

# **Cork and the Spanish Civil War**

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## **Introduction**

The 1930s saw many important developments in radical politics in Ireland. On the one hand, there were the developments on the left, with the formation of Saor Eire and later Republican Congress. There was also the establishment of the Communist Party of Ireland. On the other hand, there was the rise of the conservative ‘radicalism’ of the Blueshirts. By the mid-1930s however, the situation had changed, and radical politics of the left and of the right was on the decline. This occurred for a number of reasons, such as the ending of the land annuities question, the stabilisation brought on by Fianna Fail, and the constant splits on both the left and the right. Radical politics in Ireland had not gone away however, and a resurgence came about with the Generals’ coup in Morocco in July 1936 that sparked off the Spanish Civil War. O’ Duffy and the right saw the opportunity for a new age crusade to save Christianity against Godless Communism in Spain. The *Irish Independent* took the lead in whipping up a public hysteria about the atrocities being committed against Christianity in Spain. Other newspapers soon followed suit, and they were joined by the Catholic hierarchy and soon the newly founded Irish Christian Front. On the other side, left-wing republicans and communists sitting in the doldrums in Ireland, saw it as a fight to defend democracy and roll back the tide of international fascism. Cork, being the Free State’s second city, and a centre of both republicanism and Blueshirtism, saw important developments take place. Huge rallies were held, and proportionately large numbers of volunteers left from Cork to fight for either side, c. 55 for Franco, and 15 for the Republic. Cork thus offers a good case study of the response of Ireland as a whole to the Spanish Civil War and what many would see as the last hurrah of inter-war radical politics in Ireland.

## **The Home Front**

It was the role of the media, more than anything else that shaped public opinion in regard to the Spanish Civil War, and consequently, gave the impetus for the development of support groups and movements, as well as the ultimate measure of volunteering for service. The media in the 1930s was dominated by the newspaper. Cork had two popular dailies which were the first and often last port of call for news at a local, national and international level, for most of the population. Both were very well informed and sold well. One of these, the *Cork Examiner*, was the only daily newspaper based outside of Dublin. The other, the *Evening Echo*, had a very high readership within Cork. The coverage and analysis of the Spanish Civil War by these two papers, is thus very important for determining the reaction of Cork as a whole to the war.

The *Evening Echo*, like most newspapers, began reporting the Spanish Civil War in July just as it was, a Generals' revolt against the government. Most of the coverage, especially the early coverage of the war, appears quite balanced and objective. Much of this is because most of the information, especially in the early days, was taken directly from the news agency Reuter. The paper presented accounts of battles and developments from both sides in the war. The coverage was quite extensive, and there were only a handful of days in 1936 that the war was not front page news. At first glance then, the *Echo* provided quite a good objective account of the war in Spain. However, this is somewhat of an illusion. Look more carefully and one will find that the *Evening Echo* was not neutral and objective in this conflict. The *Irish Independent* was a blatant supporter of Franco, giving many column inches to describing the so-called atrocities of the

Republican government. It even went so far as to label Franco's forces as the 'Patriots' and the government forces as the 'Reds'. The *Echo* was not this bad, referring to Franco's forces as the Nationalists. It did however refer to the government forces as the 'Reds', increasingly so over time. It also gave many reports of the 'Red' atrocities in Spain while keeping quiet about the atrocities committed by Franco's forces. Although battle reports were presented from both sides, there seems to be a subtle attempt to emphasize more the accounts given by the Nationalists. Go beyond the day to day coverage of the war and it becomes quite a different story. Many articles were given over to reporting speeches made by priests and bishops denouncing the evils of bolshevism and communism, with particular reference to Spain. This occurred on an almost daily basis, and sometimes more than once per day. Much coverage was also given to the fundraising activities of the Irish Christian Front, and reports also of new branches being formed throughout the country and commentary and speeches by its leaders. Much coverage was also given over to reporting O' Duffy's plans for an Irish Brigade, and later to reporting the departure of the volunteers, especially from Cork. Coverage was also given of their activities within Spain, though less so, and many of their letters home were printed in its pages. This can be compared to the situation regarding coverage of volunteers for the International Brigades. At no stage are any of the Cork volunteers mentioned as leaving, or as being active in Spain. Only passing reference is made to volunteers from outside of Cork, in the case of volunteers leaving Belfast, and also in the case of the death of Rev. Hilliard. Besides this, there is nothing. The *Evening Echo* did not have an editorial at this stage, thus it is difficult to gauge the official position of the paper. However, there were many daily columns that were reflections on aspects of society or opinion articles by columnists

who were never properly named. One of these (it never had a title) was mostly about locations, often in Spain, such as Malaga. It would give a brief description of its history, culture and sights and sometimes make a passing reference to the war. When the articles were about places in Spain, it would often be prompted by current events, the example above being the fighting at Malaga.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, however, this column would do features on things other than places. One of the first of these was titled ““Red” Revolution And Its Technique, *Soviet-Sponsored Anarchy in Spain*’.<sup>2</sup> Another was on ‘The Women warriors of Spain’s Red Army *The Savagery Of The Fighting Female*’.<sup>3</sup> Others included ‘The Murder Gangs Of The Spanish War *The Reign Of Terror In Barcelona*’<sup>4</sup> and ‘The Red Assault On The Catholic Sanctuaries *Looting The Ancient Shrines*’.<sup>5</sup> It is clear then, that while seeming to provide an objective account of the war, the *Evening Echo* was actually on the side of General Franco and the Nationalists.

The *Cork Examiner*’s coverage of the Spanish Civil War is almost identical to that of the *Evening Echo*. This however, is not surprising since they were both owned by the same company. Sometimes they carried the exact same reports of the war. The *Examiner* did have more extensive coverage of the war, but this was only because there were more pages in the *Cork Examiner* and consequently, more room to give more details. The reporting and analysis was almost identical however. The *Examiner*, for instance, referred to Franco’s forces as the Insurgents or the Nationalists and the Republican forces as the

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Echo*, Tuesday, 6 October 1936, p. 3 ‘Traveller’s Glimpses of Spanish War Zone: *Through The Straits Into Malaga*’

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Echo*, Monday, 17 August 1936, p. 3

<sup>3</sup> *Evening Echo*, Wednesday, 28 October 1936, p. 3

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Echo*, Tuesday, 2 February 1937, p. 3

<sup>5</sup> *Evening Echo*, Friday, 26 February 1937, p. 3

government forces. Only over time, as in the *Echo*, was there a subtle shift to calling the government forces the ‘Reds’ and having more of an emphasis on reporting the news from the Nationalist side. There was a major difference however, between the two papers. Unlike the *Echo*, the *Examiner* did not have daily opinion or analysis pieces about topics including the war. The only exception to this was with the Saturday magazine in the *Cork Examiner*. The opinions in these articles do not appear to be the official line of the paper however. For instance, an article in the Saturday magazine of 10 October 1936 is titled ‘An Ulcer that may kill Europe- CHRISTIANITY versus ANARCHY. *Whither Spain?*’ It was written by a person called A.M.H. and refers to the ‘Patriot’ forces and the ‘Reds’ and the battle of Christianity against Communism. This is unlike the mainstream pieces in the *Cork Examiner*. However, the analysis overall, seems to be on the side of Franco for all of the same subtle reasons discussed above for the *Evening Echo*.

