

No Coward Soul

Jack Nalty (1902-1938)



by Steve Nugent

A FireHorse Productions Book

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*No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.*

Emily Brontë 1846

To refuse to fight would have been to lose; to fight is to win.

Patrick Pearse 1916

*If I must die, let me die
With my head very high
Dead and twenty times dead,
My mouth against the grass,
I shall have my teeth clenched
And my chin firm.*

Miguel Hernandez.

*Vientos del Pueblo me llevan
(The Winds of my People Carry Me)*

Foreword and Acknowledgements

I have only one memory of my uncle Jack. He was carrying me on his shoulders, running up and down stairs at his home in Convent Avenue, Dublin, probably not long before he left for Spain at the end of 1936. I can still recall that feeling of joy and energy and exhilaration that I experienced.

Jim, my older brother, has three memories: Jack coming back from work to his earlier home in East Wall Road, of Jack trying to settle a dispute between Jim and me as we fought, and of once seeing him standing outside the oil depot, where he worked, smoking a cigarette.

I was playing with toys on the floor in the kitchen of my family home when I overheard that he had been killed but I don't recall having any emotional response to the news. At some later time, I recall my grandmother saying angrily that Franco had "shot his way to power" but the meaning was lost on me then. I grew up knowing that Jack had been in the I.R.A., that he had been "on the run", that he hid guns in the family home and that he died in Spain, but I did not understand until I recently researched his life that he had soldiered in three wars - the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War, and the Spanish Civil War, offering his life to each of those causes.

I discovered little about Jack's inner life, and details of his life are unfortunately sparse. I tried to avoid fleshing out his story with speculation and conjecture about motivation or choices that he made, as motivation is complex and often inexplicable. Every person who fought and died in those times for their beliefs make up

the history of the time just as the history of the time determined them. Setting his story against the great size of events of one of the most troubled periods in Irish and Spanish history might seem to diminish his achievements, but in portraying those events, I wished to provide a context and background into which he had fitted his aspirations and ambitions. Perhaps we can then get to know something more of him by looking around him.

In attempting to condense the history of the period that formed the matrix of Jack's life, I have referred to historical personalities or events only insofar as they might have had some direct relevance to his life and that might provide some clue to the directions he chose to take. Conflicting accounts of that complex and turbulent period were many, and while I have tried to be accurate, in some cases I had to make an arbitrary decision on what to use. At times, obsessively searching for exact dates to map Jack's movements (and there were often many versions) seemed somewhat secondary to the activity in which he was involved. I also tried to be objective as I moved through the minefield of Irish and Spanish politics, but inevitably, even by the choice of material presented, biases will be evident. Information about his life came from many sources - personal contacts, letters, newspaper cuttings and military archives. Accounts of his time in Spain during the Civil War were mainly taken from books about the Spanish Civil War and from personal communications with other Brigadiers and writers.

I traveled through the barren areas of Spain where he fiercely fought his last battle, and there is no burial place. He had disappeared and we had hardly known him. I feared that he would vanish from our minds, that his valor, not only on the battlefield but also in the area of his community activism would go unacknowledged.

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So I chose to write about him primarily to attempt to show the kind of man that he was, knowing, from what I learned about him, that he would not have wanted to be made into a hero - in his opinion that would be for others.

A loving respect had always surrounded Jack in my grandparents' home on Convent Avenue, and I recall the photos of him that were displayed in the house for as long as family members lived there. I also wanted to maintain that love and respect that I had absorbed while I was putting the pieces of his life together again, to neutralise my feeling of being cheated of a fuller relationship with him, to bring him back, and to commemorate him.

I could not have written this account without the generosity of others. My brother Jim, in Dublin, is blessed with an archival memory which allowed him to generate, and share, details both of Jack's life and of other Nalty family members. His encouraging comments sustained me as the work progressed as did those of my family, close and extended. I now hope they will enjoy meeting Jack.

My cousin Peg Keegan, who has since died, met with me in Carrowkeel with her husband Tony, and without hesitation offered me many photos and documents which appear here. I will always appreciate her kindness and encouragement.

I am grateful to my friends Stephanie Goldberg who encouraged me constantly while diligently and expertly reading the early writing, and to Chris Veldhoven whose helpful comments allowed me to see a better way to put it all together.

Others were prominent in providing me with information on Jack's life in Ireland and in Spain. Paddy Feehan, through the liberality of his daughter Isabel Connolly's letter writing from Dublin, and later in person, provided me with details of the period in which he and Jack served in the I.R.A. and other organisations. Bill Alexander, who has since died, wrote freely to me, and I have used his book, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, extensively. Ciaran Crossey of Belfast, and Jim Carmody of London, who have researched the history of Irish and British involvement in the Spanish Civil War, aided me in substantially increasing the substance and interest of the work. Jack's autobiographical essay, quoted here, comes from files that they unearthed and unselfishly shared with me. Commandant P.B. Brennan, of the Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks in Dublin, went beyond the line of duty in his willingness to provide copies of files on Jack's imprisonment. I am indebted to Con Maxwell of Dublin who sent me many references to books in which Jack was mentioned, and to contacts that proved very fruitful. John Meehan, a friend of my aunt, Maisie Nalty, added some interesting information about Jack's relationship with General Eoin O'Duffy. Records of Jack's involvement in the Dublin City Harriers were appreciatively received from Mary McKenna of Ashtown, County Dublin. Grainne Curran of the General Register Office in Dublin very ably steered me through the intricate process of obtaining official documents, and Gregory O'Connor of the National Archives furnished me with useful web links, so shortening some cyber searches. From Calgary, Canada, Maureen Venzi tirelessly emailed me many useful references to the ship, *King Neptune*, on which my Uncle Mick Nalty sailed the seas.

The Family

Jack was born in Ballygar, Co. Galway on September 7, 1902.



His father, Stephen, at that time was a Constable in the Royal Irish Constabulary and resident in Ballygar. Stephen had married Agnes O'Connor, the daughter of Michael O'Connor, a farmer, of Carrowkeel, 4 Mile House, Kilbride, Co. Roscommon on November 8, 1891. At the time of his marriage, Stephen was living in Ballinderry Barracks close to Carrowkeel. Stephen's father, also named Stephen, was listed on their Registration of Marriage as a farmer.

The Royal Irish Constabulary was identified by many as a force which did the dirty work for the British ruling class. They resented this image - ninety-nine percent of the constables were long serving Catholics and Nationalists who felt divided in their loyalties. However, they answered to officers who were Protestant and controlled from Dublin Castle, the centre of British Rule in Ireland. Although not trained as a paramilitary force, being armed they carried out baton charges and raids. From 1917 to 1919, over 12,000 homes were raided followed by arrests and deportations.

During the War of Independence, the R.I.C. constables became open targets and 442 were killed between January 1919 and June 1922. They were disbanded in 1922, 60% secured government pensions and were replaced in Southern Ireland by the Garda Siochana.



Grandfather and Grandmother Nalty in back garden of 11 East Wall Rd.

My grandparents Stephen and Agnes, with some of their children, moved to Dublin in 1908, firstly to a temporary address at Millmount Ave. Drumcondra and then to 11 East Wall Road. In 1936, they moved to 1 Merville Villas, Convent Ave. Richmond Road.

Aggie, the oldest sister, remained in the West and lived at one of the family farms of the O'Connors, her mother's family, at Carrowkeel, Four Mile House, Co. Roscommon. She married Dan O' Sullivan and had two children, Peg and Johnny. She wrote the following letter to my mother:

*Carrowkeel
16/7/33*

Dear Peg

I was sorry to learn of your being ill and hope by now that you are feeling much better. I'd have written before now but I seldom go out except to Mass as this is such a backward place to get anywhere out of and now they are all so busy I can get no housekeeper.

I hope the two kids are well. Peg is as strong as ever but Johnny not and I don't know will he ever be. He has no tooth yet at 10 months and cant sit up without support. He has a good appetite and sleeps well however he is also very thin. I give him Cod liver oil and malt for a cough which he has for a good while. I'd have taken him to a doctor but I don't suppose it would be of any use as they are not much use in this part. I'm sorry I even stayed as it is nothing but work all the time and nothing for it. I've got to hate

this place. I don't know what they were fighting for all the years. Mother did not say what was the matter with you if you were just rundown but I hope you will soon be alright again. I don't suppose I'll be able to get away this year as Johnny is too young and helpless to take into a small house, that is all that keeps me as this place does worry me. I think I've lost any health I even had since I was sick in the Winter and could not mind myself. Ask Mother or Mary to write and tell me how you are.
Yrs. Aggie.

Johnny died within a few months of Aggie's letter.

In December 1933 Aggie wrote:

Dear Peg,
I hope your health has improved a good deal by now. The dry weather ought to be an advantage.
How are all the family? Well I suppose. You are lucky to have two such good kids. Peg is well but I still miss Johnny terribly. Has the girl Heffernan recovered?
I am writing this in a hurry for Dan to post in town. I hope yourself and family will enjoy a happy Xmas.
Yours affect.
Aggie

Aggie's husband, Dan, died in his thirties.

Peg, her daughter, married Tony Keegan and continued to live at Carrowkeel until her death.

Staffie, the oldest son, christened Stephen O'Connor Nalty, was born in Ballygar on November 7, 1895 and continued to live in the West. He joined the British army in World War I (1914 -18) along with about 200,000 other Irishmen. He was in the trenches at the Somme, survived that slaughter and wrote from France on December 20, 1917:

My Dear Mother

I received your letter and parcel yesterday. The parcel came alright and never got crushed. The cake was splendid. I found P. Brennan at last. He came to see me two days ago and he is going on leave either today or tomorrow so he will just be at home for the Xmas. I managed to get a P.C. I am sending it to you. I hope you will like it. Anyhow I could not get any better over here. I hope you are well at home. I am well myself but my fingers that were frost bitten last year are getting very sore again as we have very heavy frost and snow at present but I will be all right again when the heavy frost goes away. I have no more news for you at present hoping you will enjoy a Happy and a bright new year.

*From your loving son
Staffie*



Staffie (in British Army uniform), Jack and Mick

Staffie came back from the War to the other O'Connor property but, having no interest in farming, went to America in 1926. He worked there as a Park Ranger but was not heard from until his return to Ireland in the nineteen sixties. He was ill on the journey home and died in the Bon Secours Private Hospital in Dublin.

Peg, my mother, was born in 1901. After the family moved to Dublin was educated at the Dominican Convent on Eccles St. Dublin. She married my father Barney Nugent in 1928 and lived at The Ward, Co. Dublin where Jim and I grew up.

She wrote the following letter to my father, probably in 1933, from the home of my father's cousin, Lucy, in County Armagh.

Forkhill.

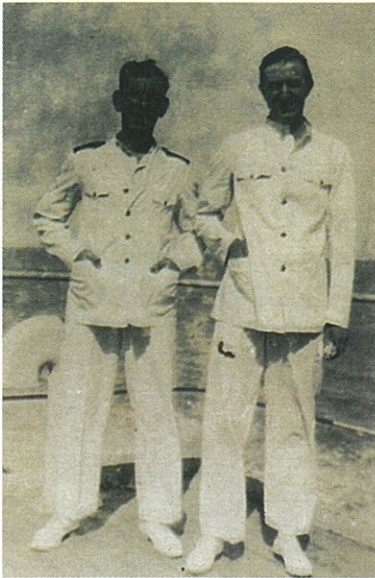
*My dear Barney,
Sorry for not writing yesterday, but I don't seem to get any time. I think you better come for us as soon as you can get the car before I am crocked up again, these pair of chaps are simply going daft this week, won't go to bed without lamps etc. having me running up to them all night. Lucy is a bit disagreeable too, I am no use to her so she wouldn't even help to put them to bed or wash after them, however I don't blame her as she has a miserable time here, and we all come and plank ourselves on her and we don't even ask her to visit us, so enough grumbles. She took the kids to*



*Newry today so I have a rest at last. I hope you are going on alright and I hope Katie is looking after you well. Did you get your car yet? No more news. Tons of love from kids and self.
xxx from Peg.*

She died aged 33 years old of what was then called "galloping consumption" (miliary tuberculosis).

Mick was an apprentice carpenter in the Dublin Dockyard Co. for five years qualifying in 1926. From August 1929 to December 1937, he acted as carpenter on the King Neptune, a general cargo Motor Vessel of the Merchant Marine built at Harland and Wolff, Belfast, in 1928.



Mick, left, on King Neptune

During World War II (1939-45), Mick worked in the Dublin shipyard and for some time in Bristol, England. In 1941, he sailed in convoy under escort from Greenock, Scotland on the dangerous North Atlantic run to New York to bring back a ship bought by the Irish Government on which he served as carpenter. He did one other Trans-Atlantic run from Greenock in 1944 and then continued to work in the Dublin shipyards until he retired. Mick married May Graham later in life.

Maisie also attended the Dominican Convent. She was employed at May Roberts Pharmaceutical Suppliers as a cashier when, in 1941, she was the subject of surveillance by the Detective Branch, Special Section, Dublin Castle. She was 28 years old at the time, and investigation revealed that she had acted as a courier for the

I.R.A. while Jack was a member. The report on her stated that Jack "went over to the Communists" and that his outlook at the time was "definitely Communistic". It was noted that he had fought on the side of the "Reds" in Spain. As far as their information went, Maisie shared his views.

The surveillance was triggered by an inquiry from the G.2 Branch of the Dept. of Defence in Dublin who had asked for information about her following their receipt of a letter from the U.S Postal Censorship Branch. This letter had been smuggled out of Rikers Island Prison, New York, signed by Joe "Jeff" O'Connor, Maisie's cousin, which seemed to indicate that she was associated in the past, and still might be, with members of the I.R.A. Joe was detained there on a charge of Larceny from the British Associated Railways Offices, Rockefeller Centre, New York City, of films showing railway lines and stations of the British Isles.

