

Scotland and the Spanish Civil War
Daniel Gray Luath Press, Edinburgh £12.99
Reviewed by Alan Lloyd, Research associate, U K Defence Forum
This is the latest addition to a line of excellent books, which have been published in the last couple of years, detailing the efforts of British men and women who went to assist their Spanish and International comrades to halt the tide of fascism in 1936-39.

Sadly, examples of these publications are usually not to be found on the bookshelves of High Street bookshops. One could be forgiven for thinking that this is yet another chapter in the story of the British establishment trying to cover their shame for turning their backs on the democratically elected Spanish Republican Government, and allowing Hitler, Mussolini, and Salazar, to run their fascist writ through another part of Europe.

This book concentrates on the magnificent contribution made by the people of Scotland to the Spanish cause, and the main source for information used by Daniel Gray are the archived memories of the Scotsmen and women who went to fight and nurse.

Of the approximately 2,400 British International Brigaders over 500 were Scots, in addition to those who also went to join the nursing services. Whilst most of them were members of the Communist Party there were also members of the Labour Party, Independent Labour Party (ILP), and others who were simply wishing to fight fascism. Volunteer Tommy Bloomfield summed up the mood of the times by saying; "An empty stomach made my empty head think."

Scotland also provided a large part of the leadership of the British Battalion during the war, with legends such as Jock Cunningham, Bob Cooney, Peter Kerrigan, George Aitkin and many others, including Alex McDade, who was one of so many to be killed in action, who penned the ever moving song; "There's a valley in Spain called Jarama."

Those in Spain were given tremendous support on the home front with fundraising for medical, and other supplies, and constant efforts to apply political pressure on the TUC and Labour Party hierarchies, in particular, to take a more active roll in the struggle to show the "non-intervention" policy for the disgraceful sham that it was. Scotland, despite the desperate poverty of the time, also raised enough money to send a complete "Scottish Ambulance Unit" to Spain. Harry Pollitt was moved to remark that; "Scotland does better than any other part of the country in its contribution to our (Aid for Spain) fund."

The book also includes chapters on the role of the ILP in Spain, not least because the base of their UK support, including 4 MP's, was in Scotland. The ILP volunteers role in linking with the Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista (POUM) and anarchists, in Spain, instead of the International Brigades has always been controversial and Gray is not afraid to analyse this, or to discuss the death of Bob Smillie in a republican prison.

Earlier this year the final surviving Scottish Brigader, Steve Fullarton, was laid to rest, and this book should stand as a fitting memorial to him and all his comrades who, as Roddy MacFarquhar said; ".....were convinced that if we could win we could stop the war spreading. Had we been able to win we would have stopped Hitler and Mussolini in their tracks". How right they were.

(c) Alan Lloyd 2008. This article also appeared in the Morning Star newspaper today