The media was by no means the only body that shaped public opinion on the war. The Irish Christian Front (ICF) also did, but no doubt the hysteria whipped up by newspapers such as the *Irish Independent* and the reporting of the hierarchy’s condemnation of the ‘Reds’ in Spain helped it to come about and to grow in the first place. The setting up of the Irish Christian Front and its subsequent growth was a reflection of the attitude of the majority in Irish society to the war in Spain. One of its most successful branches was in Cork. The ICF was set up in August 1936 by Paddy Belton TD and others. Its chairman in Cork was the well known former Irish Volunteer, Liam de Róiste. It quickly gained support within Cork from prominent figures such as Prof. Alfred O’ Rahilly of UCC as well as amongst ordinary people. The first real expression of its influence was on Sunday,

20 September 1936 where it held what it advertised as a ‘Monster Rally of the citizens of Cork, to protest against the persecution of Catholics in Spain.’ Its leaflet posed the question ‘Is it to be Christianity or Communism?’<sup>6</sup> The response to the advertisements was overwhelming. 60,000 appeared on the streets that Sunday to hear speeches by O’ Rahilly and de Róiste arguing against the communist menace in Spain.<sup>7</sup> Not just in Spain, however, but in Ireland and Cork too. As de Róiste said:

But, why this meeting and why this challenge here, you may say. There is no communism in Ireland. There was no need of a challenge in Cork: no need of an answer in this city to any Communist front. Don’t be too self-complacent. Don’t be too sure of yourselves in this matter. The attitude towards events in Spain has been an eyeopener: with the British socialist propaganda in front, the “Irish Times” on one flank and the Irish Communist party on the other. Forewarned is forearmed... The poison has entered Ireland. Small doses, sugar coated at times for Irish consumption... Many are lulled to sleep by it: some are roused to frenzy. Don’t be deceived by appearances of health. The virus has entered the body politic of the Irish nation. And Spain has awakened some who were asleep to the dangers from without and the dangers within.<sup>8</sup>

The ICF did more than just make speeches and hold rallies however. It also raised funds for Spain in a Cork Relief Fund.<sup>9</sup> A sense of urgency was placed on contributions by many, such as de Róiste, ‘It was a fight for Christian civilisation against atheism. It was

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<sup>6</sup> Leaflet advertising meeting, U271:N (18), *de Róiste Papers*, Cork Archives Institute

<sup>7</sup> Figure comes from telegram from Marquis McSwiney to Cardinal of Spain, U271:N (7), *de Roiste Papers*

<sup>8</sup> de Róiste speech and resolution to meeting Sept 20, 1936, U271:N (17), *de Róiste Papers*

<sup>9</sup> It was reported in the *Evening Echo* of 20 November 1936, p. 5, that the fund was due to close on November 5 and that the final figures were to be published in the *Cork Examiner* of Saturday 28 November. However, they were not, nor could I find a subsequent edition with the figures.

to be hoped, therefore, that those who had not yet contributed would do so without delay.<sup>10</sup> The funds raised were used to purchase many things for the ‘Catholics of Spain.’ This included medical aid,<sup>11</sup> a consignment of Cork-made woollens,<sup>12</sup> and an ambulance.<sup>13</sup> Some of the fund raised at a national level was used to buy supplies off a number of Cork businesses. 75,000 field dressings were bought off Messrs Egan and Co., and 3,600 pairs of socks were bought off Messrs Dwyer and Co.<sup>14</sup> Politically, there was always differences and suspicion between the Cork members of the ICF and its Dublin leadership. O’ Rahilly for one, seemed always distrustful of Belton, and reported his suspicions and rumours to de Róiste in a number of letters.<sup>15</sup> One of the chief reasons for distrust was the belief seemingly held by some such as O’ Rahilly and de Róiste that Belton was trying to turn the ICF into a vehicle for political manoeuvring and advancement.<sup>16</sup> The issue reached a head when de Róiste and another Cork delegate J.P. Weldon, left the ICF Convention in Dublin on 3 February 1937, when de Róiste was asked to sit down when he interrupted Belton for introducing party politics.<sup>17</sup> The ICF’s activities scaled down dramatically after this. Into 1937 the public seemed less interested in Spain and the ICF, particularly after numerous controversies surrounding Belton and the finances of the ICF and its increasingly political stance. It had a long death agony throughout the summer of 1937 finally ceasing to exist in October of that year.

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<sup>10</sup> *Evening Echo*, Friday, 30 October 1936, p. 5

<sup>11</sup> *Evening Echo*, Thursday, 1 October 1936, p. 5

<sup>12</sup> *Evening Echo*, Friday, 9 October 1936, p. 8

<sup>13</sup> *Evening Echo*, Saturday, 2 January 1937, p. 8

<sup>14</sup> *Evening Echo*, Friday, 29 January 1937, p. 7

<sup>15</sup> Letter dated 16 Sept, 1936, U271:N (3); letter dated Friday 18 Sept 1936, U271:N (5); letter dated 25 Sept, 1936, U271:N (12), *de Róiste Papers*

<sup>16</sup> See letter from F. O’ Reilly, Executive Secretary of the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland to O’ Rahilly, 26/10/36, for instance. U271:N (14) *de Róiste Papers*

<sup>17</sup> *Evening Echo*, Thursday, 4 February 1937, p. 6



## Cork and the SCW

Although the response of the media and the growth of the ICF were important developments regarding the reaction of Cork to the Spanish Civil War, the most important was the sending of volunteers. Volunteering for service in the war may be seen as the ultimate contribution one could make for either side. Doing so meant that many were prepared to pay the ultimate sacrifice of their life for the cause which they believed in. This is therefore, the most important reaction to the Spanish Civil War shown by the people of Cork and it is to this which we shall now turn.

## **The Irish Brigade**

*Go in God's holy name, you brave sons of Ireland. Remember you will be soldiers of the grandest army in the world. Uphold the dignity of that army, whether on or off duty, and never forget to uphold the proud name of your native county of Cork.* P.J. Coughlan<sup>1</sup>

The setting up of an 'Irish Volunteer Brigade' to assist Catholic Spain, was first suggested in a letter from General O' Duffy reported in the *Irish Independent* on 8 August 1936. A few days later, the idea was taken up at a meeting of the Cork city branch of O' Duffy's National Corporate Party, reported in the *Evening Echo* on 14 August. The director, S. Murray outlined that 'You have there the forces of Christ and anti-Christ arrayed in a life and death struggle for supremacy' adding that 'It is revolting for any Irishman or woman to read of these vile atrocities by the Government forces of Spain.' Following this a resolution was passed unanimously condemning the 'anti-God campaign', calling on the Irish government to break off diplomatic relations and trade with Spain and significantly, 'we also urge the formation of an Irish brigade to help the Spanish people in their fight against oppression.'<sup>2</sup> This lead was followed by Cashel on 14 August, and soon committees were set up across the country to receive applications for the Irish Brigade. O' Duffy's 'Crusade Against Communism' received a ready audience across the country, no doubt encouraged by the activities of the Irish Christian Front and stirred into action by the atrocity stories spun by the media, thousands signed up determined to defend Christ the King against the Communist hoards.