The Detective Branch concluded, having kept her under observation and made inquiries regarding her, that "so far nothing has transpired that would connect her in any way with the I.R.A., or any other illegal organisation."

Maisie continued to work at May Roberts, later becoming Secretary to the Company Director, and held that position until her retirement. She died in 1976.



Maisie with Jim and Steve, crossing O'Connell St., probably in Autumn 1939

Kathleen, who suffered from Down's Syndrome, lived all her life in the family home, being cared for by Maisie, until her early death.

Ireland

Ireland moving into the Twentieth Century

Sean Keating's *Men of the West* (1915) rendered a romanticised image of the fighting Irishman dressed in western "peasant" costume to link the Gaelic world of the West of Ireland with the new Ireland, soon to be achieved by force of arms.



The second half of the nineteenth century in Ireland was intensely political in two different ways — one constitutional, the other clandestine. The political movement towards Home Rule was, in effect, the revision of the Union of 1800 which had incorporated Ireland into "the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland" with representation in the British Parliament by four bishops of the Protestant Church of Ireland, twenty-eight temporal peers elected from the Irish peerage, and by one hundred commoners elected by the Protestant minority of a Catholic country. Home Rule would reverse this representation and provide greater self-government for Ireland. But the movement was ultimately to fall victim to its representation as a betrayal of the loyal Protestants of Ireland, particularly those in Ulster. The House of Lords effectively blocked the passage of a second Home Rule Bill as British elements of power were determined to prevent the breakup of the Union and the potential submergence of the northern Irish Protestants by a Catholic dominated state. The movement died.

The Fenian organisation was simultaneously founded in Dublin and New York in 1858 and represented the clandestine. The themes were secrecy and armed resistance. They attempted an invasion of Canada in 1866 from the U.S. at Niagara Falls, and an insurrection in Ireland the following year. A policeman was killed in an attempted rescue of one of their number in Manchester, England and the three Fenians involved were tried and hanged. The movement then went further underground for fifty years but became a legend, ceasing to have any impact on events until political progress was exhausted.

The twenty-five years between 1890 and 1916 also saw numerous efforts to deal with Ireland in ways peripheral to politics - the formation of the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association to foster the Gaelic tradition, were examples of attempts to rectify matters in a country dwindling in its population and scorned by Britain. These initiatives, with a thrust towards agricultural reform, did not lessen the growing tension in a country outraged by its colonial status.

The Easter Rising 1916 (April 24 - May 1)

The Irish Citizen Army was a socialist militia which was also dedicated to Irish self-determination. It was originally set up by the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union to protect workers and strikers from the violence of toughs and Dublin Metropolitan Police during the Dublin "lockout" in 1913 when a group of employers had combined to force workers to withdraw from the ITGWU with resultant bitter confrontations.

The General Post Office, Dublin, after the Easter Rising



The Irish Volunteers had been founded in 1913 to counteract the established Ulster Volunteer Force whose goal was to resist by force the implementation of Home Rule if it should ever become law.

Both of these forces, about 300 I.C.A. and 1500 Volunteers, took over a series of strongpoints in Dublin. The action was well timed to coincide with Britain's preoccupation with World War I but, due to a series of mishaps, was a strategic failure and was mainly confined to Dublin. With the deaths of 64 of their number, the insurgents agreed to an unconditional surrender after six days. This led to the execution of 14 of the leaders by firing squad, and the deportation to internment camps in Britain of up to 2000 men.



The wreckage of Liberty Hall, headquarters of Connolly's ITGWU, and also of the Irish Women's Workers' Union founded by Delia Larkin

The participants in the Rising were not fully representative of the Irish people and many of the civilian population were either frightened, intolerant or apathetic towards it, showing little support for the aims of the leaders. As remnants of the forces walked down the Dublin Quays to prisons in England, the working class people threw garbage at them. But in the months that followed, the proclamation of the establishment of a provisional government of the Irish Republic, read on the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin on Easter Monday, and the effect of the subsequent indiscriminate executions of the leaders and deportations of prisoners, injected a new Nationalism into the future of Irish political life, which greatly outweighed the insurrection's military ineffectiveness.

Jack was educated initially in a local National Primary School and, after the move to Dublin, at O'Connell School on Richmond Street which had a reputation for harsh treatment of its students. In Jack's words, it was "controlled by the Christian Brothers".

In 1917, at age 15, he joined the Fianna Eireann which he described in an autobiographical essay written in April 1937 while in the International Brigade, as "a national revolutionary movement for Irish boys, closely connected to the Irish Republican Army. In this organisation we boys were trained in all branches of military activity to enable us to take our places in the I.R.A. when we reached the necessary age which was at that time eighteen years. I should mention now that what sent many lads into the national movement then was the example shown by the men who fought and gave their lives for Irish freedom in the revolt of Easter 1916, in particular James Connolly who was our first working class leader and who was executed although badly wounded."

James Connolly (1868-1916) was born in Edinburgh of Irish immigrants, and with his experience of the working class he moved to Belfast and founded the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, and, on behalf of the women linen workers, The Irish Textile Workers Union.



While active in Trade Union organisation, he was a socialist theoretician whose preoccupation was the just distribution of wealth, and, in Ireland's case, that wealth belonged to the Irish and must be wrested from foreign interests. He was jailed during the 1913 lockout and was a Commandant in the Easter Rising. He was executed propped up in a chair as he was unable to stand due to leg injuries.

Countess Markievicz (1868-1927) was born in a town house near Buckingham Palace and married a Polish Count from whom she was divorced. She became a part of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and was much romanticised by history. A vital and well known activist, she



founded Fianna Eireann. She worked closely with James Connolly and achieved working class endorsement when she ran a soup kitchen in Dublin during the 1913 lock out. A Commander in the Irish Citizen Army, she was sentenced to death for her part in the Easter Rising, but the sentence was commuted. She became the first woman to be elected to the British House of Commons but did not take her place there as a protest. Vehemently anti-Treaty, she was Minister of Labour in the 1st and 2nd Dail but was in

prison for her political activities for most of those terms.

The War of Independence (1919-1922)

In January 1919, a group of Irish Volunteers ambushed and killed two members of the R.I.C. On that same day, the Sinn Féin party, led by Eamon De Valera, easily elected in the General Election of the previous year, renounced the British Parliament and established the 1st Dail Eireann (Irish Parliament). Those present approved the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence (read in Irish, French and English) and the Democratic Programme.

The Volunteers now took an oath of allegiance to the Dail and became The Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.).

Eamon De Valera (1882-1975) was born in New York. He was the last Commander to surrender in the Easter Rising. His death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment but he was released after a year. He was President of the 1st Dail. Following the Truce of the War of Independence, he met several times with the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, proposing a formula of External Association which would not require Ireland to take an Oath of Allegiance and would recognise the British Monarch as the Head of the Commonwealth "with no reference to Ireland." This was rejected (but he later achieved acceptance of his formula with the 1936 External Relations Act). He led the

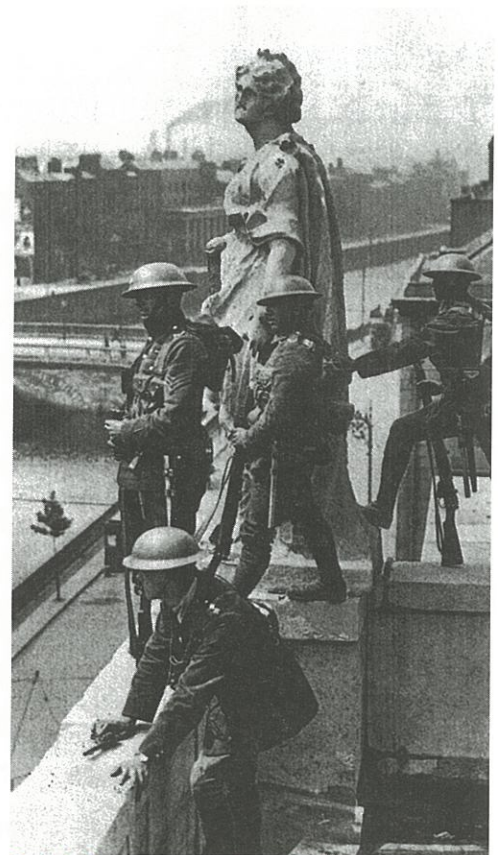


Eamon de Valera under arrest in 1916

opposition to the Treaty conditions. In 1936, he took advantage of the Abdication of Edward VIII crisis to remove all references to the King and Governor General from the Constitution.

Sometime in 1919, Jack decided that he had enough of school. He said, in his essay, that, like many of his comrades in the Fianna, he had difficulty in attending to his school tasks as well as to his activities in the national movement so he finished with school and went to work in the Anglo-American Oil Company in Dublin. He worked there until about November 1919 and then went to work in the shipyard in Dublin. About the same time, with the help of friends, Jack was transferred to the ranks of the I.R.A. although he was not yet the necessary age. He was attached to C Company No 1 Battalion, Dublin Brigade, and took part in "several engagements against the British troops" in Dublin.

In 1920, the British Government passed the Government of Ireland Act establishing the Six County State of Northern Ireland, outlawing the Dail, and refusing to recognise the status of the I.R.A. as an army - or even the existence of a war between Great Britain and Ireland. The I.R.A. now destroyed tax offices and post offices, raided banks, and burned loyalist homes. Ambushes of soldiers and police around the country led to reprisals by the Black and Tans.



British troops in Dublin during the War of Independence

The Black and Tans were notoriously vicious forces mainly recruited in haste from World War I British Army officers to replace the fast resigning R.I.C. (nearly 600 in three months). A temporary shortage of uniforms caused recruits to be outfitted in various blendings of khaki, dark green, and black which reminded people of the County Limerick Hunt, The Scarteen Black and Tans. They raided private houses, assaulted, arrested and shot citizens indiscriminately.



A Constable, Soldier and two Black and Tans

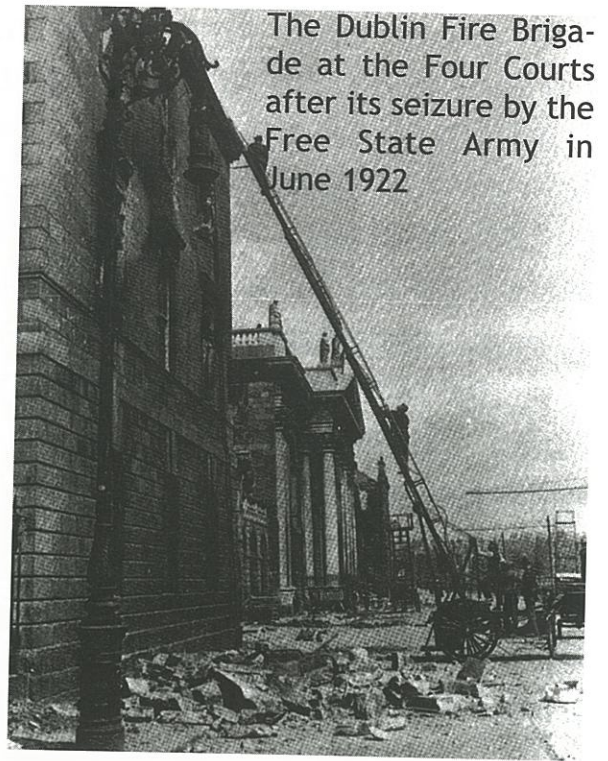
In March 1921, Eamon De Valera, as President Of Dail Eireann, announced a formal "state of war" with England indicating that the Dail was accepting responsibility for actions of the I.R.A.

King George the Fifth, on the 22nd of June 1921, opened the Parliament of Northern Ireland and pleaded for an end to the war. A treaty was signed in December of that year setting up an Irish Free State of 26 County Dominion Status within the British Commonwealth of Nations with an oath of Allegiance to the King.

The Irish Civil War (1922-1923)

In January 1922, the vote in Dail Eireann accepted the Treaty — 64 in favour and 57 against. The minority, led by Eamon De Valera, gradually withdrew into opposition fearing that this action would lead to the end of a Republic. De Valera believed that the treaty betrayed those who had fought for an independent Ireland. Conflict around the Treaty now divided the I.R.A. into two armies. The Free State Army (pro-treaty) and the Republicans (anti-treaty).

A group of Republican officers seized the Four Courts government buildings in Dublin in April 1922 setting up their Headquarters there as a challenge to the new Free State government. An attempt at conciliation over a two month period was in vain, and an artillery bombardment of the Four Courts by the Free State Army forced a surrender. This precipitated civil war in which guerilla warfare, with assassinations, executions, retaliations and ambushes followed.



Continuing attempts to bring about a truce by the Catholic Bishops, who had previously threatened to excommunicate all those in revolt against the government, failed. It was the death of Liam Lynch, the Republican Chief of Staff, that finally broke resistance. De Valera conceded defeat in May 1923 and the war ended.



Snipers of the Free State Army, Stephens Green, Dublin 1922

Every civil war is said to lower the level of civilisation. This one left a lasting legacy of loss and bitterness with division of families and friends. Five hundred and forty Free State Troops were killed in action; there was no accurate Republican count but

it was considered to be in the thousands.

Michael Collins (1890-1922) became involved with the Irish Republican Brotherhood (a remnant of the Fenian movement of the 1860s) while working in London. In the Easter Rising, he fought in the General Post Office and was later elected to the 1st Dail. He was Director of Intelligence for the I.R.A., being responsible for the "Squad" which eliminated the British Army's intelligence network in Ireland. Following the Anglo-Irish Treaty, in which he was a negotiator, he became Commander-in-Chief of the Free State Army during the Civil War, and was killed in an ambush in August 1922.



