The Republican Army in the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939

This is a long-awaited translation of a definitive account of the Republican Army in the Spanish Civil War. Michael Alpert examines the origins, formation and performance of the Republican Army and sets the Spanish Civil War in its broader military context. He explores the conflicts between communists and Spanish anarchists about how the war should be fought as well as the experience of individual conscripts, problems of food, clothing, arms and the role of women in the new army. The book contains extensive discussion of international aspects, particularly the role of the International Brigades and of the Soviet Russian advisers. Lastly, it discusses the final uprising of professional Republican officers against the Government and the almost unconditional surrender to Franco. Professor Alpert also provides detailed statistics for the military forces available to Franco and to the Republic and biographies of the key figures on both sides.

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Other works on the Spanish Civil War by the author


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Michael Alpert
Contents

List of maps  page vii
List of tables  viii
Preface  ix
Archival sources  xii
Notes on the text  xiii
List of abbreviations  xiv
Maps  xv

1 The Spanish Army in 1936  1
2 Military and paramilitary forces in Spain on 18 July 1936  17
3 The militia months: July–December 1936  29
4 Militarisation  59
5 Professional officers in the Republican Army  85
6 A new officer corps  118
7 The experience of individuals  157
8 The political commissars  174
9 The communists, the anarchists and the Republican Army  202
10 International aspects  219
11 Reorganisation  258
12 The Casado uprising  275
Conclusions  303

Appendix 1: Unit establishments of the Republican Army  315
Appendix 2: History of the 2nd Mixed Brigade  317
## Contents

- Appendix 3: Generals of the Spanish Army 319
- Appendix 4: Biographies of significant officers and political commissars of the Republican Army 322
- Bibliography 353
- Index 367
Maps

1 Franco's control of Spain, 1936–9, adapted from Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War* (Macmillan, 1994)  
2 One year of the rebel conquest, adapted from *New York Times*, 24 October 1937  
3 Spain in the summer of 1938, adapted from *New York Times*, 31 July 1938
## Tables

2.1 Number of men in barracks in July 1936  
2.2 Initial manpower in the major Arms available to each side  
2.3 Number of paramilitary *comandancias* available to both sides  
8.1 Pay of commissars  
9.1 Senior commands in CNT hands, September 1936  
10.1 Estimated amounts of war material sent to Spain 1936–9  
12.1 The Casado coup: contrasting chronologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Number of men in barracks in July 1936</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Initial manpower in the major Arms available to each side</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Number of paramilitary <em>comandancias</em> available to both sides</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Pay of commissars</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Senior commands in CNT hands, September 1936</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Estimated amounts of war material sent to Spain 1936–9</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>The Casado coup: contrasting chronologies</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On 18 July 1936 military insurgents in Spain declared a State of War without the consent of the Government, with the aim of overthrowing the Popular Front Government of the Spanish Republic. The uprising was successfully resisted in many parts of Spain, and thus developed into the Civil War of 1936–9, ending with the victory of General Franco on 1 April 1939. The Republic constructed what was in effect a new army, which it called the Popular Army of the Republic (Ejército Popular de la República). In the Republican press the Popular Army (the Spanish adjective popular means ‘of the people’ but to call it ‘People’s Army’ would suggest a similarity to forces which did not exist at the time, as well as begging the question of communist influence) was also often called the Spanish Army, to underline the fact that Franco’s forces were foreign, as indeed they were to a greater extent than those of the Republic. Its opponents generally called it the ‘Red’ Army or Ejército Rojo. Here it is called the Republican Army.

The Republican Army consisted of the remainder of those parts of the Spanish Army, of its war material and of its professional and non-commissioned officers who had not rebelled and in some cases had taken part in the crushing of the rebellion of their fellow officers in the week of 18–25 July 1936. From these the Republic created a military force which fought the war arising from the coup launched by the larger part of the officers and the garrisons. The Republican Army became a full-size force of several hundred thousand men, who fought for two years and eight months in particular conditions of inferiority.

Its interest for historians and military specialists lies in the issues that arose during the war from arguments about the nature of the army, from the political tensions suffered at the time as they affected the character of a national army fighting a civil war, together with questions of armament and politico-military issues regarding appropriate strategy. For military, social and political historians the significant questions lie in the area of the extent to which an army can be ‘revolutionary’, how this term is interpreted and how far discussion of the nature of
Preface

the Republican Army can be understood and assessed against the criteria of successful forces created in comparable situations elsewhere. The Spanish Communist Party and the Soviet Russian advisers of the Republican Army inevitably thought in terms of their experience of the Russian Civil War of 1918–20. In historical terms, references were made to the Red Army of the Russian Revolution, the armies of the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century and even to the New Model Army in the English Civil War of the seventeenth century. In their turn, the experience of the Spanish Civil War was important for the Soviet Army, and for the anti-Nazi guerrilla forces of the Second World War, for the Cuban revolutionaries under Castro and for the armies of communist China and Vietnam.