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<sup>1</sup> *Evening Echo*, Thursday 7 January 1937, p. 1 (also see footnote 14)

<sup>2</sup> *Evening Echo*, Friday, 14 August 1936, p. 2

The Brigade did not come together immediately however, as there was some doubt whether it would gain Franco's approval initially. There were also issues regarding transport arrangements that meant that the departure was delayed. O' Duffy had expected about 2,000 men to go to Spain to form the Irish Brigade, but in the end due to the above complications, around 700 eventually made it. These included about 55 from Cork,<sup>3</sup> most of them from the large towns such as Cork city, Bandon, Youghal and Midleton, and areas where Blueshirt activity had been strong. Quite a few had military experience of some sort, and most were from rural backgrounds, though notably, as the reports below show, quite a lot were from working class backgrounds. The overwhelming reason for going to fight in Spain on the side of the Nationalists was in order to defend Christianity against the 'Reds'. All the interviews and letters home from Cork volunteers' bare witness to this fact.

November 19 saw the first set of volunteers leaving Cork for Spain via Dublin 'to join General O' Duffy's Irish Brigade in its fight against Communism.'<sup>4</sup> They were Capt. Thomas Hyde of Ballynacurra, Midleton, Co. Cork, Capt. Thomas O' Riordan of Ballincurragh, Midleton, and Michael Cagney, South Mall, Cork (later promoted to Lieutenant). Two of these had a strong military past. Captain Hyde had served in the IRA and had been appointed Captain in the National Army. Capt. O' Riordan had also served with the IRA during the War of Independence and had been appointed Captain in the National Army where he commanded the troops that entered Dungarvan, Co. Waterford

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<sup>3</sup> Although recent research by Ciaran Crossey has indicated that this figure may be up to 74. A lot of these were reported as leaving for Spain but no evidence exists for their presence in Spain, thus the lower figure of 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Evening Echo*, Thursday, 19 November 1936, p. 6

during the Civil War. The third member of this contingent, Michael Cagney, had no military experience, however as he was only eighteen years old when he left for Spain. He was only a year out of school and was an apprentice in the machinery department at the Sunbeam Wolsey factory in Blackpool. The *Evening Echo* also mentions that ‘At the height of the Blueshirt activities in Cork, he was leader of the juvenile section.’<sup>5</sup> The *Echo* also mentions that ‘About three weeks ago, his younger brother, Barry, went to Italy, to undergo five years’ training in a State military aviation college. He was invited to go by Signor Mussolini at the expense of the Italian Government, having been personally recommended by General O’ Duffy, who is a close friend of his father, Dr. P. Cagney.’<sup>6</sup>

These were not the only Cork men leaving for Spain that day. The *Echo* reported that there were five more men from Bandon leaving that day for Dublin, en route to Spain. They were James Roche, J. L. Boland, D. O’ Donoghue, and another who refused to be named. The *Echo* reported that they are ‘members of the Blueshirt movement.’ The same article also mentions another Cork man, twenty-one year old Sean Twomey, son of a Shandon street pawnbroker who left for Spain via Dublin earlier in the week.<sup>7</sup>

O’ Duffy and about forty volunteers left Dublin on board the mail boat for Liverpool on Friday 20 November, and it is likely the Cork volunteers mentioned above were on board. The next day they left Liverpool for Lisbon on board the Yeoward Line’s SS *Avoceta*. Before leaving Liverpool, one of the men on the ship shouted ‘We will be back before

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Christmas.’<sup>8</sup> Eight days later, another group of Irishmen; fifty from the Free State, twenty from London and ten from Manchester, left Liverpool on board the SS *Aquila* en route for Lisbon where they were to join with O’ Duffy. The men ‘include a doctor, engineers, barbers and an airman.’<sup>9</sup> They also included a Cork man James McCarthy<sup>10</sup> and it is likely that another Bandon man, J.M.. Poland was on board, having being presented with ‘suitcases containing shirts, socks, etc., as a mark of appreciation of the great sacrifice they were making’ from the Bandon Ladies Committee on Thursday 26 November, for the five volunteers from Bandon.<sup>11</sup>

The *Echo* reported the departure from Mallow of two more volunteers on Wednesday December 9. They were to report to Dr. Cagney in Cork before leaving for Spain. The two volunteers were Matthew J. Doolan and John J. Sheehan. Doolan was a 21 year old chauffeur who had been

one of the pioneers of the Army Comrades’ Association in North Cork, since its formation in Aug., 1933, and has occupied various positions as an officer of the League of Youth. He sided with Comdt. Cronin when the first split came, but gave up politics completely when the last division came in the Fine Gael organisation.

He was going to Spain ‘not at the invitation of General O’ Duffy or any party leader, but to do what he thought right, according to his conscience’. Sheehan had also been in the

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<sup>8</sup> *Evening Echo*, Saturday, 21 November 1936, p. 1

<sup>9</sup> *Evening Echo*, Monday, 30 November, 1936, p. 5

<sup>10</sup> James McCarthy, ‘From Liverpool to Lisbon’, in *Evening Echo*, Cork, Monday, 4 September 1967, p. 5

<sup>11</sup> *Evening Echo*, Monday, 30 November 1936, p. 7

Blueshirts 'very early' and was a member of the NCP when he left for Spain.<sup>12</sup> It is likely that these men left on the SS *Ardeola* from Liverpool on Saturday, 12 December. If not, they may have left on the German cargo ship the SS *Urundi*, which left Galway on Sunday, 13 December. The *Echo* reported on 11 December that six more young men had left Cork that morning for Dublin, to get the boat to Liverpool and on to Spain to join O' Duffy's Irish Brigade. 'It is believed that the six Corkmen will be joined by other volunteers to the Irish Brigade as the bus travels to Dublin. Some men from Munster have already gone to the capital to prepare for to-night's departure to Liverpool.'<sup>13</sup> It is thus likely that these men were on the SS *Ardeola* also.

Not everyone from Cork made it to Spain however. Comdt. Cronin, who left for Spain on board the SS *Aquila* in November, found that he was refused entry to Spain from Portugal. He returned to Cork on board the M.V *Innisfallen* on Wednesday, 23 December 1936. According to Cronin, 'Mr Gunning, General O' Duffy's secretary, made it perfectly clear that General O' Duffy resented my coming to Spain and that he (Mr. Gunning) had instructions not to help or facilitate me in any way.' He offered to join the Foreign Legion or to form a separate Irish Brigade but he was refused. Some contend that he was refused because it was his intention to set up a rival brigade all along, and that he had tried to recruit some of O' Duffy's men on board the ship.<sup>14</sup> 'Comdt. Cronin alleged that Dr. James Burke, who left Cork with him, and some other Irishmen were "treated even worse."' They were left behind in Lisbon, Burke apparently because he had no 'military status', and the others, after being told they could cross over to Spain were just

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<sup>12</sup> *Evening Echo*, Wednesday, 9 December 1936, p. 1

<sup>13</sup> *Evening Echo*, Friday, 11 December 1936, p. 1

<sup>14</sup> Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 41-42

left behind in a hotel in Lisbon.<sup>15</sup> Following a statement by O' Duffy in the *Irish Independent* of 13 January 1937, Cronin issued a reply saying 'I am indeed glad to be able to infer from General O' Duffy's statement to-day that he was not responsible, as he was in Ireland at that particular time, but he must be well aware that whatever happened was without the knowledge of General Franco or any officer of his staff in Lisbon.'<sup>16</sup>

Cronin and Burke were not the only men from Cork who never made it to Spain. Neither did the volunteers who had intended to sail from Passage East in January. Hundreds of volunteers from many counties, including Cork, waited throughout the night of 6-7 January at Passage East in Co. Waterford for a transport ship that never arrived. It was finally confirmed that it was not coming in a cable from Dublin at 2:30pm. According to the *Evening Echo*,

About forty volunteers left Cork last night, and were joined by other contingents at Fermoy. Before leaving Colonel Coughlan addressed the volunteers and pointed they were embarking in the cause of Christianity. 'Let no malice or hate mark your glorious errand,' he concluded; 'let no deed of yours bring a blush of shame to those you will leave behind who are near and dear to you. Go in God's holy name, you brave sons of Ireland. Remember you will be soldiers of the grandest army in the world. Uphold the dignity of that army, whether on or off duty, and never forget to uphold the proud name of your native county of Cork.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Evening Echo*, Thursday, 24 December 1936, p. 5

<sup>16</sup> *Evening Echo*, Thursday, 14 January 1937, p. 5

<sup>17</sup> *Evening Echo*, Thursday, 7 January 1937, p.1

## Cáceres

By Christmas 1936, all the volunteers were in Cáceres, Spain, where they were to stay in a three storey building at a military barracks for the duration of their training period.