Jack's niece, Peg, recalled her mother Aggie telling her stories of Jack during "the troubles", a term describing an indefinite period, usually covering 1919 to 1923, within which time Jack was fighting the British or, later, the Free State Army. There were stories of soldiers looking for him, and searching for guns. During one of these searches, a gun was hidden in a chair seat in the kitchen but was not found. Later, Mick took the gun to the shipyard and threw it in the sea. My grandmother also told me of how she would hide his guns on the outside windowsill during the raids.

Jack was one of more than eleven thousand Republicans arrested and incarcerated throughout the country – including two hundred

and fifty women. He was now Captain in No 1 Dublin Battalion, Republican forces, and he had continued fighting in the Dublin area until he was arrested and placed in **Mountjoy Prison** on March 26, 1923, and thence to the "Glasshouse" (Military Prison on the Curragh, County Kildare) until the end of November 1923.



Records of people interned during this period have only survived in fragmentary form but it has been calculated that seventy Republicans were executed between November 1922 and May 1923. Almost ten thousand men remained imprisoned, often in appalling conditions. Hunger strikes by prisoners, with resultant deaths, stunned the public, but led to eventual releases in batches starting in the Spring of 1924 and not completed until 1932.

On being released from Military Prison, Jack reported back to his Battalion, now very much depleted. Through discussions and contacts in the internment camp, he had begun to take an interest in working class politics and, shortly after his release, joined the Revolutionary Workers Group - an Irish affiliate of the Comintern (Communist International), active in industrial disputes, later superseded by the Irish Communist Party. He procured work in another oil firm and, as a result, joined the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. After two years, he became Union shop steward on the job and oil delegate to the Branch Committee of the Union. He was later elected Chairman of the Oil Section in his union. This Oil Section comprised the men in eight oil firms - a total of 600 men.

Jack remained a member of the I.R.A., and, in 1931, when he was again imprisoned, he held the rank of Company Commander.

Jack and Athletics

During these years, Jack established himself as a long distance runner in the Dublin City Harriers. The records of the club reflect his achievements:

In the seasons 1925-26 and 1926-27, he won the Seven Miles Cross-country Club Championships.

In 1927-28, he dead heated for the title and won it again in 1932-1933.

He is listed in Individual Performances in Cross-country Championships:

In 1927-28 - Second in the County Dublin Senior.

In 1928-29 - Third in the County Dublin Senior ("Nalty ran with great determination and finished a good third").

In 1930-31 - Third in the National Senior.

In 1930-31 - Third in the Connacht Province Senior.

In 1931 he received International honours when he represented Ireland in the cross country team at Baldoyle, County Dublin.

General Eoin O'Duffy, who led the Blueshirts and the pro-Franco Christian Brigade to Spain, was President of the Gaelic Athletics Association. He admired Jack as an athlete, and was friendly with him.



Dublin City Harriers. Jack is seated third from left

Socialism and Blueshirts

Republicans now abstained from the Dail and from taking the Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown. They were unrepentant and defiantly continued to rebuild the I.R.A.

An important section of the Republican opposition led by De Valera split to form Fianna Fail ("Warriors of Destiny") in 1926 and entered the Dail in 1927 with an impressive number of seats.

When De Valera gained power with a Fianna Fail majority in 1932 he abolished the hated Oath of Allegiance, severing links that bonded the Irish Free State and Britain, so creating a Republic within what had been constituted a Dominion by the Treaty of 1922. By this time, the I.R.A.'s power was declining as it was divided between militarism and left wing socialism.

The struggles of the early thirties were carried on by the leftists against what they saw as fascist elements, notably the Blueshirts. Formed in Spring of 1931, the organisation promoted the policy of a "corporate state" similar to Mussolini's Italy. They adopted the trappings of European fascist movements in uniform and Nazi-like salute. Membership soon stood at 100,000. Many were motivated by hostility to Fianna Fail's radical



economic policies which had led to an "economic war" with Britain, and for the government's continuing link with the I.R.A. Its anti-Communist thrust was another attraction.

Street battles were usual as Blueshirts broke up political meetings on grounds that communists should not be free to organise, while any Republican movement was denounced as communistic.

Originally composed of ex-servicemen from the Free State army, they were led by General Eoin O' Duffy, ex-Chief of Staff of the IRA, who, as Police Commissioner, was already hated for his repression of Republicans. In 1931, he circulated a secret report to members of the Catholic Hierarchy and to government officials analysing the strength of the Communist Party in the Free State, which if allowed to grow, he considered, would threaten every aspect of Irish life. His report angered the incoming Prime Minister Eamon de Valera who later fired him.

Receiving no governmental support, the Blueshirt numbers dwindled, and a ban by De Valera on a proposed rally at Leinster House to commemorate Michael Collins completed the demoralisation of the members. While O'Duffy's attitude to communism was considered to far outweigh the card carrying membership of the Communist Party of Ireland, there were general fears, intensified by the terror of atheism, which made religion, rather than political change, the principal issue.

Jack became a member of the Communist Party of Ireland on its re-establishment in 1933, later becoming Chairman of the Dublin Group.

The Communist Party of Ireland was first founded in 1921 by Roderick Connolly who, at 15 years, had fought alongside his father James Connolly in the General Post Office during the Easter Rising of 1916. Members of the C.P.I. opposed the Treaty and focussed on military and social struggle, attracting workers and small farmers. The organisation never exceeded more than 100 members but was recognised by Moscow as the Irish Section of the Comintern. However, Moscow withdrew its recognition in 1923.

The C.P.I. was re-established in 1933 reacting to the rapid growth of the Blueshirts. In Dublin, it confronted banks, the transport companies and slum landlords, and attracted support from socialist intellectuals such as Peadar O' Donnell and Liam O' Flaherty but earned Catholic condemnation. During a week long, Jesuit "mission" in the Pro-Cathedral, it was stated in a sermon that "even here in the Holy City of Dublin these vile creatures are in our midst". This precipitated an attack on Connolly House, the offices of the Workers' League, and its destruction by fire, including its library. The occupants were badly beaten. Though few, the Communists in Ireland became second class citizens, victims of social apartheid and public abuse.

Peadar O' Donnell (1893-1986) taught on Arranmore Island and went to Scotland as a Trade Union organiser to aid migrant workers from Donegal in their struggle for better pay and conditions. He was a Company Commander of the I.R.A. in the War of Independence and opposed the Treaty. With little faith in violence, he attempted to steer Republicans towards social — revolutionary change involving ideas of social, civil and cultural freedoms as an essential part of national freedom. As a writer, his short stories reflected the severe living conditions of his native Donegal. He strongly opposed the Blueshirts movement.

Paddy Feehan, whom I was privileged to meet in Dublin, told me that he first met Jack at a meeting in Hardwicke Hall in North Dublin in May 1934. To their surprise, the Commanding Officer asked those of the battalion who were members of the Communist Party, or any other Socialist Party, to fall out. About 10, including Paddy and Jack, did so and were immediately expelled from the I.R.A. The C.O. saluted them as they left and said that it was a sad day to see them going. Many of Jack's company also resigned in sympathy. He and Paddy then joined Saor Eire. Their Commanding Officer was Kit Conway, a Free State officer, who was later killed in the Spanish Civil War.

Saor Eire (Free Ireland) was a socialist-republican splinter group of the I.R.A. founded by Peadar O'Donnell, Frank Ryan and George Gilmore. They sought the overthrow of "British Imperialism and its ally, Capitalism, in Ireland". It appealed for support from workers and working farmers, for public control of land and ownership of transportation. The Catholic Hierarchy declared both the I.R.A. and Saor Eire to be "sinful and irreligious" and forbade Catholics to join. It was also declared an "unlawful organisation" by the government and soon collapsed.

Jack was now giving his time solely to working class activities. He was involved in providing social services to those in financial need, for example to those subject to eviction from their homes in the late 20s and early 30s. One time when his mother asked him where his jacket was, he said that somebody needed it more than he did.



Most of Paddy Feehan's contacts with Jack during this period were at monthly meetings of the Republican Congress which they joined on its formation in 1934 after the demise of Saor Eire. Jack, in his biographical essay written while in the International Brigade, assessed the Republican Congress as "a United Front movement against Fascism".

The Republican Congress sought the destruction of the "ranch farmers" and the establishment of a workers republic. Deeply committed to democracy, its members had no taste for capitalism and, while distrustful of the political influence of the Catholic clergy, it manifested no objection to Catholicism itself. They were conjoined with the I.R.A. in their battle against the big farmers and farming based businesses. The government disapproved of any signs of such an united front of socialist organisations with the I.R.A., seeing any such union as potentially disruptive to society.

Paddy Feehan saw the Congress' aim as "an attempt to get people of all walks of life – rich and poor, to pool their ideas so that everyone's could be used". He believed that the real opponents to the work of the Congress were not the politicians or clergy but the "so-called workers of Dublin". A taint of Communism deterred many from joining, resulting in its dissolution in early 1936 when their Dublin office had to be vacated due to inability to pay the rent.

In February 1935, Jack was jailed in Mountjoy Prison for six weeks resulting from incidents arising from a campaign against the non-recognition of trade unionism in the Dublin "Bacon Shops" chain. Imprisoned with him on that occasion were twenty others who took part in a mass pic-



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ket, including Charlie Donnelly and Dinny Coady, both of whom later fell in battle in Spain.

A bitter transport strike began in Dublin on March 3, 1935 and lasted for seventy six days. The government called on the Free State Army to supply trucks and drivers for transport. There was sniping at lorry tires and two Gardai were shot.

The I.R.A., the Republican Congress and the Communist Party condemned the government's use of the Army for strike breaking purposes in a labour situation involving a private monopoly of Dublin Transportation. They called for the organised support of all those who stood for decent working and social conditions.

COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND.

Headquarters:

CONNOLLY HOUSE, GREAT STRAND ST. DUBLIN.

DUBLIN DISTRICT.

Dear Comrade,

You are required to attend an Aggregate Meeting of all Dublin Members which will be held in Connolly House on Tuesday 5th. March at 8 p.m.

The meeting is called in connection with the existing industrial struggles in the City of Dublin and with the object of mobilising all Party forces in support of the Tram and Bus Workers.

Sean Murray will give a report on the Tram Strike and on the dispute in the Railways.

You are urged to make a special effort to be present.

Yours fraternally

Jim Larkin Jr.

The call for support issued by the Council of the I.R.A. in particular alarmed and alerted the government. Houses were quickly raided by police and 44 men taken into custody. Many arrested were quickly released after interrogation, but others got sentences from 6 to 18 months.

Having just served his sentence for the "Bacon Shops" action, Jack was among those again arrested and later "admitted" (as the official form puts it) to the Military Detention Barracks, Curragh Camp on March 27. Jack described the charge as "being a Republican". The file relating to his internment gives his occupation as "Storeman". He was 32 years, single, 5' 10", 161 lbs., dark brown



The Military Detention Barracks, ("The Glass House"), Curragh Camp

hair, brown eyes, and a "fresh" complexion. Religion was Roman Catholic and his mother was given as next of kin. He was charged with "being a member of an unlawful association" and "failing and refusing to give an account of his movements when demanded by a member of the Garda Siochana".

While awaiting trial, he was visited by his mother, Roderick Connolly, Frank Ryan, and his cousin, Sean O'Beirne of 92, Upper Leeson Street, Dublin.

Bill Scott and Charlie Clarke were fellow prisoners, both of whom died in the Spanish Civil War.

He pleaded not guilty at the Special Powers Tribunal, comprised of one colonel and two majors, and was sentenced to one months imprisonment from date of arrest, which meant that he was there and then released on April 29, 1935.

Ten shillings and four pence were returned to him.

"On my release, Jack said, I applied for my job but only succeeded in getting it after the men on the job threatened strike action. From then on to the time I came to Spain, I was engaged in getting better conditions and pay for the workers engaged in the oil firms, with much success".



Ireland in the Thirties

Facing a ruined economy, living conditions were bleak in Ireland in the thirties. The Civil War had cost the country about twenty million pounds, and only a massive loan from the Bank of England halted total economic collapse. The agricultural economy was seriously hit. Quota restrictions slowed migration to the U.S. and more returned home than went abroad, often finding themselves back on farms too small to support them. Tens of thousands were semi-

idle or totally unemployed in the cities. Tenement houses in Dublin were occupied by eight or nine families – often more than ten to a room infested by vermin.

The author Francis Hackett wrote to the Irish Times in May 1935: "The worst radio in the world, the dearest telegrams. The worst telephone development, the worst electric system... with our politicians hood winking us and blathering to foreign correspondents about our spirituality and our happiness."

Much of the fault, he said, lays with education being in the hands of "under-developed celibates". The Irish Language was important but costing millions, and was "a wild goose chase". He denounced "fatuous film censorship, press intimidation, book censorship, sterilised education, birth control by infanticide and divorce by strychnine and the hammer".

The last time that Paddy Feehan saw Jack was in 1935 at the unveiling of the memorial to Liam Lynch, Chief of Staff of the I.R.A. in the Civil War. As they were out of the I.R.A. at this time, they had to stand in a separate field during the ceremony at Goatenbridge, County Tipperary.

Paddy admired Jack as "a wonderful character who dressed well and made a neat figure". After Jack left for Spain in 1936, Paddy did not have any contact with him. Paddy had also wanted to join the International Brigade but was about to be married and was in great conflict around his decision. He always felt regretful that he had not been free to go to Spain.

In 1936, it was considered that, as the Blueshirts faded, De Valera did not require the I.R.A. Subsequent to some armed murders, he proclaimed it an illegal body and imprisoned its Chief-of-Staff.

Peg O'Sullivan and her mother came from Carrowkeel to spend Christmas 1936 in Convent Avenue, shortly after my grandfather and grandmother, Mick, Maisie, Jack and Kathleen moved there from East Wall Road. When they arrived, they were disappointed to find that Jack had left for Spain to join the International Brigade and Mick had been asked, at the last minute, to go to sea. On the day that Aggie and Peg were leaving to return home, word came that Jack had been wounded.

