentary and Soviet supplies
The British were not unique in that 75 per cent of them had 'never held a loaded weapon in their hands before' going in to battle at Jarama. One recruit who had served in the British Army got a good laugh out of the training, adding that most men learnt on the battlefield. In 1938 John Henderson remembered that he fired ten rounds on the practice range and 'that was the sum total of the military experience of just about everybody'. The news came through about the Nationalist breakthrough at Jarama and 'then we were in the lorries and up in the line'. A Spanish recruit who posed a question about bomb trajectories during a training lecture given by Fred Copeman, the British battalion commander (and ex-seaman dismissed the Royal Navy for involvement in the Invergordon mutiny in 1931), was told in reply: 'I don't know mate, I'm a sailor myself'. Copeman, who had also been a boxing champion, settled disagreements over discipline at Jarama in unorthodox fashion, 'by hitting out at his opponent'. Training did undoubtedly improve, but as late as 1938 a British recruit was still complaining that he 'wasn't a trained soldier' and that he learnt soldiering 'by actually doing it in action'.

From the above it is hardly surprising that the British battalion was unsatisfactory when it came to imitating a conventional army. There was the recurring problem of soldiers not receiving and even ignoring orders. Training commands and control in battle erratic. Jim Brewer, in the British anti-tank battery, was present at an accident where they refused to withdraw their Soviet-supplied 37mm anti-tank gun, arguing that they were not in any real danger. Malcolm Dunbar, the battery commander, sent Frank Proctor of the battery headquarters to the recalcitrant gun armed with a pistol. Proctor was forced to threaten the battery crew: 'If you don't give your word that you will withdraw at once, I am commanded to shoot you. I was trained in the Royal Artillery and I will bloody well carry out that order.' As Brewer recalled: 'Frank was very convincing and we gave in.'

Lessons from history missed

At Jarama difficulties also arose because of the disjointed structure of the Republican forces. German Brigaders doubted if the Republican high command had read any 'textbooks on warfare published since the end of the Crimean War'. The Germans might have been right considering the Spanish experience of modern war. One Brigade veteran felt that the anachronistic Spanish attitude was because the 'twentieth-century Spaniard had grown up with a vision of war which seemed to be

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The fierce resistance of the British at Jarama fortunately prevented the enemy discovering that the front was completely open on the left, without Republican troops at all. As Alexander noted in his chapter on Jarama:

'The [British] Battalion was surrounded on three sides, open to heavy fire from rifles, machine-guns and artillery, and to infiltration. Then without orders Overton withdrew his company to the 'Sunken Road', leaving Fry's No. 2 Machine-Gun Company without support or flank protection.'

The confusion of battle was compounded by language and translation difficulties. The diverse languages used 'posed a serious problem, especially when orders had to be translated several times during the thick of the fighting.'

Three factors emerge from the battle of Jarama that explain the Nationalists' defeat and throw light on a changing Republican Army: firstly, the high morale among the volunteers of the International Brigades; secondly, the Nationalist exhaustion and a general overestimation of Franco's strength; finally, the evolution of a modern army in the Republican zone.

Experiences from the front

The resolve of the British unit allowed Brigaders to hold on in
trying circumstances. High morale plus a modicum of military training saved the day. The battalion's esprit de corps was a product of its members' conviction that what they were doing was right. This sense of having a real purpose explains how the volunteers could resist Franco's Moroccos veterans. The correspondence of the British Brigaders conveys how the volunteers felt that they were on a mission to halt the evils of fascism. William Gilmour, out in Spain with the International Brigade, appears to be an unassuming volunteer to judge by his photograph. His letters home, however, belies his pacific appearance and provide a good example of the determined mood of the volunteers: 'We have by now learned to grin and bear our disappointments [sic], with the assistance of our hatred for Fascism, it is not hard to do.' Gilmour's missives have the tone of propaganda pamphlets: 'I have grown to hate war in all its gruesome ghastliness but that hatred of war is much superseded by my hatred of fascism.' When Gilmour is granted three days' leave in Madrid his ardour does not wane: 'It has been a great tonic to my anti-fascism and by the time I returned to the trenches my hatred for Fascism has grown a hundred times greater.' While it is true that soldiers on leave in Madrid did go in for more prosaic pursuits, Gilmour captures something of the spirit of Spain.