The Irish Brigade was assigned to Franco's elite Spanish Foreign Legion or Tercio, who were widely referred to as 'The Bridegrooms of Death.'<sup>18</sup> The Irish Brigade was designated as the XV *Bandera*, a theoretically autonomous unit. The *Bandera* was divided into four companies; A-D, as well as having headquarters staff. A-C were infantry companies, whereas D was a heavy machine gun company. Each company was divided into two platoons, each under the charge of a Sergeant and his three Corporals. The troops were given old German uniforms leftover from the Great War.<sup>19</sup> 'We received pay at the same rate as the Spanish soldiers, which was three pesetas a day for legionaries.'<sup>20</sup> They stayed here for a number of weeks before moving out for the front. Before they had left Cáceres, a collection was taken up to finance the erection of a plaque in Santa Domingo church

to commemorate our having worshipped in it...The inscription in Irish, Spanish and English reads: 'To the glory of God and the honour of Ireland, in remembrance of the 15<sup>th</sup> Bandera, Irish Brigade of the Tercio, which worshipped in this church while serving in the cause of the Faith, and of Ireland's ancient ally and protector, Spain.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 48-50

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 51

<sup>20</sup> James McCarthy, 'The Irish Advance To Ciempozuelos', in *Evening Echo*, 8 September 1967, p. 5

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



They set out for the railway station to bring them to the front on 17 February, marching across Cáceres ‘led by a colour party, Lieut. Hyde bearing the Irish tricolour in the place of honour, with Lieut. Fitzpatrick on his left carrying the Spanish Nationalist flag.’<sup>22</sup> It was to be the last time Hyde would see Cáceres.

### **The Front Lines**

The XV *Bandera* was sent to Ciempozuelos in order to protect the town against the Republican Army. There had been some activity in the area so on 19 February, they marched in battle formation on the road to Ciempozuelos. Suddenly, a detachment of troops was seen coming towards the Irish. Not knowing who they were, the lead company A, halted and its commander, Captain O’ Sullivan and a few others went forward to meet the other detachment. The Irish identified themselves as ‘Bandera Irlandesa del Tercio,’ and immediately the other detachment opened fire, and in the ensuing battle two Irishmen were killed, Lieutenant Tom Hyde, from Midleton, Co. Cork and Dan Chute of Tralee, Co. Kerry. It later turned out that the men who opened fire had been on their own side, a detachment from the Canary Islands. It is probable that they opened fire for a number of regions. They had been uninformed of any other Nationalist presence in the area, and had not recognised the Irish in their German uniforms. When they heard them speaking English and identifying themselves as ‘Bandera Irlandesa del Tercio’, they believed it to be a trick of the International Brigades and opened fire.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Tom Hyde was seemingly a popular man. He had joined the Irish Volunteers in 1913, and served with them in Cork City in 1916-17, and later with A.S.U., 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Cork Brigade. He served in the IRA during the War of Independence, and had been appointed a Captain in the National Army after the Treaty, serving in the Civil War. He later joined the Blueshirts where he also held the rank of Captain. While in Midleton, he had been the proprietor of the local cinema and was seemingly very popular in the area. He was aged forty and was unmarried when he died. While in Spain, he seems also to have been popular. He had held the flag while at mass in Santa Domingo church in Cáceres,<sup>23</sup> and again held the flag at the front of the *Bandera* as they later marched out of Cáceres.<sup>24</sup> While in Spain he kept an autograph book, and filled it with messages from soldiers in Franco's army as well as his comrades from Ireland. With Hyde now dead, General O' Duffy wrote on the last page, 'To Tom in Heaven: You were the first to join the Irish Brigade. You were the first to give your life for the cause which the Irish Brigade is fighting for. Intercede now for the glorious success of that cause.'<sup>25</sup> News first reached Cork of his death on Tuesday 23 February, when it was reported in the *Evening Echo*.<sup>26</sup> Back in Midleton, his death was met with mourning and respect by the community. A vote of sympathy was passed to the relatives of Capt. Hyde by the Midleton Leaseholders Association on Friday 26 February 1937, and they had also arranged that the ten o' clock Mass in the Church of the Most Holy Rosary, Midleton on Sunday 28 February, 'was being specially offered at the request of the members for the repose of the soul of the late

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<sup>23</sup> *Irish Independent*, 24 February 1937, p. 9 P13/128(4)

<sup>24</sup> *Evening Echo*, Friday, 8 September 1967, p. 5

<sup>25</sup> Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 66

<sup>26</sup> *Evening Echo*, Tuesday, 23 February 1937, p. 1

Capt. Hyde.<sup>27</sup> On Friday 5 March, 'a Solemn Requiem Mass for the repose of the soul of the deceased officer', was offered. During the mass, 'the trading community closed their premises from 10 a.m....Even the workmen employed in local schemes paid their tribute of respect by attending the ceremonies.' Other members of public bodies, TDs, members of the GAA, political parties and other bodies from throughout the county also attended.<sup>28</sup>

The Irish would not see any more action for a while, having to defend the town. Many Cork men used this time to write letters home. Most of them spoke about the same things; the death of Hyde, the 'action' they had seen as well as the desecration of churches. One letter by Corporal John Nunan, is typical of the volunteers letters overall:

We moved to the front line trenches a week ago... We met with great misfortune the first day when two of our men, Capt. Hyde and Lieut. Chute, R.I.P, were killed and another comrade wounded...we were taken unawares. You may bet it was pretty hot for some time... We are confident that our side is winning as the Reds are retreating every day.... Our guns are much better and so are our 'planes.

It is a terrible sight out here with wrecked buildings everywhere, particular attention having been paid to the churches in which there is nothing intact... We are very well treated here, having the best of food.... Some days ago some Reds came over to us saying they were hungry.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Evening Echo*, Saturday, 27 February 1937, p. 7

<sup>28</sup> *Evening Echo*, Saturday, 6 March 1937, p. 8

<sup>29</sup> *Evening Echo*, Tuesday, 16 March 1937, p. 5

### **After Ciempozuelos**

After almost a month of inaction, the XV *Bandera* finally received orders on 12 March ‘to attack in full strength at dawn the following day, apparently with the stated objective of taking the village of Titulcia on the opposite heights.’<sup>30</sup> The weather was terrible that day, and as the Irish advanced towards the river Jarama, they were bogged down and came under ferocious artillery fire. In this situation, they were eventually forced to retreat, amazingly having lost only one man, with nine wounded. By the end of the week, three of the wounded would die however.<sup>31</sup> That night there was a big argument between the officers of the *Bandera* over the incident, which was to cause tension later.