Spain

Spain before the Civil War

Following the First World War (1914-18), fascism made major advances in Italy, Eastern Europe and Austria. Spain, for centuries, had stood apart from the main European changes, featuring land ownership by aristocracy, primitive and miserable living conditions and a large professional army of aristocratic officers. Moves towards change, even by the middle and professional class who wanted a liberal progressive government, were resisted – often by force. The workers who wanted socialist change were influenced by anarchist ideas and acted violently against the ruling class. The Communist Party was small with influence extending beyond the cities. The Catholic Church maintained the status quo. In 1923, General Miguel Primo de Rivera had imposed a military dictatorship, influenced by Mussolini, and with the collusion of King Alfonso XIII. His popularity diminished, and he finally left the country in 1930. A year later, with the proclamation of a Republic, the King abdicated, and left Spain.

In September 1934, the government moved to the Right, forcing the Socialists out. The workers opposed this with a general strike which in some areas, was viciously crushed by units of the Spanish Army under the command of General Francisco Franco.



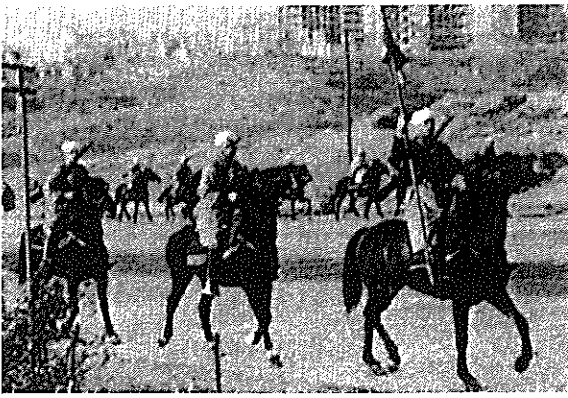
Celebration in Madrid of Frente Popular victory, February 1936

The Republican and working class organisations came closer to each other and formed the Frente Popular (Popular Front), taking a majority at a free election in 1936. Many of the Frente Popular were liberal middle-class professionals who lived in urban middle class communities. To emphasise its non-revolutionary character, the Socialists and the Communists did not take portfolios.

This change was seen by the Spanish aristocracy as a dangerous move towards Bolshevism. The threat was reinforced by the government introducing a program, based on social and political reforms, which restricted the privileges of Church and Army. A progressive constitution was drafted. Legislation was enacted to benefit the working classes with long-awaited agrarian and church reforms. Divorce and civil marriage were allowed, religious symbols were removed from public buildings and religious orders were barred from teaching. Clergy were forced to disclose property holdings for taxation and army officers had to take an oath of loyalty to the Republic. The new Republican government released political prisoners, and handed some land to peasants. Nevertheless, army officers and other reactionaries fomenting civil disorder and plotting rebellion went uncontrolled.

The Military Coup

Morocco, whose colonisation was Spain's last attempt to play an imperial role in restoring national prestige after the loss of Cuba and the Philippines, was the centre of activity as the plotting materialised into an attempted coup on July 17, 1936. Officers of the African army took command of the military garrison in Morocco. The African army contained the Tercio which was Spain's equivalent of the French Foreign Legion. The Tercio was composed of The



Regulares, a very aggressive corps of Moroccan troops led by the Africanistas – a military aristocracy of which Franco was a member. They were tough, disciplined, war experienced, and particularly skilful in frontal assault and hand-to-hand combat. The members were

titled: Los Novios de la Muerte – the Bridegrooms of Death, and "Viva la muerte!" was their battle cry.

A large number of military units on the peninsula also mutinied. In many of the main towns and country areas, the people were able to defeat the rebels as the Government distributed weapons to civilians. This force, the Militia, was a match for Nationalist rebel troops who were unprepared for such resistance especially in the cities of Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, Malaga, Catalonia and in the Basque country. The mountainous zones of Navarra and half of Aragon, vast stretches of rural Castile and much of Andalusia, including its capital Seville, became rebel controlled. The government was unable to fully put down the uprising while the rebels, expecting a classic pronunciamiento (there had been 52 attempts between 1814 and 1936), assumed that within days or weeks they would control Spain. Civil war was inevitable. The Nationalist rebels were now unable to complete the take-over without the intervention of the African army which was stuck in Spanish Morocco. Eighty per cent of the Navy, the commercial and military air forces which remained under Republican control prevented them from crossing the Straits of Gibraltar.

Hitler and Spain

Franco, already known in Germany, made a personal appeal to Hitler for planes and arms to transport the troops across the straits. A deputation met with him at Bayreuth where he was attending the



Wagner Festival. After the meeting, Hitler ordered the creation of a special staff to administer aid to Franco. The operation was christened Unternehmen Feurzauber (Operation Magic Fire) by Der Fuhrer himself as he had just been to hear "Siegfried", the hero of which had to pass through the Magic Fire to free Brunnhilde. A Spanish company was formed to make it look like a commercial venture (HISMA) that handled imports of "goods".

Germany responded by sending in the Condor Legion, a select air squadron of over 3,000 men, 37 officers and 92 new planes which essentially formed the nucleus of the Nationalist Air Force. Junkers transport planes, within three days, had set up an airlift between Morocco and the peninsula, assisted by planes sent by Mussolini.

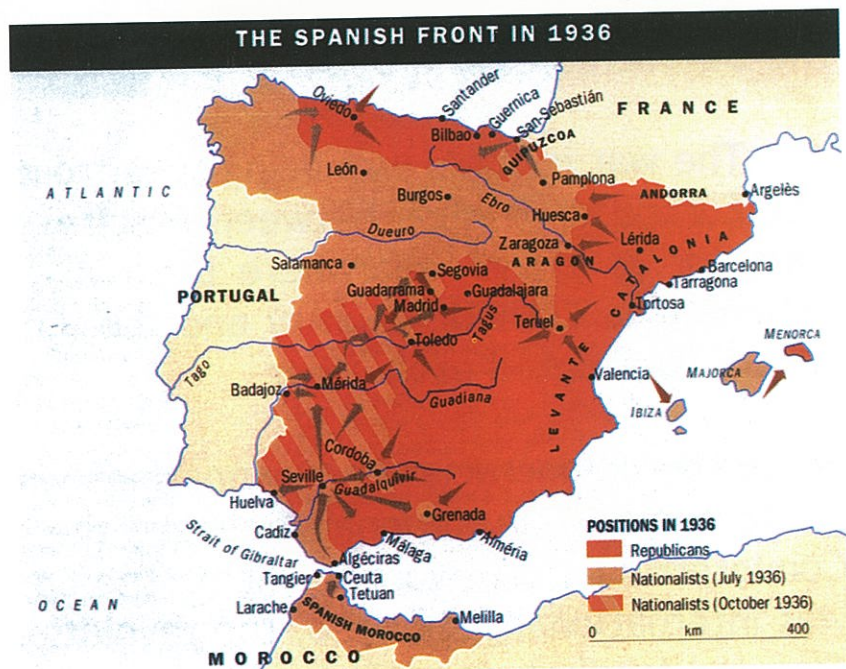
Italy and Spain

Mussolini initially hesitated to commit help to the rebels, and then, claiming that he wanted to fight Communism and protect the Mediterranean from Soviet influence, provided a military presence which exceeded the German, and sufficient, it was later estimated, to prejudice his capability in the Second World War.

Franco's advance

The coming of the African Army swung the balance to the Nationalist side. Franco took command. In a week, 14,000 men crossed the straits. The Republicans were soon incapable of an effective blockade due to obstacles set up by Tangier authorities. American oil companies refused to carry fuel across the straits. German and Nationalist warships sank vessels that were headed for Republican ports.

By the end of July 1936, Nationalist troops, airlifted from Morocco to Seville, rapidly began to move Northwards along Spain's border with Portugal. In a week, they penetrated about 123 miles with little or no resistance. There were plenty of Republicans willing to resist but not enough leadership and



Map of Spain on July 26 1936

training and a shortage of experienced and disciplined infantry units. An area of 89,000 sq. miles was in the rebels hands — the remaining 104,000 remained in Republican hands. Madrid became the Nationalist objective.

The Church was dominant in zones captured by the Nationalist rebels during the war. An official state bulletin outlined instructions for schools. Images of the Virgin Mary were to be displayed and, on entering and leaving school, the students would say to their teacher "Hail purest Mary" to which the teacher would respond "Conceived without sin".

The Democracies and Spain



The war in Spain was being seen from a distance as either the first European struggle between Fascism, Communism and Democracy, or as a civil war where the two faces of Spain, the rural Nationalistic Catholic country and the metropolitan secular Republican, confronted each other.

While the democracies had sympathies with the Republican struggle to contain the Nationalist rebels, the growing influence of the Comintern in Spain worried them. The Soviet Union, at this time, was internationally shunned, the revolution and the murder of the Tsar and family being still fresh in people's minds. Within ten days

of the outbreak of the revolt, the British and French constructed a "Pact of Non-Intervention", maintaining that the war was an internal affair. In England, Mussolini was seen as making a bold attempt with Fascism to crush Bolshevism, and The Anglo-Italian Pact of April 1938 ratified Britain's agreement to the presence of Ita-

lian troops in Spain in exchange for Mussolini's promise to abandon Spain once the civil war was over. Winston Churchill praised the Mussolini regime, and the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Hinsley, in thanking Franco for a signed photograph, also thanked him for "defending the true Spain of Catholic principles."



'Non-Intervention Poker', by the English cartoonist David Low, from the French magazine Vu in January 1937. British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden (with hands tied behind him) and Léon Blum, Prime Minister of France, sit with Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin

The United States were indifferent to foreign affairs and wanted to avoid involvement in European quarrels. Roosevelt depended on the largely democratic Catholic vote which would be effected by him taking any partisan attitude in the Spanish problem. Congress, at Roosevelt's request, extended the Neutrality Act to civil wars and this took effect on May 1, 1937. The State Dept. marked U.S passports as "not valid for Spain" but none of these measures ultimately stopped many American volunteers from joining the International Brigades.



Franco

Francisco Franco (1892-1975), on October 1, 1936, at 44 years old, Franco assumed complete power as Chief of State of Nationalist Spain. Assuming unlimited authority gave him theoretically broader powers than those held by Stalin, Hitler or Mussolini. Commissioned as a second lieutenant at 17, he knew that the path to quick promotion in the army lay in Morocco. He helped organise Spain's Foreign Legion and played a decisive role in Moroccan campaigns that broke the power of native uprising. He placed great emphasis militarily on the value of proper equipment and of "saber manera" ("know how"). It was said that his courage was only equaled by his personal ambition. He wished to expand Spanish territories in Africa, and, politically, he sought an authoritarian system over parliament. A firm Catholic and culturally traditionalist, he believed that Catholic faith and Spanish nationalism were inseparable and that Spain had a unique religious mission to pursue.

Madrid

Franco failed to take Madrid. Its defense became a legend and a central feature of the war stretching over the next 2 years. The Militia, fighting on familiar ground, relentlessly resisted the African army. Men and women drank coffee in cafes with rifles on their shoulders and then moved down the street to the battle front of fierce house to house fighting.

The African troops had fought from Seville to the gates of Madrid. During the 10 weeks of fighting in the suburbs to reach the centre of the city, the casualties in their elite units reached over 70% and Franco was running short of munitions and supplies. At this point, the advent of the International Brigades and Soviet planes forced him to abandon directly attacking the city in favour of encirclement. From then on, all the battles in the middle of the country were really attempts to reach Madrid.



Republican militia in defense of Madrid

The Brigades had fought with such intensity that the people of Madrid felt reassured that they had some defense against the Nationalists but, in November, the government quit the city for Valencia, far from the front. Bombing and house to house fighting continued.

The Germans, in the battle of Madrid, tested fighting and bombing techniques they would later use, not only in the Second World War, but in the massacre of Badajoz, in which around 18,000 civilians were shot in the course of 12 hours, in the bombing of Madrid and



Bomb damage in the western quarter of Madrid

Barcelona, and in the razing of Guernica by German aircraft with repeated machine gunning of its civilian population.

Russia and Spain

Russia directly intervened, seeing the democratic powers' passivity in the face of an imminent rebel victory over Madrid. In early October 1936, the Soviets sent in weapons, bombers and T-26 tanks.

Much of the Soviet equipment was overpriced, often obsolete, poorly manufactured and sometimes unusable. Chicanery, racketeering and bribery held sway. Stalin was said to have blackmailed the Republic into surrendering its Spanish gold reserve of 510 tons to Moscow for safekeeping in return for aid, and to have later subjected his supposed allies to exchange rate scams. The gold dwindled to nothing and the last arms supplies were granted by the Soviet Union on credit.

The International Brigades

The first nucleus of International Brigades arrived from Marseilles in early October 1936 and went to Albacete military base in Southeast Spain, one hundred miles from the nearest battle front.

For the most part, these first arrivals presented spontaneously as disorganised, poorly armed columns of combatants but their volunteered help had major symbolic value in lifting the morale of the Republicans. In total 45,000 men and women of all social conditions from over 50 countries enlisted in the Brigades to fight on the Republican side.





The presence and motivation of the foreign volunteers who fought there depended largely on their experiences outside Spain but whatever the individual motivations of its members the International Brigades were essentially controlled by the Soviet Communist Party acting via the Comintern, and their existence and constitution depended on decisions taken in the Kremlin. With a military commander and a political commissar it was a political army in the image of Trotsky's Red Army, defining itself in ideological and military terms. Some saw the Brigades as instruments of Communist Policy, that propaganda and politics took priority over military goals.

Commissars were the political soul of a combat unit, controlling the internal affairs of that unit in the areas of press, censorship, military training, education and appointments to military and political posts. Fighting power depended on the political work of conditioning the troops, maintaining discipline and ensuring the correct political orientation of the soldiers. They ensured the ideological preparation of troops prior to combat, explaining the military, strategic and political significance of the action to be undertaken. They also weeded out spies, defeatists and provocateurs.