Gilmour was not an isolated example. Another Brigader wrote home: 'Well! I ask you! Can we let all our disappointments sit, with the assistance of our hatred for Fascism, it is not hard to do.' Gilmour's missives have the tone of propaganda pamphlets: 'I have grown to hate war in all its gruesome ghastliness but that hatred of war is much superseded by my hatred of fascism.' When Gilmour is granted three days' leave in Madrid his ardour does not wane: 'It has been a great tonic to my anti-fascism and by the time I returned to the trenches my hatred for Fascism has grown a hundred times greater.' While it is true that soldiers on leave in Madrid did go in for more prosaic pursuits, Gilmour captures something of the spirit of Spain.

The British battle was also fortunate in that within its ranks exceptional leaders emerged. This leadership was to prove vital. Copeman, the ex-sailor, rallied what remained of the British battalion at Jarama, and Albrighton noted in his diary that under a 'less able man' the Moroccans would have broken through their lines. Copeman made his men hold their fire until the last moment and the result was devastating, the Moors fell by their hundreds and the remainder broke ranks and fled. A disillusioned Brigader who supplied an account of his experiences for a pro-Franco pamphlet still praised Nathan's leadership in battle. Brewer, of the anti-tank battery, was struck by this process of natural selection: Copeman and Nathan were 'outstanding... These chaps were born leaders', Dunbar was 'superb... by any standards an exceptional soldier', while Sam Wild was a 'born commander'. It was also the case that the

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Prolonging the war

High morale in the International Brigades, plus a more realistic assessment of Nationalist capabilities, goes some way to explaining the success of the Republican forces during the war. Soviet involvement, and the consequent development of a conventional army, completes the picture. As Hugh Thomas noted, this Soviet commitment, even in the early battles like Jarama, was crucial:

'It is easy to dwell on the exploits of the members of the International Brigades in this and other battles since their achievements are amply chronicled, since many men were courageous and since the fact of their presence was so unusual. But militarily more important at the Jarama were the Russian aircraft and tanks, which held the ground and controlled the air. Russian direction of the Republican artillery was also important.'

A Swiss volunteer remembered that Soviet involvement permeated through the Republican forces: 'A chaque brigade et a chaque division a été adjoint un Russe avec le grade de conseiller militaire . . . Il y avait en outre des Russes dans toutes les armes spéciales, l'aviation, les tanks, les armes de défense anti-tanks etc.'

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and other International Brigade units were involved in defeating the Italians:

'Officers and men of four brigades, three Spanish, one International, involved in the capture of Buitrago [at Guadalajara] had obeyed orders, operated coherently, and shown professional knowledge of tactics down to platoon and section level. They were an army and not autonomous-minded collections of anarchist, communist or socialist militia.'

But when the first real Republican offensive of the war began at Brunete in July 1937 the attack was contained by the Nationalists. The battle of Brunete ground to a halt, as had the previous Nationalist offensives, and only a small penetration was realised. Like the Western Front during the Great War, both sides in Spain had trouble exploiting local successes. A relatively primitive military structure and exiguous matériel in the Republican zone obviated against deep pushes into the Nationalist zone.

Improvement in the Republican troops

There were undoubtedly improvements in the Republican forces. Peet, for example, who had served in the British Army, commented on the improved discipline after Brunete: 'The contrast between this army and the British Army is astonishing. The officers are real comrades of the men and although discipline . . . is not as good as it should be, people who have been out here a long time say that things have improved collosally [sic] in that respect.' Again, with Soviet advisers war planning was also enhanced, but the execution of battles was still a haphazard business. In April 1937, a British Brigader wrote in his diary an extract that summarised the difference between expectation and reality when it came to battle in the Spanish Civil War:

'This was the theory—i.e. that the momentum of the attack should pass from the left flank right along the line. It could have been effective if carried out. Actually, artillery started on time: planes half hour late: two attacking battalions on left flank not even in their own trenches till 8.30-9.00. Tanks late. Did not go over top till 9.30 . . . Ammo supplies sent up strayed to wrong part of the sector . . . Absolutely no momentum or support now . . . there was none of that scientific accuracy and organisation.'