On 23 March, they were pulled out of Ciempozuelos and moved to La Marañososa. Life here was harder than at Ciempozuelos, with boredom, and lack of water being the main complaints. One day in April, a Republican infantry detachment attacked but was easily driven back.<sup>32</sup> ‘By this time, about a third of Bandera strength was on sick parade, and over a hundred men actually hospitalised.’<sup>33</sup> There were only two medics for the whole *Bandera*, yet despite the heavy workload, one of them, Sean Roche from Bandon, still found time to take photographs of daily life among the troops. Life was far from fun in La Marañososa however. Another Midleton man, John W. Walsh, died here from pneumonia. He had worked as a member of the clerical staff in the Midleton distillery for a number of years before leaving for Spain in November 1936.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 75

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 77. Three of these men were from Tralee, and one from Dublin.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 82

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *Evening Echo*, Monday 5 April 1937, p. 4

Disaffection continued to grow among the troops. The men were sleeping in uniforms which were now tattered and old, morale was low, the food was bad, water was in short supply, being substituted by alcohol. Thus, drinking also became a major problem. A big split had developed over the retreat on 13 March, and the soldiers began to have scuffles with each other and began to form into two opposing camps. The Commanding Officer, Yägue, recommended that the group should be disbanded. The Tercio never retreated, unless in the face of huge losses. The Irish *Bandera* clearly had not been. Officers were turning against O' Duffy, and with his command breaking down, he wrote a letter to Franco on 9 April, asking that arrangements be made for his men to be sent home. Despite this, it took them a long time to get home. They were moved to Talavera for two weeks and then onto Cáceres on 10 May. Here more controversy erupted over the officers wanting to keep their handguns, and difficulties arose over obtaining transport. On 17 June, the men finally made for Lisbon where they caught the ferry the SS *Mozambique*, to arrive in Dublin four days later. There they split into two rival groups and went their separate ways.

A few men had elected to stay on and to join other *Banderas*, including a Cork man Daithí Higgins, who was eventually killed in September 1938 at the battle of the Ebro.<sup>35</sup> For most of the rest however, the 'Crusade Against Communism' came to an abrupt and uneventful end on the docks of Dublin.

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<sup>35</sup> Stradling, *The Irish and the SCW*, pp. 120-121

## **International Brigades**

*Then comrades come rally*

*And the last fight let us face*

*The Internationale*

*Unites the human race!*

The Internationale

‘In September 1936 a decision was taken by the very small Communist Party of Ireland that an Irish Unit of the International Brigades should be formed.’<sup>1</sup> This task would be a very large undertaking in Ireland, considering the fierce hostility towards Communists and the pro-Francoist sympathies of the majority of the Irish population. The recruitment of volunteers to fight for Republican Spain was certainly quite different than the campaign organised by O’ Duffy to fight for Franco. There seems to have been no attempt to organise for recruitment openly in Cork. There are certainly no references to it in the local media. It is not surprising that this should have been the case. As outlined in the first two sections of this work, public opinion was very much on the side of General Franco. The situation of questioners being chased off the streets of Cork by religious fanatics at the ICF rally on 23 September 1936 no doubt encouraged those who had been thinking of going to Spain to fight for the Republic to arrange it rather discreetly.<sup>2</sup> From the outset then, the difficulties the volunteers for the International Brigades had to endure were much more so than those of O’ Duffy’s Irish Brigade.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael O’ Riordan, *Connolly Column: The story of the Irishmen who fought in the ranks of the International Brigades in the national-revolutionary war of the Spanish people, 1936-1939* (First edition 1979, Second edition, 2005, Torfaen, Wales), p. 55

<sup>2</sup> Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999), pp. 118-119

Who were the men who volunteered for the unpopular side? All seem to have been left-wing and to have had some connection with the Republican Congress and/or the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) or the IRA. A few had previously emigrated from Cork and had found their way to Spain from their adopted countries.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for volunteering are not available from all of the Cork volunteers, but from the available information and from testimonies of other Irish volunteers, the over-riding reason for going to Spain was to fight fascism and to 'reply to the intervention of Irish Fascism in the war against the Spanish Republic, which, if unchallenged, would remain a disgrace on our own people.'<sup>4</sup>

The travel arrangements for the volunteers differed enormously from those of the Irish Brigade. Whereas O' Duffy's men left in a few organised ships in November and December 1936, almost all returning in June 1937, the volunteers from Cork for the International Brigades left at different stages over a year and a half long period, never as one organised group, and had to endure great difficulties along the way, especially after the London Non-Intervention Agreement on 20 February 1937. For O' Duffy's Irish Brigade it was a case of getting on a boat at Liverpool and sailing to friendly Portugal where it was a short trip across the border into Spain. However, for the other side, they first went to London, where they received weekend tickets to France under a false name. In France they received a medical and a political examination in order to weed out

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<sup>3</sup> Seven of the fifteen Cork volunteers came from abroad. Liam Burgess and John O' Sullivan from the United States, Christopher Martin from Canada, Vincent Crompton (though born in England, was listed as living in Cork in 1949 after having served a prison sentence for involvement with the IRA), George Leeson, Tom Donovan and John Thomas Sheehan from the UK.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Ryan letter to *Irish Press*, 23 September 1936; cited in McGarry, *Irish Politics and the SCW*, p. 50

adventurers, and from there it was a case of marching across the Pyrenees at night in order to evade the French authorities.<sup>5</sup> In total over 200 men from Ireland would complete this journey, fifteen of which were from Cork.

The first organised group of Irishmen set out for Spain in December 1936, led by Frank Ryan. There they made their way to Madrigueras, the location of the International Brigades base, in order to receive their training. These were not the first Irish in Spain however. A few others had gone before and some including Tom Patten of Achill, had even died. They had operated in units such as the Thaelmann Centurion, which were the predecessors of the International Brigades. The International Brigades had been set up in order for international volunteers to be organised effectively in military units for the defence of the Spanish Republic. They were not the only group in which international volunteers fought however. The POUM militia also had international volunteers. Not all Irishmen served with the International Brigades, but every volunteer from Cork did. Although recruitment and travel was arranged by the Communist Party, not all volunteers were communists. Many of the Irish volunteers were not so, and described their political affiliation as ‘anti-fascist.’ The International Brigades numbered about 40,000 in total but there was never more than 17,000 at any one time in Spain. About 5,000 died in total.<sup>6</sup> About one-third of the Irish volunteers were to die.

The Irish Unit, fifty strong, went into action for the first time on Christmas Eve 1936 with the 12<sup>th</sup> French Battalion of the XIV Brigade and the No. 1 Company of the British

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<sup>5</sup> O’ Riordan, *Connolly Column*, pp. 111-114

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51



Battalion. 'Their task was to take part in a Republican offensive in the South with the express duty of capturing the village of Lopera from the Fascists.'<sup>7</sup> They spent nearly a month here at the Cordova front before being moved back for the defence of Madrid.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that a number of Cork men were engaged in these early battles on the Cordova front. Charles Coleman had arrived in Spain on 21 December 1936, and served with the Lincoln Battalion in January. Tom Donovan also went to Spain in December 1936, as did George Leeson.