The Irish International Brigade

In late 1936, The Republican Congress and the Communist Party of Ireland began to exchange views about organising an Irish Brigade to go to Spain but they did so in an atmosphere of increasing popular condemnation. Controversy ran high and Frank Ryan

said "the Spanish trenches are here in Ireland".

Frank Ryan [1902-1944] was a veteran of the War of Independence, and a Republican Congress leader. He was a sincere Catholic, University College Dublin graduate, Gaelic scholar, and freelance journalist. In Spain, his role was that of commander, organiser, publicist, writer, and broadcaster. He believed implicitly in the courage and expertise of the I.R.A. members in Spain and saw Spain as a further opportunity for the I.R.A. members to gain skills which would be of use in Ireland on their return. He was captured by Italians in Summer 1938 who kept him hostage for their officers who were held by the Republicans. Following court-martial, he was sentenced to death, later commuted to 30 years imprisonment. In Ireland petitions and demands ("Release Frank Ryan or else") led to De Valera's personal intervention with Franco for his release but he was handed over to the Germans in 1940. He made one abortive attempt to return to Ireland, but in deteriorating health he died in a Dresden sanatorium. His remains were re-interred in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin in June 1979.



Frank became involved in a public argument over Spain with the Irish Primate, Cardinal Mc Rory, after which he changed his mind about going ahead with any plans to mobilise aid to Spain. The Communist Party executive persisted and, subsequently, the Republican Congress agreed. Both parties then collected particulars of

the volunteers who were ready to leave by the end of 1936.

By the time enough volunteers were gathered to make an expedition worthwhile, it was generally believed that they would be joining an army of the Communist International. There was considerable hostility to it in their own communities, especially among the women.



European volunteers marching through Barcelona on their arrival in October 1936

Sixty-six percent of the Irishmen who fought for the Spanish Republic were working class men from Belfast, Dublin, Cork and Waterford. Most of them had been through years of economic depression and were considered to belong to communities which were among the poor-

est in Europe. They had fought in strikes and on the streets. Some believed that the war in Spain was identical with the struggle against economic and religious exploitation at home and were spurred on by political idealism. A desire for adventure, discontent at home, poverty, and an inability to settle down were other factors but the main motive was the need to respond to the fascist challenge, "antifascista", which had a meaning for Ireland with a

total of 48,000 Blueshirts — more per capita than any other European country.

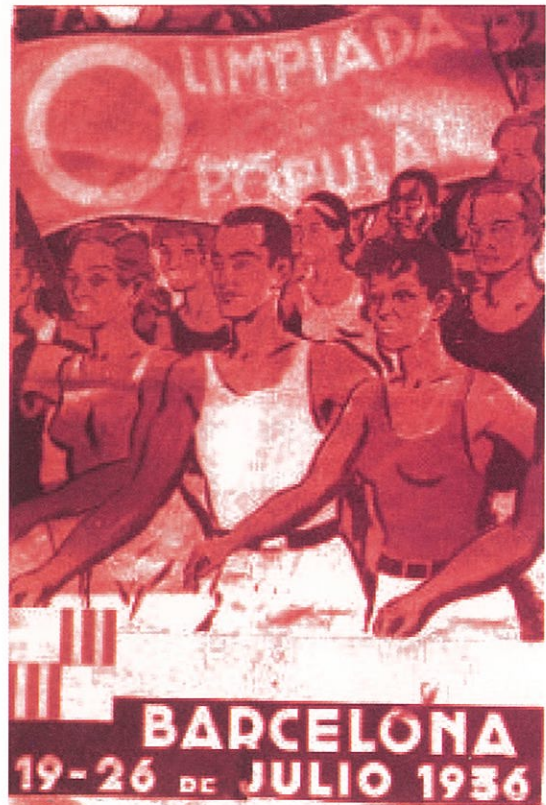
The C.P.I. did not need a call from Moscow. Eoin O'Duffy's personal involvement was a special challenge which provoked the left. While many believed that they had smashed O'Duffy's bid to set up a fascist dictatorship in Ireland and that his presence in Spain was irrelevant, others who joined were said to be looking for a chance to refight both the Blueshirts and the Irish Civil War on Spanish soil.

The Irish Christian Brigade

By 1936, the influence of the Blueshirts had faltered and the fire was taken out of the oppositional situation. It is claimed that on the day the Communist Party of Ireland called for Labour and Republicanism to join in support of the Spanish Republicans, Eoin O'Duffy's call for Christian Crusaders to fight on Franco's side was printed in the Irish Independent, one of Ireland's national dailies.

O'Duffy made a speech at the site of Michael Collins's death in which he said that if Collins was alive he would have been leading this Crusade to Spain.

Many athletes refused to participate in the Official Olympiade in Nazi Germany and came to the Workers Olympiad in Barcelona instead



The Irish Independent of August 10, 1936, three weeks into the military uprising in Spain, referred to an Anti-Red Crusade for Spain. O'Duffy maintained that nuns were being raped and priests were being massacred by the Republicans in Spain and advocated the restoration of a Christian administration there. The paper regarded O'Duffy as "sincere in his motives to lead a band of missionaries to a country where the forces of evil were striking a deadly blow at the Catholic Church". It was thought that the paper, in addition, guaranteed some financial support for the venture.

Details of plans for the Christian Brigade are not clear. A Spanish aristocrat resident in London, Count Ramírez de Arellano, contacted Cardinal Mac Rory, early in August 1936 who put him in touch with O'Duffy. De Arellano then asked O'Duffy to raise "a volunteer army" (to avoid international complications) to come and help the Nationalists. O'Duffy went to Spain for further negotiations. Franco did not have time to meet with him as it coincided with his negotiations with representatives of the Berlin and Rome governments.

The enthusiasm for the Christian Brigade swelled, and recruits were drawn from various parts of the country allowing O'Duffy to mobilise volunteers whom he later claimed reached 6000. Some of them were former Blueshirts but not more than 10% of the total were believed to be Fascists.

De Valera and Spain

De Valera hesitated to make policy around Spain. He believed that his Spanish blood made him ideal as a mediator but Madrid rejected him. This was followed by the resignation of the Spanish Ambassador to Ireland with many of his staff, leaving a Junior Irish

assistant in charge of matters between the Spanish Republic and the Irish Free State. Many of the Fianna Fail delegates told De Valera that their constituencies were in jeopardy if the government backed the Spanish Republic. De Valera also wished to avoid open hostilities, between the hard-line I.R.A., undeterred by his ban, and the O'Duffy followers.

De Valera takes the salute at review of National Army. Helmets had been changed from those of the British to those similar to the Wehrmacht for a time in the Thirties.



Fianna Fail banned Irish involve-

ment. Those who wished to go to Spain required a passport and few possessed one. Spain had been struck off the list of countries to which passports allowed access. Even though it was not yet illegal for men to leave Britain to enlist in Spain, some were occasionally picked up by police or customs and sent back.

Volunteers concocted reasons for travelling, in one case to visit France to pay respects at the grave of a brother killed in the Great War, another to visit the Marian Shrine at Lourdes.

The Irish Catholic Hierarchy and Spain

Catholic clergy showed no open approval but many privately praised Generals Franco and O 'Duffy. Collections were made out-

side churches after Mass for "Catholic Spain" and the Nationalist cause.

In an attempt to counteract negative propaganda, a Basque priest addressed a packed meeting in the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin in January 1937 and recounted how the war in Spain was not a religious war but an imperialist one where Franco's forces were in control, banning the Basque traditions and language. He called Franco "a blood thirsty militarist who had dragged thousands of innocent and defenseless citizens from their homes, beat them and then shot them". He indicated that the burning of churches by the Republicans was related to the fact that Fascist priests used them as political meeting places. The Spanish government was a coalition of many non-Communist parties.

His campaign ran into trouble. Two Jesuits took issue with his facts and said that he was "blindly biased". The Northern Ireland Labour Party arranged meetings in Belfast but Queens University would not allow him to speak. In the Ulster Hall, he was interrupted by shouts of "Up Franco" and "What about the murder of nuns?".

The Journey to Spain

Groups which set out from Dublin were usually vetted by Communist Party of Great Britain officials in London, before boarding the boat train at Victoria Station. Each was given a ticket to Paris and One pound sterling for emergencies (one official protested that this was too much and would encourage drinking). They usually took the land route over the Pyrenees, in groups of twos and threes, starting at the foothills near Perpignan and then secretly marching in single file up and over the mountains.

Jack left Dublin on the Liverpool ferryboat in a group organised by Frank Ryan on Friday December 11, 1936.

About another 40 left from Belfast and Rosslare. There were no demonstrations as they left. Frank Ryan told an Irish Press reporter that going to Spain was "a demonstration of the sympathy of revolutionary Ireland against international Fascism. It is also a reply to the intervention of Irish Fascism in the war against the Spanish Republic which, if unchallenged would remain a disgrace on our people. We want to show that there is a close bond between the democracies of Ireland and Spain. Our fight is the fight of the Spanish people, as it is of all peoples who are the victims of tyranny." He told a reporter from Reynolds News, the English left wing Sunday newspaper, that the volunteers included "members of the Republican Congress, the Labour and Communist parties, the I.R.A. and Trade Unions". The I.R.A., however, was not officially supporting the Brigade.



Over the same weekend, 500 volunteers of General O'Duffy's Christian Brigade boarded the tender Dun Aengus to rendezvous with a mystery ship in Galway Bay. The men marched to the dock

at midnight on Saturday, having arrived by trains, buses and cars, singing and cheering. The S.S. Urundi arrived at noon on Sunday in miserable weather, flying a Swastika. Thirty-five decided not to travel.

By this time, Frank Ryan's group was in Paris. Traveling through France, they arrived at Perpignan on December 14.

In the group of thirteen were Jack's close friends Paddy Duff and Donal O'Reilly (who had been in the Four Courts in 1922), together with Joe Monks, Kit Conway, Charlie Donnelly (Republican activist, lecturer and poet) and Jim Prendergast, activist and Communist Party member. The group also included Frank Edwards who had been dismissed from his position by the local bishop, Dr. Kinane, as teacher in a local Christian Brothers' school because he was a Republican Congress leader in Waterford.

They traveled quite openly, crossing the Spanish frontier by railway through the tunnel under the Pyrenees to the collecting point at the old fortress-like barracks overlooking Figueras. They reached Albacete, headquarters of the International Brigades, on December 16, having journeyed in a packed and slow moving train through Barcelona, often to cheering crowds welcoming them at stations en route.

Albacete lays 70 km. South of the main road between Valencia, whence the Republican Government had now been transferred, and Madrid. It was well known for its two industries – the growth and processing of saffron, and knife-making. The men regarded Albacete as a backwater: It was a town of 25,000 but was chosen because it was on main railway lines and had road communications

to most of the front-line zones to the North, West and South.

The International Brigade H.Q. was in a large villa built around a courtyard. Food and drink, from wine to cognac, was plentiful and the stores in the town were well stocked. By March 1938, when the last of the Brigades evacuated, Albacete was in ruins, with severe rationing of food and clothing.



Jack was among the group of new recruits who were to be shaped into a military unit at Madrigueras, a village near Albacete, situated on a rolling plain of vine and wheat fields. His occupation, on arrival, was listed as "labourer".

Jack, in International Brigade uniform

The Brigades

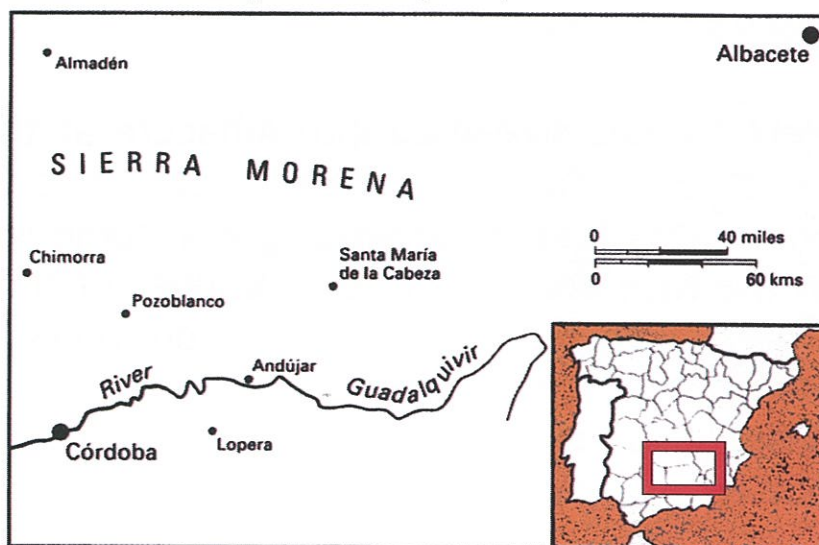
The General Staff of the Brigades had been in existence for about three months by this time. Three Brigades, the XIth., XIIth. and XIVth., mainly German, French and Italian were in action on the Madrid front.

New recruits streamed into Albacete at the rate of 500 to 1000 a week. By October 30, 1936, there were 3,500 from all over the world and, during the ensuing war, some 45,000 foreigners enlisted in the Republican side. The number of foreign volunteers allowed the Brigades to operate autonomous units, at least until late in the war when native Spaniards filled the ranks. Because of heavy casualties sustained by the XIth and XIIth at Madrid, the Albacete staff posted many of the new recruits to these two Brigades as rein-

forcements in November and December 1936. Some believed more time was needed to train and prepare, others felt that they should be called on immediately. Nevertheless, when the main party of Irish arrived, they found themselves, with their experienced military backgrounds, being quickly drafted into ad hoc units. They filled gaps in a front line which now curved across the middle of Spain, roughly from North to South, but extending unevenly for thousands of kilometres.