The improved capabilities and professionalism of the Republican side were evident by early 1938 but only in comparison to the chaos of 1936. Soldiers were now being taught the basic drills necessary to fight a modern war. Nat Abramson, a British Brigader, commented on the training instilled in the International Brigades on the eve of the Ebro offensive:

'AVION has just come over. I am writing these lines lying very still with my head covered by my . . . coat. It blends very well with the surroundings. None of us are allowed to look up when they appear, nor must there be any movements; in fact, when
sitting around or resting we are well spread out and cover as much ground as to make any bombing not too dangerous or effective.72

This care taken to disperse and conceal troops can be favourably compared to the militias’ inability to carry through such measures. Preparing to cross the Ebro, John Peet, in Spain since 1937, recalled how “Training tightened up considerably comparing to the Ebro, John Peet, in Spain since 1937, recalled how “Training tightened up considerably in the early weeks of July 1938 in preparation for the difficult operation of crossing the Ebro River."73

Improvements not enough

The International Brigades were heavily involved in the battle of the Ebro, and the inherent possibilities after the initial push into the Nationalist lines were obvious to British Brigades: we had this vast stretch of country all to ourselves and if we had sufficient transport we could have gone on to Saragossa and really caused consternation . . . if we’d had mobility . . . we could have exploited it.”74 A breakthrough was achieved at the Ebro in July 1938 following an impressive river crossing by the Republicans, but there was a failure of exploitation. Herein lies the problem. By the Ebro offensive, the Republic was losing the war of attrition: support from abroad was flagging the International Brigades were filling up with young Spanish conscripts, the Republic’s stock of war equipment was diminishing; the Republic was losing the psychological war. The problems for the Republic could not be solved at this late stage by improved training and planning for battle. War weariness had set in and in the austere Nationalist zone Franco had prepared his side for a long struggle.

The British battalion performed prodigious feats of bravery and the International Brigades as a whole were a great help to the Republic. However, these exertions came to nothing because the Republic was disjointed. No amount of improved training was going to alter the fact that Franco had a focused aim and used his army to achieve his objective. The British stood and fought at Jarama, and then took the war to the enemy at Brunete, Teruel and Ebro, but the creation of a tough, conventional army could not mask the more profound flaws within the Republican camp.

Defeated by internal strife

On a visit to Spain in the 1970s after Franco died, a British doctor, who as a medical student had gone to Spain to tend the Republican wounded, recalled the frantic nature of life behind the lines in the 1930s that was still apparent in the 1970s: “The one depressing feature of the visit was evidence that the division among the political left which was so fatal during the civil war, had continued. One man excused himself from an introduction because of political differences (presumably socialist-communist).75 The differences, conspicuous many years after the Spanish Civil War, had damned the Republic. The International Brigades failed because their efforts were consumed in an environment of recrimination. If, however, the Popular Front had been united in its aim to assert its mandate (with help from the democracies of Europe) the presence of the International Brigades could have been decisive. The Republican side spent too much time fighting internal enemies. The International Brigades improved immensely during the war, as did the Popular Army, but the problems for the Republic were more profound. The Republic was disunited and unable to pull together even when there was an obvious common enemy. In Spain the development of a conventional army was crucial as a first step to winning the war. It was, however, not enough, and a lack of unity was to seal the fate of the Republic.

