THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The Spanish Civil War began on 19 July 1936. After decades of political turmoil, a Popular Front Government was elected in February 1936. As the Popular Front was made up of leftist Parties, the Right Wing and Traditionalist elements in Spain were determined that ‘At the Eleventh Hour, a squad of soldiers would save Civilisation’. A collaboration of military leaders attempted a coup to overthrow the legally elected democratic government.

Not all of the Spanish army followed the military leaders. The majority of officers rebelled, but about half the soldiers remained loyal to the Government. At first the Government hesitated, not appreciating the seriousness of the situation, but the Trade Unions did, and they seized arms to form militias to crush the rebellious soldiers. Spain also had armed police services; the Civil Guard, the Assault Guard and the Carabineros. Like the Army, these had mixed loyalties and were found on both sides of the rebellion.

The rebels also had the support of armed Right Wing groups. Of note were the Falange, a true Fascist party, who had long been battling with the Leftist groups, and the Carlists, a Monarchist movement based in Navarre, who had already started two civil wars in the previous century.

The rising was not a fascist rebellion, but from the first day it had the support of the fascist powers of Europe. Germany, Italy and Portugal poured aid into Spain in support of the military leaders. The rebel General Franco, who was to become the equivalent of the German Fuhrer within a year, had his professional ‘Army of Africa’ flown across the Straits of Gibraltar from Morocco by the German Luftwaffe.

Spain was soon divided into what were classed as the Nationalist (Rebel or Fascist) areas and the Republican (Loyalist or ‘Red’) areas. If you look to Map 1 above, you can see that the Rebels held areas (shown in red) in the south and in the north. The Militias and Government forces had held back the rising in the North, but the South was a different matter. The South of Spain soon contained the Army of Africa, the most professional part of Spain’s army. It consisted of the elite Spanish Foreign Legion and the Moors, native Moroccans employed in the Spanish army, the equivalent of the Gurkas in the British army. Spain’s most capable officer, General Franco, was their leader.

On 12 February 1937, another Six Hundred British entered a ‘Valley of Death,’ the Valley of Jarama located outside Madrid in Spain, and only one Hundred and Fifty survived. These six hundred British have never been immortalised by great poets. Their battle has rarely, if ever been mentioned in British history books.
Once the German Luftwaffe had flown the Army of Africa across the Straits of Gibraltar, it became engaged in a lightning war, striking North towards the capital Madrid, sweeping aside the Militias and Government forces that stood in their way.

By October, the Rebels stood on the outskirts of Madrid. Franco, his allies and indeed the rest of the world, expected the Nationalist army to take the city and for it all to be over in a matter of days. The Republican government had fled to Valencia, but the people of Madrid were determined to fight. Led by General Miaja and with their battle cry ‘No Pasaran’ (they shall not pass), the citizens of Madrid fought back and stopped the Rebel army entering their city. During the battle, a new Republican force marched through the streets and advanced straight into the front lines. They were called the International Brigades.

THE INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES

The Spanish Civil War is often described as the precursor to World War Two. This is because from the onset, it was an international affair. The Rebels were seen as part of the rise of Fascism across Europe.

The Government of Spain were seen as ‘Reds’, as the Popular Front was made up of left wing parties, and there were very strong Communist, Socialist and Anarchist Unions within Spain that threw their support behind the Government.

The Government looked to other European democracies for help, especially in terms of purchasing arms that it badly needed. France initially helped, as they also had a leftist Popular Front government. But the British Government was hostile to Republican Spain, and threatened France if they continued to aid them. France’s answer was non-intervention, an attempt to stop all war material entering Spain, and set up a committee to enforce this policy. The committee not only included European powers, but also the USA and Canada who were strongly in favour of non-intervention. In a piece of unparalleled political hypocrisy, this committee, set up in London, included both Germany and Italy. Needless to say, the only party not receiving weapons was the Government of the Republic.

Only two nations supported the Republic, one was Mexico and the other the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union responded to the Republic’s call for aid for two reasons: they had influence over the Communist Party of Spain, and Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, was in a power struggle with Germany. He saw what was happening in Spain as an expansion of German power, and needed to contain it.