The Córdoba Front

This first involvement of the Irish came as a result of an enemy thrust in Córdoba province, to the South of Albacete, to relieve a besieged rebel outpost situated deep in the government zone formed around the monastery of Santa María de la Cabeza. During the war's early weeks, more than a thousand pro-rebel refugees from nearby towns had gathered in this ancient shrine. There was pressure from the religious lobby, and from Franco, to save the heroic defenders of Santa Maria and, in the last week of December, an attack by the Nationalists developed along the line of the main road from Cordoba city towards Andújar and by implication towards Valencia. Immediate resistance by the Republicans was required. In haste, the French Battalion of the XIV Brigade was dispatched to Andalusia but weakened by recent casualties, it needed strengthening. More than



forty Irishmen, including Jack and nine of the thirteen who had come to Spain with him, were joined with British men to form No.1 Company. The Irish of the Company called themselves The Connolly Column in honour of James Connolly.

Paddy Duff (Dublin) on the left, with Jack



The company of about one hundred men was commanded by Captain George Nathan. Piling into railway wagons on Christmas Eve, they set off for Andújar. On arrival while awaiting orders, they were able to enjoy a Christmas dinner of sorts. On December 26, they advanced towards the village of Lopera, a few kilometres Southwest of Andújar. By this time, the enemy had taken an arc of villages to the North and South of the road, establishing a bridge head of which Lopera, captured by them on Christmas day, formed the apex.

No. 1 Company's mission was to retake the village.

Joe Monks wrote about the battle in "With the Reds in Andalusia" and Donal O'Reilly contributed his account, ten months later, to the Irish Democrat. What follows is an amalgam of their writing:

From Joe Monks: "Lorries were to take us to the firing line. It was at this juncture, whilst the day was still young, that the Brigade Commander, General Walter, followed by Commissar Heuseler, and Chief of Staff Major Aldo Morandi, visited his battalions.

Walter was Polish and had a special smile for the Irish. He told "Kit" Conway that he had studied the two periods, the two battles for O'Connell Street, and "Kit" then called Jack Nalty forward to shake hands with the General. "Kit" told how Jack had been by the side of Cathal Brugha in the Hamman Hotel. Major Morandi talked with some of us lesser mortals, as Belfast man Bill Beattie remarked."



Stamp commemorating the birth of Cathal Brugha

Cathal Brugha (1874-1922) fought in the Easter Rising of 1916 where he received crippling injuries. He was I.R.A. Chief of Staff in the War of Independence and was fiercely against the Treaty. During the Civil War action, he took up a position in the Hamman and Gresham Hotels on O'Connell Street tunneling from one to the other and patrolling the roof tops along that side of the street. The area was blasted and suffered massive damage. Brugha advised other Republicans, including De Valera and Countess Markievicz, to leave the Hamman under a white flag. He did not surrender, came out shooting and was cut down by a sniper from a nearby building.

"As it is in all wars, a lot of time is spent in waiting and on the morning of the 27th. December we had to settle down to wait on the lorries. Ralph Fox, seated on one of the stanchions explained to us that we had a very easy task to perform. It was simply a matter of taking back the next pueblo, Villa del Rio, which was needlessly lost by an inefficient Spanish unit on the 24th December.

Nathan ordered the quick march. All were present and correct. No lorries apparently were available so we set out to march to the firing line... I became aware of the silence. Our swift footsteps were bringing the proximity of death ever closer and for me fear, the agent of the well-armed overlord, was in our midst. He marched in step with the cold-hearted one they call Sergeant Death... Now no aircraft was crossing the sky and it was only the step of the volunteers marching that went sounding from the tree-lined road over the golden coloured fields to the lush margins of the Guadalquivir. And it was then the marching men began to chant in time with the step:

'So left, two, three; so left two three; to the work we must do.

March on in the workers' united front for you are the worker too.

Fascist bullets, Fascist bombers make our land a smoking mass.

Hurrah for courage, hurrah for bravery. At Madrid they did not pass.'

'No Paserán!'

Before reaching the main road the Company swept past an old shepherd. He stood beside his donkey. His sheep were huddled in a ditch by the side of the road. We saw that the peasant's smock stretched down



to the knees of his trousers. He wore alpargatas. His stumps of teeth were tobacco stained; but his eyes were bright and full of admiration for us. He lifted his clenched fist.

"Salud Companeros!"

His smile crinkled the whole of his face which was as dry and as grey as the soil itself.

"Ask your man where he got the hat?"

All who heard the question and understood it laughed. Captain Nathan laughed.

The Dublin teenager who asked the question and his companions



could see for themselves that the old man's face beneath the broad-brimmed Cordoba hat remained unchanged. Again the old man shouted, "Salud Companeros!" and they liked to think that he had a stake in the fight, and wished them to win.

International Brigades marching to the front

Three antiquated trucks met us on the way. The drivers turned them about, and the H.Q Section, with half the Irish Section, soon filled these small 30 cwt. vehicles. Nathan ordered the remainder of the Company to keep marching, the trucks would do the necessary trips to get everybody forward. Instead of going directly to Lopera, the route took a right turn and they were deposited on the approach to Villa del Rio.

Our baptism of fire took place when enemy planes came into the area and strafed the road with the neighbouring olive plantations time and time again.

A group of Dubliners that had got friendly with the Londoner Segal, were beside him, beneath the same tree, at the time he was killed outright. It shocked them that that death had come to him instantly, and that without a murmur he was gone from them. They lifted the body onto a blanket and rested his head upon a satchel. But like lightening Captain Nathan came among them. Taking a quick look at the dead volunteer he asked seriously if anyone needed a pair of boots. He herded the Dubliners out onto the road remarking that there was no time to have an Irish wake."

The company formed and moved to the attack – a V shaped movement with the Irish unit led by Kit Conway advancing on the left flank. They moved through the olive groves with the zing-zung of the bullets playing a tune and the occasional snick of a bullet as it clipped off a cluster of leaves.



Gesticulating vigorously with his stick, Captain Nathan led a race downhill to a stream that flowed past the base of a mighty ridge. "Kit Conway led the Irish attack out from the friendly trees, down a short valley crossing a stream and then up among the hills, out of breath they reached the lee of the ridge. Shoals of bullets now raked the branches, showering them with twigs and leaves. They reached the crest under heavy fire."

Joe Monks: "Gaining its crest Nathan went over the skyline on his belly like a lizard. Elsewhere on the slopes he was mostly to be seen on one knee, using his field glasses. At one point in this advance the Irish were first to gain the crest of one of the ridges, and Conway called for a volunteer to scout ahead. The general attitude was that they needed a breather and on the instant none volunteered. Taken aback Conway instantly handed the command over to Jack Nalty and upholding the precept that a leader should not ask his men to do what he himself was not prepared to do himself, set off to scout the ground. However, he was soon back and Nathan, having reached the crest, ordered the general advance to continue. Low on the next down slope, safe from the bullets, Captain Nathan stopped.

He then ordered them to charge and following him, and the stick that he swung above his head, they went in a rush over the intervening hollow and started quickly climbing the next slope where bullets like hailstones thudded upon the ground."

Donal O'Reilly: "The fire is terrific. The language is terrific. Joe Monks is hit. Prendergast's and Dinny Coady's guns are shot to pieces. Bits of guns fly and we think we're all hit."



After the move, the enemy raked the position they had held with machine gun fire. On the crest of the hill, they discovered that they

had advanced too well. In the darkness they dug in and then lay down in groups to rest, huddled together against the cold of the night.

At dawn, they saw the village, Villa Del Rio, just 350 yards away. They went on their way again. As they cross the open ground, clouds of dust are thrown up by the enemy's bullets. They wait for support before making the final assault. Republican big guns come into play but 2 out of 5 shells fail to explode. As they counter-attack, the Fascists are identified in Nazi uniforms.



Republican Army and Civilians bring artillery to the frontline

Donal O'Reilly: "Kit Conway spreads us out. Duff, Nalty and myself are on the edge of the road. We realise we are now fighting a rear-guard action. Cummins and Gough are wounded and move back. Jack Nalty is hit. I won't look. Paddy Duff attends him. I glance and see both sides of Jack's chest is hit. I feel I must cry or act the pig, so I go back to the gun for relief. It's clear Jack is badly hit. I think he is finished... We advise Jack to start making his own way back. We'll cover the ground later perhaps. Jack crawls away."

Although they had reached a good position overlooking the village, they had unknowingly bore down upon the strongest point of the enemy's line. Enemy motorised units had got to Lopera together with cavalry units, and with harassment from the air, such heavy casualties were incurred that assaulting the enemy lines became an

untenable proposition. Lacking air support or adequate artillery, Nathan had no alternative but to withdraw.

Of the Irish, eight men had been killed — including the seventeen year-old Dubliner, Tommy Woods and several others, as for Joe Monks, he is wounded.

Frank Ryan, in a letter on February 11, 1937, from Hosp. de Sangre, Elda, where he was being treated for a bullet through his arm: "Jack Nalty was caught in machine gun fire. He had three bullets in his chest and his right arm was broken. He picked up his rifle and slung it on the good shoulder, caught up the broken arm and walked three kilometres to the field hospital. 'Others need stretchers more' he said. Of course, a man with such an iron constitution is alive and on the mend today."

In Jack's words: "We went into action on the Cordoba front on December 27th. On the following day I received three bullets from a machine gun and spent three months in hospital."

Hospital conditions were often primitive with poor hygiene, infrequent changes of dressing, and inadequate equipment.



For its part in the battle, Nathan's company was acknowledged to have done a good job, so much so, that it was transferred directly to the Madrid front to cope with another emergency.

George Nathan was an ex-British Officer whose power of command and coolness under fire made him a popular officer in some quarters. In January 1937, the Albacete directorate incorporated the British Battalion into the XV International Brigade together with French, American (Abraham Lincoln) and Slavic-Italian battalions with Nathan as their commander. He died of shrapnel wounds in the Brunete offensive in July 1937.



Nathan (with pipe)
Memorials of the Spanish Civil War

Some years later, it was revealed that George Nathan was a key member of a hit-squad directed by Dublin Castle during the War of Independence. He was personally responsible for the murder of three prominent Limerick citizens in 1921, one of whom was George Clancy, Mayor of Limerick, who had been a friend of James Joyce at UCD and portrayed as Davin in 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'.

The Irish Protest

The Irish Brigadiers tended to be hostile to anything British. It was not easy for I.R.A. veterans to accept a subordinate relationship to British officers in Spain. Even the accents were irritants. They claimed that the English had sent out the worst officer types who were treating them like colonials. On the other hand, the

authorities felt provoked when some of the Irish began speaking Gaelic to each other. A full scale rebellion against being a part of the British Battalion blew up from a feud that developed between the Irish unit and the English platoon occupying the neighbouring billet. The English awoke to find their barracks surrounded by Irish armed with guns, knives and cobblestones. A hurried truce was arranged. A number of Irish then demanded that they be sent to the American Abraham Lincoln Battalion which contained some Irish-American ex-I.R.A. members.

A meeting was eventually called to discuss the demand. Arguments that Spain offered an opportunity to fight the mutual enemies of the Irish and English working classes — British Imperialism and international capitalism — failed to keep the Irish in the British Battalion. On Ja-

nuary 19, 1937, all the Irish were transferred to the Lincolns. An American volunteer described the Irish joining their battalion as "a ragged, impoverished-looking crew. Most of them were from Dublin and had fought with the I.R.A. against British rule. They were expert gunsmiths and



boasted knowledge of any gun made".

As Jack was in hospital, he was not a part of this confrontation. Nearly all the Irish volunteers who arrived later joined the British Battalion and lived with and fought alongside their British comrades without any open friction.

The Christian Brigade In Spain

The Christian Brigade arrived in Spain, with great fervor, as warriors against Marxism, O'Duffy claiming that 6,000 had volunteered. Affiliated with Franco's strictly disciplined Tercio, who saw them as inferior in their skills, they were formed into banderas and distributed among various army groups as the need arose. The Bandera Irlandesa was consequently isolated, often undermanned and dependant on Spanish units for support services. Communication with the Spanish was poor and leadership unreliable.

They fought in two major actions. At Jarama in February, 1937, they suffered heavy losses, and on one occasion, they inflicted "friendly fire" on their allies. They met the opponent brigade in only one action where the trenches were only a few hundred yards from each other. Frank Ryan called to them on a loudspeaker "Irishmen go home! Your fathers would turn in their graves if they knew that you'd come to fight for imperialism. This is the real Republican army, the real men of Ireland".



Eoin O' Duffy in uniform as Inspector-General of the XV Bandera Del Tercio

Back in Ireland the members tended to be seen by the Irish as dupes of O'Duffy's political ambitions.

Within the Brigade

It was impossible to create an army with standardised organisation and structure as the battalions were continually disrupted by emergency demands for assistance. There were shortages of weapons, high casualties in enemy action, two or more new Irish arrivals daily, all of which demanded frequent change in structure. Training remained the main concern. While the Soviet advisers and Comintern representatives insisted on a highly disciplined army, it was observed that brigadiers wore bandoliers of bullets like Mexican bandits with hand grenades tied to their belts. The terrain of olive groves and vineyards was difficult to navigate. The Brigadiers had little knowledge of Spanish, the food was strange and in some cases they had to subsist on olive oil and a handful of grapes. Meat, bread and coffee were almost unknown, with often nothing to eat for several days, although wine was always plentiful. The daily wage was about two shillings. Cigarettes were scarce and they smoked everything – best were sundried potato leaves. They wore thin canvas shoes wrapped in rags, open necked shirts and khaki pants. Bacterial infections were prevalent.



Citizens flee from Malaga Feb.1937

In April 1937, Franco moved towards the Basque country. In June, Malaga and Bilbao fell. The Republican Government moved from Valencia to Barcelona.

On leaving hospital, Jack was posted to officers training school where he was on April 25, 1937.