In this context the idea that the POUM could have had their popular revolution with the Nationalist enemy so close must appeal to doctrinaire ideologues. The advance of Franco from Spanish Morocco needed to be countered before radical social change could be countenanced. The battles upon which the Spanish Civil War were decided were fought by the International Brigades and the regular Republican Army. At Jarama, Guadalajara, Brunete, Teruel and the Ebro these units battled it out with Franco’s Nationalist forces. While Rome burnt, the militias in Catalonia, upon which Loach’s Land and Freedom indulgently focused, were deciding the war in their own fashion, by talking, holding meetings and encouraging the peasants to have a revolution. □

Notes

1. For militia system, see George Orwell, Notes on the Spanish Militia in Collected Essays, Journalism & Essays, (Penguin, 1971), vol. 1.
4. International Brigade Memorial Archive (hereafter IBA), Marx Memorial Library London, Box 50(A)/12, Albrighton papers, diary, 15 October 1936.
5. Oral recording, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Jaime Mas Homs, 10627/5.
6. IBA/50/(Alexander papers, Alexander to sister, 19 September 1937.
12. For an Englishman who fought in Franco’s Tercio see Peter Pimp, Mine Were of Trouble, (London, Cassell, 1957). Kemp’s oral record held at the IWM (9769/3).
20. See Brian R Sullivan, ‘The Italian Soldier in Combat, June 1940-September
Robert Stradling, 'Franco’s Irish Volunteer; 24 March 1931, (also 31 March and 7 April).

For statistics Colin Williams et al, Memoirs of the Spanish Civil War, (Stroud, Sutton 1990) p. x (also Thomas, Civil War, p. 98).

IBA/50/Gilmour papers, Gilmour to ‘comrade’ in Britain, 5 April 1937.


For statistics Colin Williams et al, Memoirs of the Spanish Civil War, (Stroud, Sutton 1990) p. x (also Thomas, Civil War, p. 98).

49. Plate, IBA Box A-2: file A/38.

50. IBA/50/Gilmour papers, letter to comrade, 5 May 1937.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid, 14 May 1937.

53. IBA/A-12/Abrahamson papers, Abrahamson to Harry and Minnie, 27 March 1938, p. 2.

54. IBA/50/Kerr papers, interview [1988], p. 2.

55. IBA/50/Peet papers, Peet to mother, ‘somewhere in France’ n.d.

56. SWML, AUD/15: Greening.

57. IBA/50/Peet papers, File Pe/3, ‘Notes on Spain entitled ‘Nuts and Bolts of Spanish War’.

58. IBA/50/A1/12, Albrighton papers, diary, 20 February 1937.


60. SWML, AUD/2: Brewer; also AUD/3: O’Donoghue on Copeman.

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42nd, 44th, 50th and 51st Divisions, and travelled with them to France to command III Corps. 48th Division trained separately, moving to France under command of I Corps.


17. War Diary of 48th (South Midland) Division (GS), for December 1939, PRO Ref. WO 166/578.

18. War Diary of 48th (South Midland) Division (GS), for March 1940, PRO Ref. WO 167/244.

19. Interview with ex-Pte Norman Fowler, 15/5/95.


23. In August 1919, Lloyd George’s Cabinet imposed stringent limits on defence expenditure, and laid down that future plans be based on the assumption that there would be no major war within ten years, and that no expeditionary forces would be needed. In the aftermath of a terrible war, with the German Army defeated and dismembered, and the Imperial Navy scuppered at Scapa Flow, this was not an unreasonable supposition to make. The ten-year rule was later extended on a daily basis, from 1928. That it remained Government policy until 1932, long after the war clouds had started to gather, implies a lack of realism that crept in along the way.


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62. IBA/A-12/Peet papers, File Pe/3, ‘Nuts and Bolts of Spanish War’.

63. Stradling, Cardiff, p. 95.

64. See Geraghty, IWM, 14893/3 for poor rifles. O’Duffy’s support for Franco is described in his Crusade in Spain, (London, 1938).


67. Thomas, Civil War, p. 593.

68. IBA/A-1/B/4, 'Révélation, par Ernest Zund, Membre de la Brigade Internationale "Dimitrof" n.d.' Zund’s account is discussed in ‘The International Brigade’ by ‘Wayfarer’ c.1939-40, Blodgett collection, QMW.


70. IBA/A-12/Peet papers, Peet to mother, 29 September 1937.

71. IBA/D-4/Crook papers, diary, April 1937, p. 53.

72. IBA/A-12/Abramson papers, Abramson to Harry and Minnie, 27 March 1938, p. 5.

73. IBA/A-12/Peet papers, ‘Nuts and Bolts of Spanish War’.

74. SWML, AUD/2, Brewer.