There were six International Brigades in total, with the majority of the Irish being in the XV International Brigade. This brigade was formed at Albacete in January 1937. It went through various reorganisations and at one point or another included the British Battalion, the Lincoln Battalion, the Canadian Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, the Franco-Belge Battalion and the Dimitrov Battalion.<sup>9</sup> All of the Irish in the XV International Brigade had originally been part of the British Battalion but in January 1937, some of the Irish in the British Battalion transferred to the American's Lincoln Battalion. There are two possible reasons why this was so. In *Connolly Column*, Michael O' Riordan gives the reason as being because the Irish casualties were so high that it affected their organisation as a single unit, so were divided between the British and Lincoln Battalions. Others however, put it down to tensions between former IRA men and ex- British Army soldiers and officers, some of whom had been involved in Ireland during the War of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 58

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 60

<sup>9</sup> Frank Ryan (ed.), *The Book of the XV Brigade: Records of British, American, Canadian and Irish Volunteers in the XV International Brigade in Spain 1936-1938* (Madrid, 1938), pp. 24-29

Independence. There is more solid evidence that it was because of the latter reason that the Irish split.<sup>10</sup>

## **Jarama**

The XV International Brigade was formed just in time to be sent to the Jarama Front. This was occasioned as Franco's forces had moved on the offensive on 6 February 1937, in an attempt to capture the road that led from Madrid to Valencia. The offensive met with considerable success in the first few days, capturing ground and crossing the Jarama River on 12 February. The same day the XV International Brigade went into action.<sup>11</sup> Despite being outgunned and outnumbered, the XV Brigade drove on, receiving huge casualties in the process, and eventually succeeded in driving Franco's forces back. Charles Coleman, of 132 Barrack Street, Cork, was one man who fought on the Jarama front, serving with the Irish section of the No. 1 company of the Lincoln Battalion, being repatriated later that year.<sup>12</sup> One of the Irish casualties at Jarama was George Leeson. He lived in Clonakilty until the age of three when his family moved to the Isle of Wight. He was a member of the Communist Party, arriving in Spain in December 1936. He served with the British Battalion and was taken captive on 13 February along with many others.<sup>13</sup> They were lined up in front of a firing squad but they were not shot due to the intervention of a German officer. They were moved about to a number of different prison

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<sup>10</sup> See McGarry, *Irish Politics and the SCW*, pp. 65-68

<sup>11</sup> O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 70

<sup>12</sup> O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 164; McGarry, *Irish Politics and the SCW*, p.245; Moscow Archives 545/6/40/102

<sup>13</sup> Moscow Archives 545/6/162/38-39; Imperial War Museum audio file 803/4/1; Bill Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty* (London 1982), pp. 99, 184, 185; Richard Baxwell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939*, (London, 2004) pp. 115, 119, 133

camps, including San Martín, Navalcarnero and onto Talavera de la Reina. J.R. describes how they were treated here:

For the two months that followed we were put to work, chiefly on road-work. Our conditions were almost unbearable. We were starved. Our only food was two helpings of beans per day, served up in the crudest possible fashion. In our cells, we slept on the ground without straw or covering. Some of us who had had overcoats when we were captured had been relieved of them by the Moors, and our sufferings during the cold nights are almost indescribable. We huddled together for warmth. The sanitary arrangements were primitive and during the whole term of our imprisonment here we had no facilities for a decent wash. In addition, some of us had been wounded in the affray in the trench, and our wounds were left unattended...Most of us fell ill; some contracted lung disease.<sup>14</sup>

They were later sent to Salamanca where Leeson was one of five sentenced to death, but he was later released in September 1937. He tried to re-enlist but was rejected as he would be executed if caught again. He instead became an International Brigade liaison in Paris for returning volunteers.<sup>15</sup> Nineteen Irishmen in total died at Jarama, but none were from Cork.<sup>16</sup>

After pushing back the offensive, the XV International Brigade was to remain in the trenches at Jarama until 17 June when they were relieved. The Irish were granted a short break to arrange a ceremony in memory of James Connolly on 12 May, the 21<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Frank Ryan, *The Book of the XV Brigade*, p. 199

<sup>15</sup> Imperial War Museum audio file 803/4/1

<sup>16</sup> O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 73

anniversary of his execution. 'Every unit in the XV Brigade was represented at a meeting in which the speakers dealt with the national and international aspects of Connolly's life and teachings.'<sup>17</sup> A resolution was passed sending greetings to their comrades in Ireland, and pledging themselves 'together with comrades from all over the world' to 'the International struggle against the International enemy- Fascism.' They saluted their comrades at home fighting 'against Imperialism, native and British' and finally summed up the resolution with

We stand in silence here for two minutes in salute to the memory of Connolly, and to all our comrades who gave their lives in Ireland's fight against oppression, and to the workers of the entire world who have died for freedom.<sup>18</sup>

It was signed by the Organising Committee of the Irish Section, Lincoln Battalion, including Jim O' Regan of Cork, and it was also signed by members from other sections of the XV Brigade.

### **Brunete, Aragon and Teruel**

On 6 July 1937, the Republican forces launched the Brunete offensive to the west of Madrid. Seven Irish died but none were from Cork.<sup>19</sup> After Brunete, the XV Brigade had a few weeks rest, was reorganised and received new troops. One of these was Liam Burgess of Mallow, Co. Cork who had left Ireland in August 1936. He had been a member of the American Young Communist League, and ended up in Spain a year

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 77

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 78

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 84

later.<sup>20</sup> On 24 August 1937 it set out for the Aragon Front. A few more Irish died here, the Republican forces won a few battles but also lost a few. In October the XV Brigade was withdrawn for rest to Mondejar. The Brigade moved into action again in January 1938. That month they went into battle at Teruel for the following few months and three more Irishmen were killed.<sup>21</sup>

### **Defending the Aragon Front**

On 8 March 1938, Franco's forces launched a huge offensive on the Aragon front.<sup>22</sup> The Republican forces were continually driven back and many died, including some Irish. One was 'Tom Donovan, of Skibbereen, County Cork, who before emigrating to Britain from where he went to Spain had worked as a printer in "The Southern Star" weekly paper in his home town.'<sup>23</sup> John O' Sullivan of Bandon and John Thomas Sheehan of Cork were filed as Missing In Action in March/April 1938 and as they were never seen again, it is presumed they were killed.<sup>24</sup> Some, including Frank Ryan, were captured on the Aragon front. These prisoners also included Michael Aloysius 'Patrick' McGrath of Ardnalee, Crosshaven, Co. Cork. McGrath was an IRA man and had arrived in Spain via London on 23 January 1938. He was held at San Pedro de Cardena until he was

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<sup>20</sup> Brooks list: K14742/15323/12563/241; National Archives of Ireland P10/55; Richard Baxwell Database; O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 164; McGarry, *Irish Politics and the SCW*, p. 245, Robert Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War*, p. 267

<sup>21</sup> O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 108

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 117

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 118

<sup>24</sup> John O' Sullivan: Moscow Archives 545/6/444/58; Volunteer for Liberty, Vol. 11, No. 28, 6 August, 1938, p.7

J.T. Sheehan: MA 545/6/91/159; International Brigades Association Box D7/A/4/5

repatriated in October 1938.<sup>25</sup> Conditions in this camp were just as bad as at Salamanca.