Jack, after hospitalisation, at beach near Barcelona in Spring

On May 10, 1937, he rejoined the British Battalion which had emerged from a handful of survivors, of which he was one, of No.1 Company from the Cordoba front.

He was ordered back to Dublin in July that year to work on gaining more support for the Spanish Government. He returned to Ireland with Paddy Duff. Before going back he was commended for his bravery.

Frank Ryan notes in a letter of July 22, 1937:

"I've spent several days back at the base with Edwards, Prendergast, Monks and Nalty. They are on the road to you now [Dublin]. We had beer - and that's an event in this country. And we had our photographs taken - I sent it to the Democrat yesterday. Down here it's boiling weather, no cooling breezes."

In Dublin, in October, Jack joined with other wounded Brigadiers in a Manifesto calling for more support for the Spanish struggle.



Group photograph in Spain.
July 1937.

Third from left, standing, is Peter Daly of Wexford, killed, a few months later. Beside him Frank Ryan and Paddy O' Daire from the Glenties, Co. Donegal. Jack is in light shirt at back, and Frank Edwards from Waterford is standing extreme right. Jim Prendergast of Dublin is seated, centre, wearing beret and leggings

On learning that Frank Ryan had been captured, he returned to Spain and re-joined the British Battalion of the XV Brigade on the April 10, 1938. He was promoted from Adjutant to Company Commander. The record at this time described him as "One of original No. 1 Coy. With splendid military and political record. Very good type in every way".

Family members, in particular his mother, had not wanted him to go back.

Jack's letter, from London,
to his mother. March 1938

LETTER  CARD



*Mrs. S. Nalty
1 Merriville Villas.
Richmond Rd
Fairview
Eire. Dublin.*

London
Sat

Dear Mother,

I arrived here safe enough and am looking around for a bit. I went to see the Grand National on Fri., and then to see Jack Doyle that night at a theatre. I came from Liverpool the same night to here by bus. It's a long run about 18 hrs. so I had no sleep yet, but will make up for the loss tonight. London is just the same as when I was here last year, plenty of building work going on but I don't think I will touch it. However if I don't get anything here I will push on further. I will write again in a week or so and tell you what I am doing. Hope all are well. Jack

By April 1938, the Nationalist offensive reached the Mediterranean. This move split the Republican territory into two, isolating Catalonia and Aragon. The River Ebro was the valuable boundary with Catalonia. Franco then moved his offensive southwards towards Valencia, the aim being to encircle Madrid and the central front.

The Irish of the Battalion celebrated the Anniversary of the Wolfe Tone Commemoration in June 1938. Jack was a member of the

organising group. It was also reported that at some point he gave a well received lecture to the British Battalion on the I.R.A.

A leading British communist, Griffiths, recounts in his memoirs that he was "assigned to the company of the able and courageous Captain Jack Nalty from Dublin, who had fought with the No. 1 Company under Nathan at Cordoba". In a strange move, Griffith's reported, his plan was blocked by Nalty who felt that the Party was "a waste of time". He gave Griffiths routine duties, preventing him from spending time and effort in building communist groups in the battalion.

The following letter and entry was in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland in the papers of Sean Murray of the Communist Party of Ireland.

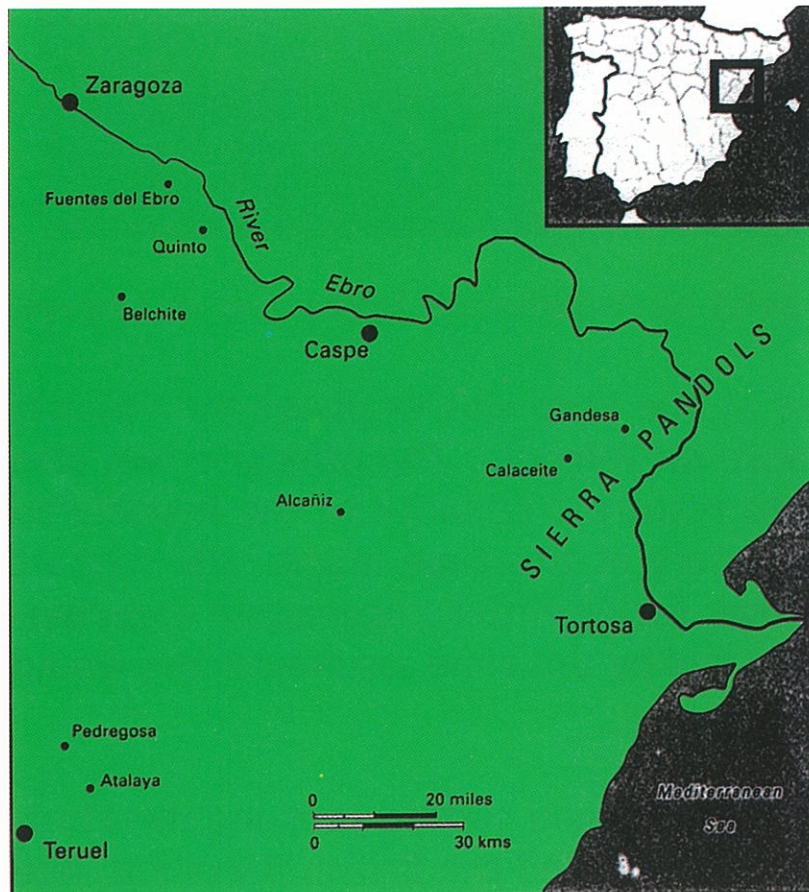
*Jeannie Gannon
7 Mountjoy St
Dublin
Ireland*

From Jack Nalty SRI 161 Barcelona Spain August 24 1938

We are back in the line again about XX days and what heat, avion and artillery. It's marvellous what men can endure in support of an ideal. The fascist infantry is not so hot though. 'Old Pat Duff got a 'blighty' a few days ago. Shrapnel in both arms but not very bad/ I helped to dress him and told him to scamm out of it.

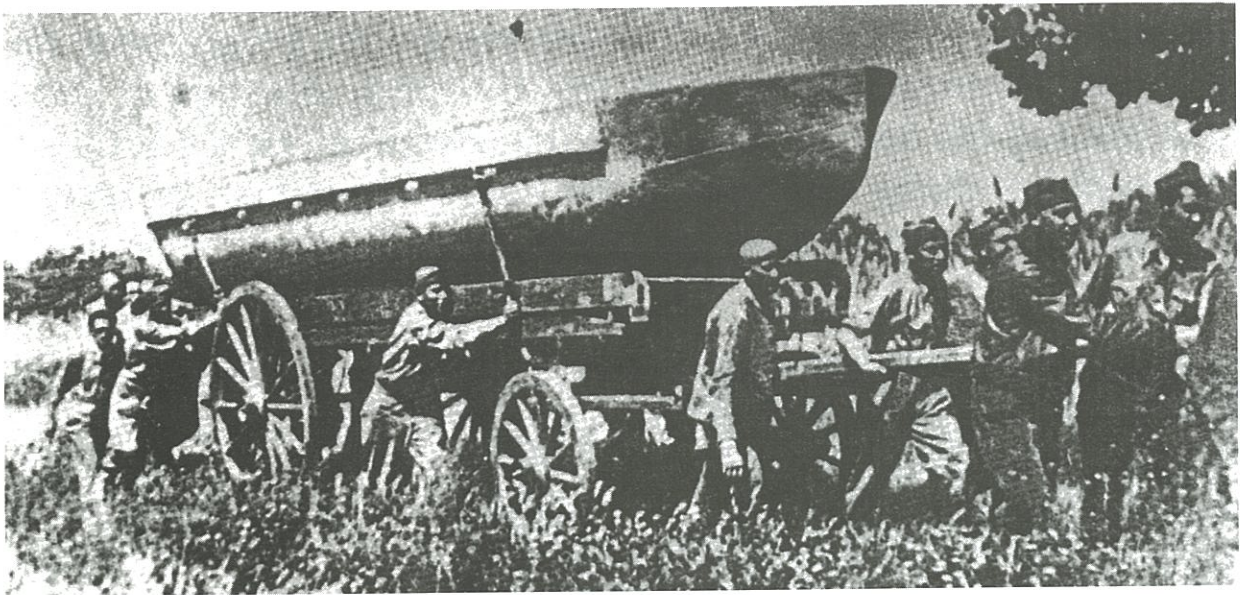
Nalty then thanked JG for 'your welcome and cheerful letter' and thanked Maggie for hers and her cigarettes.

The Spanish Prime Minister, on September 22, 1938, attempting to win support for withdrawal of all foreign troops in Spain, announced the repatriation of volunteers on the government side. There was a mixed reaction in the Brigades, feelings of shame about leaving the Spaniards to fight the powerful fascists alone, but some relief as many had been under constant pressure of bombing and shelling with increasing casualties.



After the Nationalist breakthrough in Northern Spain, Jack was back with the Battalion on the Catalonia side of the Ebro, joining in the training to re-cross the Ebro River.

The Ebro Offensive



Boats used to cross the Ebro being carried overland to the river on trolleys

The military objective at the Ebro was to divert the Fascists from their continuing advance on Valencia. The offensive was also driven by a political need to restore credibility to the Republican Government. A significant victory at this time might rally support from France and England, now facing Hitler's aggressive expansionism. European Governments had by this time assumed there would be a complete Francoist victory.

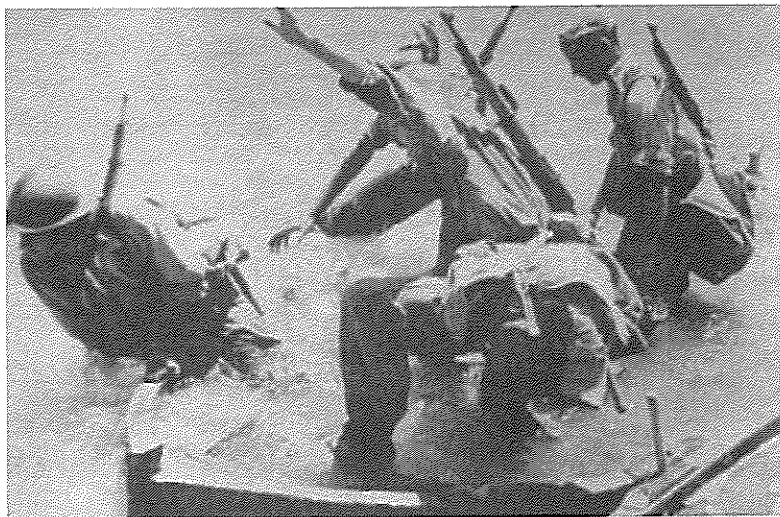
By July 26, 1938, Nationalist troops had settled in along the Ebro. A large Republican Army, which included the British Battalion, had silently crossed the wide, fast flowing river during the night on board rafts, laying down bridges to allow passage of vehicles, tanks and convoys. Their orders were to push inland towards Gandesa, an important road junction, which they accomplished. This was territory over which they had been beaten back a few months earlier.

Within four days an army of 250,000 men established itself around the town, despite furious bombardment from enemy aviation.



Two armies were now face to face along a 25 kilometres front. Massive

air bombing and persistent frontal attacks by infantry alternated with small attacks and retreats. The British Battalion was ordered to take "Hill 481" (Puig de Aliga), the key to Gandesa, which was heavily fortified with barbed wire, trenches and bunkers. The Battalion's first attack was repulsed and they continued to attack for the next six days bringing them within grenade throwing distance. On August Bank Holiday, they got to within a few yards of their objective but the odds were too great and they were pulled out of the battle.



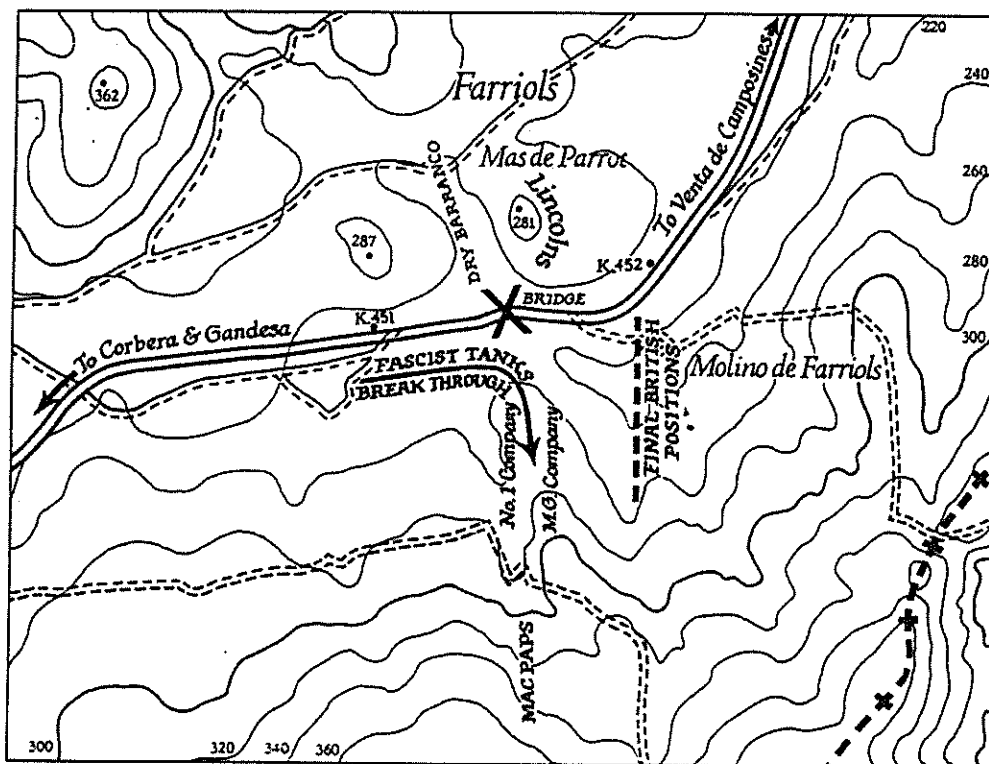
On the night of 21 September, when it was already known that the Brigades would be withdrawn from Spain, the Irish, American and British Battalions of the XV Brigade were called back to the front to check a

counter-attack of enemy tanks on the Ebro line. They went without hesitation. In haste, they were ferried forward in a few trucks, through heavy shell fire, to the rear of the threatened sector. The XIII Brigade had suffered very heavy losses there, and only remnants of its units were holding out when the XV Brigade moved in. The British Battalion moved into trenches still partly occupied by remnants of a Polish Battalion.