While in the immediate aftermath of the Spanish ‘transition to democracy’, as it came to be called, which followed General Franco’s death in November 1975, interest in the Civil War of 1936–9 which had brought him to power seemed to wane, in recent years the volume of doctoral theses, scholarly work, academic and more popular books, television programmes, websites, Web forums and similar reflections of interest has swelled. This book, which had two earlier Spanish editions in 1978 and 1989, though it has never before appeared in English, joined a number of major works on the Second Republic and the Civil War when another revised and much extended Spanish edition came out in 2007. This edition took into account the work which had appeared since its first edition, in particular research based on archival material made available in the USSR, dealing with international participation and arms supply. Furthermore, in recent years many local histories, personal accounts and biographies have enabled historians to stand back and see the Republican Army in a wider context.

Spain is a member of NATO and the European Community. It has successfully navigated the shoals of establishing democracy. The Civil War of 1936–9 is an essential part of its history. The aim of this English edition, which incorporates information taken from very recent work by scholars on the individual experiences of conscripts in the Republican Army and reflects new views, is to make an account of the Army, its international volunteers and its Soviet advisers, its political and organisational difficulties and solutions, available to the non-Spanish-reading public and to readers interested in military questions in general as well as in Spain.

It would be impossible to name all those people who, beginning with Hugh Thomas, the supervisor of the doctoral thesis which was the original form of this book, have contributed to it. Many of them, veterans of both sides of the Spanish war, whom I came to know when researching
in Madrid in 1971, are no longer with us. Professional Spanish officers were of enormous help in interpreting procedures and the vocabulary of Spanish military matters. The regular seminars on contemporary Spain at the Cañada Blanch foundation in London were a constant stimulus, as have been the communications from descendants of participants in the war and students of it who frequently send me emails with valuable information or usefully challenge me on what they have read in the Spanish editions of this book. Lastly, I must thank Christopher Feeney, who put so much effort into the copy editing of the book.

I have occasionally been accused of a certain ‘aseptic’ neutrality. I plead guilty, because I have tried to deal with facts with as little prejudice as possible. In any case, foreigners who deal with ‘cosas de España’, as Richard Ford’s book *Gatherings from Spain* of 1830 was called in Spanish, must tread warily and with respect.
Archival sources

Official publications consulted include the *Gaceta de Madrid*, known during the Civil War as *Gaceta de la República*, and cited as *Gaceta*, and the *Diario Oficial del Ministerio de la Guerra*, later *Defensa Nacional*, or daily bulletin of the Army, later National Defence, Ministry, cited as *DO* or *Diario Oficial*.

British documents are taken from the Foreign Office General Correspondence series (FO 371) with prefix W (Western) and suffix 41 (corresponding to Spain).

References to the frequently cited diary of President Azaña are from the 1968 Mexico City edition of his complete works (*Memorias de Guerra* in his *Obras Completas*).

The following abbreviations are used:

- **C** carpeta, folder
- **CGG** *Cuartel General del Generalísimo*, material archived in General Franco’s HQ
- **DN** *Documentación Nacional*, Documents of the Nationalist or Insurgent Army
- **DR** *Documentación Roja*, Documents of the Republican Army
- **L** legajo, file
- **n.d.** No date of publication
- **n.p.** No place of publication
- **SHM** *Servicio Histórico Militar*, Civil War section, now called *Archivo Militar de la Guerra*
Notes on the text

NAMES

Spanish people put their father's name first, followed by their mother's. For example, Juan Hernández Saravia. Sometimes only the patronymic is used; sometimes both surnames, as in the Pérez Salas family. Sometimes the matronymic is used, as in the case of the poet Lorca (really Federico García Lorca), or that of the Prime Minister Caballero (really Francisco Largo Caballero), though he may sometimes be found referred to both as Largo and as Largo Caballero.

ARMY BRANCHES AND RANKS

The officers who fought in the Spanish Civil War are usually referred to by the branch to which they belonged (infantry, artillery, cavalry, engineers, supply, carabineers, civil guard and others). Air Force and Guardia de Asalto (armed police) officers were seconded from their original Arms.
### Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>CEDA</td>
<td>Confederación Española de Derechas Autónomas, electoral grouping of right-wing parties, led by José María Gil-Robles</td>
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<tr>
<td>CNT</td>
<td>Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, very large, decentralised and broadly based anarchist trade-union organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAI</td>
<td>Federación Anarquista Ibérica, leaders of the CNT and anarchist revolutionaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSU</td>
<td>Juventudes Socialistas Unificadas, United Socialist and Communist Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAOC</td>
<td>Milicias Antifascistas Obreras y Campesinas, Workers’ and Peasants’ Antifascist Militias</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCE</td>
<td>Partido Comunista de España, Spanish Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POUM</td>
<td>Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista, left-wing, anti-Stalinist communist party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>Partido Socialista Obrero Español, Spanish Socialist Party, divided between revolutionary and reformist wings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSUC</td>
<td>Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña, United Catalan Socialist and Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGT</td>
<td>Unión General de Trabajadores, Federation of Socialist Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMRA</td>
<td>Unión Militar Republicana y Antifascista, Association of Republican and Antifascist Military Officers</td>
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Map 1 Franco’s control of Spain, 1936–9
Map 2 One year of the rebel conquest

October 1936

October 1937

Held by Rebels

Held by Republicans
Held by Insurgents
Held by Republicans
Regained by Republicans July 1938

Map 3 Spain in the summer of 1938