One of the prisoners, Clive Branson, described it thus:

There were no sort of regulations at all, and no time tables. If the guard didn't feel like letting the prisoners out, he didn't. The sanitary conditions were simply terrible. There were two broken down lavatories for six hundred and fifty prisoners and the water supply came through the same pipes as used for the lavatories. There were no medical supplies.<sup>26</sup>

The Aragon offensive by the Nationalists was a major defeat for the Republican forces who were driven back across the Ebro River. The next major battle was not until July. Until this time the XV Brigade was involved in minor skirmishes and training. Michael O' Riordan from Cork was one of the volunteers who arrived at this time. He had left Ireland on 28 April 1938. Another Cork man Terry O' Connell, had been rejected for service because of his poor feet and so O' Riordan being only twenty, took his papers in order to serve. He stayed briefly with a Spanish family in Liverpool before moving onto London where he met with four other volunteers and proceeded to travel to France on a weekend pass with the name of John Smith. They arrived in Paris on 30 April. Here they went to the recruiting offices on the Rue de Combat where they were questioned as to their motives. No adventurers were wanted. They were then showed three badly wounded French volunteers and at this point three of them withdrew. From Paris, twenty of them (he was the only Irishman) left for the Pyrenees. They were led over the mountains for twelve hours by a guide in the dark in order to evade the French patrols. It was extremely

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<sup>25</sup> *The Catholic Herald*, 19 August 1938; MA 545/6/91/149; NAI file P10/55; Baxwell Database; IBA Box D-7 File A/6

<sup>26</sup> William Rust, *Britons in Spain* (London, 1939), p. 66, cited in O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 120

dangerous, with each man having to hold onto the man in front. Some previous volunteers had died on the crossing. O' Riordan made it over however.<sup>27</sup> O' Riordan had expressed an interest in military science and was attached to the British Battalion on 2 May. He was then sent to the corporal training school, before being sent to the 'Chabola Valley' where the XV Brigade was now stationed, resting, training and reorganising.

Many used the quiet period at the 'Chabola Valley' in order to celebrate. The Americans celebrated the Fourth of July, the Canadians celebrated Dominion Day, and the Irish had a celebration in late June to mark the annual march to Wolfe Tone's grave at Bodenstown.<sup>28</sup> A committee was set up to organise it, and it included three men from Cork, James F. O' Regan, Jim O' Regan (no relation), and Michael O' Riordan. The celebration included a speech by 'Political Commissar' Bob Cooney from Scotland on Tone's life, and was followed by a feast (made up of two days worth of Irish rations) which 'were washed down with copious draughts of "vine rojo"' <sup>29</sup>, and included singing into the night and reflection on memories and what people on the march at home must have thought of them in Spain. 'It was a typical warm Spanish summer's night and as the men got tired, drowsy with wine and nostalgic with memories all they had to do was to dig a "hip-hole" with their bayonets, lie on the hard Spanish earth and snatch a few hours of sleep before "Reveille" sounded for another day of intense training and rehearsal for the fight across the Ebro that everybody knew was coming.' <sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Appendix XIII: Michael O' Riordan interview with Ciaran Crossey and John Quinn, Dublin, September 21, 2001, O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 226

<sup>28</sup> O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 124

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 125

### **The Ebro and home**

On the morning of 25 July 1938, the Republican forces including the XV Brigade, crossed the river Ebro. 'It was to be an epic fight. To endeavour to stop the advance Franco concentrated his most effective troops, the bulk of his artillery and all his tanks and aircraft.'<sup>31</sup> The XV Brigade went through almost exactly the same route they had to retreat from a few months previously. The main battle they were engaged in was to take Hill 481 known as 'The Pimple' because of its shape. It was heavily fortified and they assaulted it for five continuous days. At least six Irish died trying to take it but all in vain, for they never took the hill. In the last stages of the battle, Michael O' Riordan was hit in the back by some shrapnel. He was sent to hospital at Materó where the shrapnel was removed without anaesthetic.<sup>32</sup> He later received a recommendation:

He carried his light machine-gun into every action, and when he was ordered to withdraw, he waited until the whole company had done so. He said that his weapon was worth a dozen men. When he was wounded, he refused to leave his position until the others had to leave it. Even then he did not leave until he was ordered to by the Commander and Commissar.<sup>33</sup>

The Republican forces had to face a massive counter-offensive by Franco's forces on the Ebro front, with heavy artillery and air bombardment. On 13 September, the XV Brigade was moved back from the front. On 21 September, the Spanish Prime Minister, Dr. Juan Negrín announced to the Assembly of the League of Nations that the International

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 127

<sup>32</sup> O' Riordan, Appendix XIII, *Connolly Column*, p. 227

<sup>33</sup> IBA Box 21/B/7B



Brigades were to be withdrawn 'to contribute to the pacification and "restraint" which we all desire, and in order to eliminate all pretexts and possible doubts about the genuinely national character of the cause for which the Republican Army is fighting'.<sup>34</sup> The XV Brigade had to move into action one last time however, on the morning of 23 September to help relieve the XIII Brigade which was under heavy attack. Two more Irish died in this last battle. They were relieved a day later.

They did not immediately return home however, and were put on leave for a few months. On 29 October, the International Brigades gave their last parade to the Spanish people in Barcelona, where an emphatic speech was presented to them by the Communist deputy, Dolores Ibarruri, better known as 'La Pasionaria'

You can go proudly. You are history. You are legend. You are the heroic example of democracy's solidarity and universality... Long live the heroes of the International Brigades!<sup>35</sup>

The Irish left Spain on 7 December 1938. Some returned to Ireland, some to England and elsewhere. On 10 December 1938, a small group of them, including James F. O' Regan, Michael Waters and Michael O' Riordan from Cork disembarked at Dun Laoghaire. They had a small reception and returned to the Oval Bar in Dublin to drink and chat.<sup>36</sup> Barcelona fell just over a month later on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Franco's forces entered Madrid on 28 March 1939 bringing the war to an end.

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<sup>34</sup> O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*, p. 130

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139

What happened to the men once they returned home? The men were regarded as less than heroes by the governments of England and the Free State. M.A. 'Patrick' McGrath of Crosshaven, James F. O' Regan and William Burgess of Mallow, were listed on 2 June 1939 as three of sixteen veterans to whom 'passport facilities are not to be granted' by Irish legations before checking with Dublin.<sup>37</sup> James F. O' Regan was also imprisoned for being involved in the IRA's bombing campaign in Britain in 1936.<sup>38</sup> Michael O' Riordan was also imprisoned for the duration of World War II at the Curragh. He would later stand in a by-election in Cork winning 3,184 in 1946, and would later become general- secretary of the CPI. Vincent Crompton was arrested in England for IRA activities in September 1939, and sentenced to twenty years, of which he served nearly ten. He was deported to Ireland in 1948 and was living in Cork in 1949. His impression of Ireland at the time shows little change from the Ireland the International Brigadiers set out from in the late 1930s. 'The people here amaze me! They are so poor and yet so stupidly religious. I'm branded as a Communist...This is the most ignorant country I've been and I've been in many. A country of fools...' <sup>39</sup>

Despite the neglect and ill treatment they received upon their homecoming, many years later it is the International Brigadiers who have memorials and songs written about them, and it is the 'stupidly religious' who fought for the other side that are largely ignored, derided and even parodied by popular memory.

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<sup>37</sup> NAI file P10/55

<sup>38</sup> McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War*, pp. 80-81

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80

## **Conclusion**

The Spanish Civil War was in many ways, a glorious defeat for all sides in Cork. The ICF disbanded, and Spain moved off the agenda for the public soon after the *Bandera* men returned home. Small numbers continued to leave to join the International Brigades after this time however. Soon, they too would return defeated. The Spanish Civil War lived on only in popular memory and even then only as a footnote. The members of the *Bandera* retreated into obscurity, some from Cork occasionally showing their heads in the newspapers over the next few decades to defend their actions in Spain. Most remained defiant to the last and refused to recognise the repressive nature of Franco's regime. Although largely forgotten, it was they who enjoyed even a hint of public recognition and approval for the immediate decades following the war.