All the strategic **The last battle of the British Battalion**

positions on high ground were dominated by Nationalists. The British Battalion was close to the Lincoln, whose left flank was anchored on the road.

Early on the morning of September 23, a flight of 18 Republican planes pinwheelled and strafed



the rebel trenches, while shelling from the Republican battery began a sporadic but accurate fire. Nationalist artillery replied with guns on the XV Brigade trenches, opening a massive barrage. A few minutes before 10 a.m., all hell broke out over the entire sector. The British Battalion H.Q. counted one shell a second landing on its front alone. Two hundred and fifty enemy bombers and planes came

THE SPANISH FRONT IN 1938

This map illustrates the military positions during the Spanish Civil War in May 1938. The Nationalists, represented in orange, controlled the majority of the territory, including the northern and central regions, and the eastern coast from Tarragona to Valencia. The Republicans, represented in red, held a narrow strip of land along the coast from Barcelona to the Strait of Gibraltar, as well as the island of Majorca. The map also shows the surrounding countries: France to the north, Portugal to the west, and Spanish Morocco to the south. Key cities and rivers are labeled, and a scale bar indicates distances up to 400 km.

POSITIONS IN MAY 1938

- Republicans (Red)
- Nationalists (Orange)

0 km 400

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carry cans of ammo up. Not enough reserve troops, as soon as our advance was halted anyone could see we would be defeated. No prisoners were taken after a battle... they were immediately shot. Men blown to pieces, deaths from awful wounds, thirst and hunger in the ranks caused some to desert and be stopped by machine gun fire from their own side."

The following is taken from "Greater Manchester Men Who Fought in the Spanish Civil War", produced by the Manchester International brigade Memorial Committee.

"On September 21st the International Brigadiers were meant to be withdrawn from the front line as part of their withdrawal from the war. The line where Nalty and his men were was under pressure from a nationalist advance and volunteers were called for to hold the line until reserves turned up. Nalty and a remarkable number of other men volunteered. During the fighting a number of men in a machine gun post, including Syd Booth were cut off by the Nationalist advance."

Syd Booth, wrote:

"Bill Feely and I were nice and snug in our machine gun post, firing away when suddenly Bill said 'there's something bloody wrong here. They are advancing and nobody seems to be firing back at us. Go out-

Members of the 15th International Brigade in action in the Sierra Pandols



side and find out what's happening.' I went outside into the trench leading from the gun-nest and found it empty. None of our gun team was there. I had a quick look around the hill and it was bare of occupation. So back I went and told Bill the position. 'Come on,' he said, 'let's break down the gun. We will have to get it out of here quick.' Just then, Jack Nalty our commander, came into the nest and started to help. 'Look slippery,' he said, 'we've had to retreat and I've had to come back for you two.' We disconnected the gun in rapid time. I carried the gun carriage, Bill the barrel and Nalty the ammo cases, and downhill we galloped. At the bottom of the hill [Hill 666], we came to a small group of trees where two or three others had taken shelter for a few minutes. We had only a few dozen more yards to go and we would have been back with the Battalion in comparative safety. But in the meantime the fascists had arrived at the hill we had just vacated and started to fire at us. Jack Nalty got shot through the head; Bill Feeley [from St. Helen's, Liverpool] was wounded in the leg... [and] I had seven bullet wounds."

Bill Alexander wrote: "It is impossible to say where or when he [Jack] was killed. It is impossible to say precisely where he was buried (if at all! The fascists paid scant attention to our dead)".

Liam Mc Gregor and George Green, both from Dublin, also fell in this last battle of the British Battalion.

When the Battalion withdrew on the night of the September 24 , 200 of the 377 men were killed, missing or taken prisoner. The bulk of the battalion was now actually made up of Spaniards as the Brigades had suffered appalling casualties during the first six weeks of the campaign. Of the 106 British, 58 survived.

The Ebro battle ended on November 16, 1938, with the loss of all the captured territory and withdrawal of the Republicans to their initial position on the other side of the river. The battle was later compared to the worst of trench warfare in WWI. The defeat reflected the Republican's lack of military quality, together with a mediocre and indecisive chain of command. Franco had an army of gifted commandos together with the ability to finely train troops that became the backbone of his army. It was said that the war of the military had finally won out over the war of the people.

There were 60 - 70 thousands dead and wounded. As the fascists held former British positions, the fate of many was unknown.

Prime Minister Negrin announcing the pull-back of the International Brigades



The War Ends

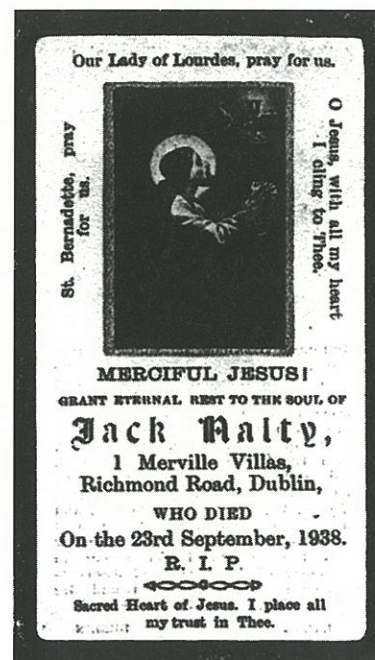
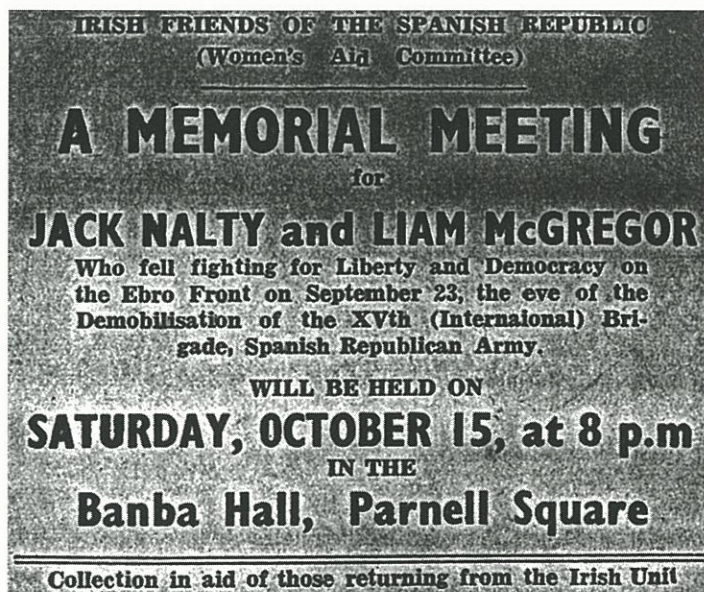
A new offensive against Catalonia was launched and, in January 1939, Barcelona fell. It was believed that Franco had power to now end the war but chose to continue it as a means of destroying his enemies. The government and army tried to flee towards the French border. Over 500,000 refugees from Spain lived in squalid concentration camp conditions in France during the German occupation.

In March, the Nationalists finally took Madrid. On April 1, 1939, Franco announced the surrender of the Republican army and the Spanish Civil War was over.

"War's hell. There's little glamour in it when you are there, especially when you see what's left - after shell and the heat - of fellows you were joking with a few hours before. But this one has got to be done and won so that makers of war can never again cause Guernica and Almerias and Bilbao." (Frank Ryan in 1936)

When Maisie died, my brother Jim went to the home on Convent Avenue to help in sorting out the effects. He found Jack's medals for long distance running mixed with boxes of bullets.

Jack's name is engraved on the Nalty family headstone in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin.



O'Neill

Jack Nalty's Father, Mother, Sister, Brothers,
I wish

I wish it was not just such news as this
from Spain that draws its letter from me
to you folk. I have delayed until 3 or 4 days
might be spent with it.

Nothing that has happened for a long
time has got such power over my thoughts
as the death of Jack. You knew him the
way the home knows one of its members. I knew
him as the great comrade & idealist. We were
kind for a long time within the P.R.G. &
drew nearer according as ideas cleared. It
was my privilege that I got to know him well.

Human nature can achieve its own
miracles. Surely in these days it is a wonder-
ful thing that in the midst of all the selfish
striving young men can lay down their
lives as Jack laid down his. His first step

was a grand gesture. His second jump
to Spain was beyond words. In face of
such happenings one can only stand silent.

What can we say to him all? Jack
could not have been any accident.
Such a life always has its back ground
in its spiritual qualities & its stock
from which he springs, so that your
own rescue, to hear his loss will
match the spirit that led him
to his sacrifice.

My I just say simply that I am
deeply sorry for you in your loss.

That I am sorry too for he was an
old comrade of mine.

I give you his in your pride
in him.

Sincerely

Robert O. Saxe

Tributes

An Annual Record of the Dublin Harriers states:

"Our season closed on a sad note when the Club members learned of the death of Jack Nalty in Spain, Sept. 23rd 1938. Jack always gave of his best; his name adorns many of our Club Trophies. R.I.P."

A Brigade member: "There was no greater claim to honour amongst the British Veterans of the International Brigades than to be known as a " No.1 Company Man."

In the International Brigade Archives in London, file IBA Box 21/B/7B, List of Recommendations: The 57th British battalion for action at the Ebro Crossing. Sergeant J. Nalty, Company Commander, "For his sangfroid and bravery at every moment at the head of his men."

Ciaran Crossey, author: "Nalty had gone back into an exposed position to rescue two men who'd been cutoff, and as a result he died in this action. The act of a brave commander."

Jack is listed in the Roll of Honour of the International Brigade, Army of the Spanish Republic, 1936-39 inserted on Labour Day, May 1, 1951 by former members of the Irish Section, International Brigade.

"Theirs was the greatest sacrifice and Theirs shall be the greater Honour. They died in the struggle against Fascism for Republican and working class freedom."



Memorial plaque unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Dublin at Liberty Hall in May 1991

In the centre of Gandesa there is a memorial to both Republicans and Nationalists killed in the war.

Bill Alexander in a letter to me: "Your uncle, Jack Nalty, played an outstanding part in the British Battalion in Spain and had one of the longest service records in the war... you can be proud of him."

In November 1995, the Spanish Parliament voted to offer Honorary Spanish nationality to surviving veterans of the International Brigades.

Your prayers are requested for the repose of the souls of the following deceased members of "C" Coy., 1st Batt. D.B., Old I.R.A.

Allen Thomas	Howlett Michael	McArdle Patrick
Bermingham Andrew	Hendrick Edward	McGrane Thomas
Bevan James	Hughes Patrick	McGuinness Joseph
Bevan Joseph	Kavanagh James	McGuinness Seamus
Bevan Thomas	Keane Edward	Munroe Thomas
Bould George	Keating Con	Nalty John
Brabazon Joseph	Keating Patrick	O'Brien Patrick
Bridgeman Edward	Kelly Joseph	O'Brien John
Brooks Frederick	Kennedy Sean	O'Flanagan Patrick
Byrne Gerald	Kirk Robert	O'Sullivan Denis
Byrne Patrick	Kiernan Thomas	O'Neill Patrick
Byrne Seamus	Lambe Patrick	Prendergast Sean
Carberry Frank	Leggett Robert	Richmond John
Cassidy Thomas	Lynch Sean	Reid Sean
Clancy Peadar	Lyons Charles	Ryan Denis
Conroy Joseph	Lyons J. E.	Scully Michael
Dolan Thomas	Madden John	Stringer Patrick
Durkin P. J.	Manning Henry	Swan Maurice
Ellis Sean	Murphy Seamas	Tallon Michael
Fahy Frank	Mulhall Andrew	Tighe Sean
Farrelly Sean	Molloy Joseph	Tobin Nicholas
Flood Sean	Mongey Laurence	Walsh Thomas
Flood Edward	Macken Patrick	Whelan George
Gegan Eamonn	Moore Philip	Wilson Laurence
Gorman Thomas	McArdle James	

Go ndéanaidh Dia trócaire ar a n-anamna

R. I. P.

It is a Holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the Dead.

Christy Moore pays tribute to the Irish members of the International Brigade in his song "Vive La Quinte Brigada" and lists Jack among the many who died.

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"I have only one memory of my uncle Jack. He was carrying me on his shoulders, running up and down stairs at his home in Convent Avenue, Dublin, probably not long before he left for Spain at the end of 1936. I can still recall that feeling of joy and energy and exhilaration that I experienced."

In December 1936, Jack Nalty joined the International Brigade which was then attempting to stem the flood of fascism sweeping through Spain. He had left behind him a personal history of military, political and social struggle in Ireland, never hesitating to break the rules in his search for his own liberty and for that of others. In Spain, he entered an arena of vicious civil war, his enemy supported by massive European dictatorships poised to eradicate democracy.

This biography pays memorial tribute to a man of courage and infinite determination who was killed in September 1938 in a land not his own, still fighting for principles of freedom and justice.

Steve Nugent grew up near Dublin, Ireland, and now lives in Toronto, Canada. He graduated in Medicine from University College Dublin, specialised in Psychiatry, and spent his professional life in England, Australia and Canada.

A late-comer to writing, he has contributed short fiction, reviews, literary interviews and creative non-fiction to anthologies, magazines and journals.