For the members of the International Brigades, it was a different story. Secretly leaving Ireland, and returning to an Ireland that was at best uncaring, at worst overtly hostile to them, they too disappeared into obscurity. History would be kinder to them however, and from the late seventies a new generation began to recognise and to glorify their struggle and sacrifice in Spain. Ultimately, it is they who are remembered at the expense of the *Bandera*. Even then however, recognition is slight. All but a few of the volunteers' names from either side are remembered, and even then just in song and popular folklore. The volunteers from Cork are largely ignored and forgotten about. This however, was to be expected. Although men from both sides have been regarded by some as heroes, in the end, they were just ordinary men, who returned to their normal, everyday lives after returning from Spain. Some went on to achieve more, most just disappeared into obscurity. Life in Cork continued as normal regardless of their actions.

**Appendix 1: Cork Volunteers**

| <b>O Duffy's <i>Bandera</i></b> |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Name</b>                     | <b>Place</b>        |
| Ahern, James                    | Midleton, Cork      |
| Beausang, James                 | Castlemartyr        |
| Cagney, Michael                 | 33 South Mall       |
| Coakley, William                | Youghal, Cork       |
| Collins, J                      | Youghal             |
| Collins, Paddy                  | Bandon              |
| Crowley, John L./Sean           | Dunmanway           |
| Daly, T                         | 1 Mulgrove Road     |
| Doolan, Matthew                 | Mallow              |
| Doran, Bill                     | Cork                |
| Fitzgerald, Eugene              | Cork                |
| Fitzgerald, G                   | Youghal             |
| Fitzgerald, Sean                | Midleton            |
| Hagen                           | Cork                |
| Hannon, John                    | Youghal             |
| Higgins, D.V.                   | Mallow              |
| Horgan, Charles J               | Mallow              |
| Hyde, Tom                       | Midleton            |
| Kavanagh, G.C.                  | 2 Balmoral Tce.     |
| Kelleher, Joe                   | Cork                |
| Kenefick, William               | 28 Old Blackrock Rd |
| Kenny, John                     | Friar's Walk        |
| Lehane, Thomas                  | Macroon,            |
| Lyons, J                        | 30 Nicholas Hill    |
| Maher, Ed                       | Bandon              |
| Manning, John J.                | Macroon             |
| McAuley, M                      | Cork                |
| McCabe, F                       | Ballyconnell        |
| McCarthy, James                 | Desert, Enniskeane  |
| McCarthy, John F                | Castletownbere      |
| McCarthy, Patrick               | Desert, Enniskeane  |
| McCarthy, Timothy, J/Tom        | Ballydehob          |
| McCarthy, W                     | Bandon              |
| McGrath, Thomas                 | Youghal             |
| McGrath, W. F.                  | 50 Lower Road       |

# Cork and the SCW

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Murphy, B          | Cork                |
| Murphy, Sean B.    | Macroom             |
| Murphy, W.         | Youghal             |
| Noonan, A.         | 69 Evergreen Street |
| Noonan, J.         | Ballydesmond        |
| Norris, Billie     | Youghal             |
| Norris, J.         | Youghal             |
| O' Brien, William  | Cork                |
| O' Brien?          | Cork                |
| O'Connell, Michael | Bandon              |
| O' Donoghue, C.B.  | Bandon              |
| O' Mahoney, Dan    | West Cork           |
| O' Neill, Michael  | Knockraha           |
| O' Riordan, Tom    | Midleton            |
| Poland, John M.    | Bandon              |
| Roche, James/Sean  | Bandon              |
| Shaw, Tom          | Midleton            |
| Stokes, Edward     | Midleton            |
| Twomey, John       | Turners Cross       |
| Walsh, John W.     | Midleton            |

| <b>International Brigade</b>        |                                |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Name</b>                         | <b>Place</b>                   |
| Burgess, Liam/William               | Mallow                         |
| Coleman, John Charles               | Cork                           |
| Crompton, Vincent                   | 2 Camden Quay                  |
| Derwin, Martin                      | Cork                           |
| Donavan, Tom                        | Skibbereen                     |
| Leeson, Harold George               | Clonakilty                     |
| Martin, Christopher                 | Cork                           |
| McGrath, Michael Aloysius 'Patrick' | Crosshaven                     |
| O'Driscoll, Joseph                  | Cork                           |
| O'Regan, James Francis              | Wellington Road/ Adelaide Tce. |
| O'Regan, Jim/James                  | Finbarr's Ave.                 |
| O'Riordan, Michael                  | Ballingeary/ Cork              |
| Scanlon, Hugh L (Paddy)             | Cork                           |
| Sheehan, John Thomas                | Skibbereen                     |
| Waters, Michael                     | Barretts Blds.                 |

## **Appendix 2**

Fig. 1: Tom Hyde, *Evening Echo*, 14 September 1967

Fig 2: James Ahern, *Irish Independent*, 5 June 1960

Fig. 3 F. Fitzgerald, *Irish Independent*, 22 May 1937

Fig. 4: C. Horgan, *Irish Independent*, 3 July 1960

Fig. 5: John Manning, *Irish Independent*, 5 June 1960

Fig. 6: Sean Fitzgerald, *Irish Independent*, 22 May 1937

Fig. 7: E. Stokes, *Irish Independent*, 6 June 1960

Fig. 8: West Cork volunteers, *Irish Independent*, 28 November 1936

**Back Row** (Left to right): F. McCarthy, M O' Connell, P.J Cleary (Limerick), C. Horgan, J Roche, D.V. Higgins

**Middle Row:** J. Crowley, Col. P.J. Coughlan (did not go to Spain), C.B O' Donoghue, T. McCarthy, W.F. McGrath

**Front Row:** J.M. Poland, G. Kavanagh, J. McCarthy, J. Manning

Fig. 9: Michael O' Riordan, *Connolly Column*

Fig 10: Irish group in Lincoln Brigade, *Connolly Column*

**Back Row** (Left to Right): Paul Burns (New York), Joe Rehill (New York), Johnnie Power (Waterford), Charles Coleman (Cork)

**Front Row:** Peter O' Connor (Waterford), Michael Kelly (Galway), T. Hayes (Dublin), Jim O' Regan (Cork), J. Bourke (Liverpool-Irish)



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

### **A note on sources**

I have to thank Ciaran Crossey, webmaster of 'Ireland and the Spanish Civil War' website. My work would have been impossible in its present form without Ciaran's help and I am very grateful for it. He has provided me with a lot of material that he has



gathered over the years by his own research, but also by communication with others, particularly in Britain, who are experts in their field. This includes utilising the database drawn up by Richard Baxwell (author of *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939*, London, Routledge/Cañada Blanch Studies on Contemporary Spain, 2004) for the basis of his PhD and now drawn upon for inquiries by the International Brigades Memorial Trust. Sources also include information gathered from the Moscow Archives (most of which is now housed with the International Brigades Association in England), the Imperial War Museum in London and the National Archives of Ireland. This information has been gathered either personally by Ciaran Crossey, or by others such as Jim Carmody (researcher alongside Baxwell with the IBMT), who have then passed it onto him. They also include lists sent to him by Chris Brooks, a researcher with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Association in the US. All of these sources do not appear in the bibliography, but are included in the footnotes when they are used in order to distinguish between information which I have personally researched and information which has been passed onto me.

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