The Soviet Union did not send troops; they sent food, guns, aircraft, tanks and advisors. They also instructed the Comintern, the Communist International organisation, to set up a network to get volunteers from all over the world into Spain to fight, and these were to be called the International Brigades.

THE BRITISH BATTALION

Volunteers did come from all over the world to serve in the International Brigades. That included Britons. Enough British came that by January 1937 they were formed into their own unit. Although it had an initial title of the Saklatvala Battalion, it became known as the British Battalion and was part of the 15th International Brigade.

Every Briton had his own reasons for going to Spain, but the overwhelming concern was to halt the rise of Fascism. They were nearly all of a left wing persuasion and most were actual Communists. They also saw that Republican Spain was alone thanks to non-intervention, and that they could ‘by their own hand’ defend Democracy against Fascism.

There were some Britons already in Spain, individuals who made their own way over to fight with the militias. Most joined the new International Brigades; some like the author George Orwell didn’t, preferring to remain with their comrades. The majority of volunteers were recruited once the Comintern was charged with getting men into Spain. They organised the travel arrangements, which were difficult, as Britain had made it illegal to fight in Spain. Recruits had to avoid Special Branch Officers at the railway stations and ports on the way, and although there was a two-year prison sentence if you were caught, no one ever was.

Below: In homage to a famous contemporary photograph; anarchist militia members execute a symbol of the hated Catholic church.
Some of the volunteers had military training, but the majority had not. They were filled with a desire to fight for the right cause but some were just not suitable for military life and were discouraged from going. The author Laurie Lee fell into that category but still made his own way to Spain in December 1937.\(^3\)

The first British to arrive in late 1936 were banded together into a Company, and they fought in both the defences of Madrid and Cordoba. In January 1937, this group transferred to the International Brigade base at Albacete and there joined the other British volunteers who had arrived for training. The original group of veterans formed No1 Company; the rest formed No2 (HMG), No3 and No4 companies.

There were about 600 members of the British Battalion, and their officers at Jarama were:

- **Commander** - Tom Wintringham
- **Political Commissar** - George Aitken
- No1 Company - Kit Conway
- No2 Company - Harold Fry
- No3 Company - Bill Briskey
- No4 Company - Bert Overton

The battalion formed part of the 15th International Brigade under command of Colonel Gal, a Russian of Hungarian birth. The other battalions were the Yugoslav ‘Dimitrov’ battalion, the Franco-Belge 6th Feb. Battalion and the US Abraham Lincoln Battalion.

The Battalion had hardly any time for drill or weapon training before they were called into action in February 1937 to halt the new Nationalist offensive that was heading for the Rio Jarama.

### THE BATTLE OF JARAMA

#### FEBRUARY 1937

The Nationalist assault on Madrid in 1936 had failed to capture the city. Having been stopped to the north and west of the city, a new offensive in 1937 was to hit a 10-mile front to the south west of Madrid. This attack would be across the Jarama Valley, with the intention of cutting the Madrid - Valencia road (see map 2), a vital supply line and contact route to the Republican Government.

The Nationalists struck on the 6 February. They attacked with five brigades, made up mostly from the Army of Africa and supported by German machine guns, tanks and the infamous 88mm AA guns.\(^4\)

The Republicans were taken by complete surprise, they were planning an offensive themselves in the same area, and the push of the gathered formations created extra confusion.

By 11 February the attack had pushed the front-line from the Madrid-Andalusia highway to the Jarama River. Republican General Miaja sent his crack communist brigades commanded by the famous leaders Lister and El Campesino pushing back of the gathered formations that night, the Nationalist commander Asencio sent his Moors ahead, and as at the taking of the Pindoque bridge, they slit the throats of the sentries, allowing the river to be crossed the following morning. Asencio’s Brigade took the Pingarron Heights in front of them the same day. The Nationalist commander Saez de Buruaga

Below: The British Battalion defend Casa Blanca farmhouse.

“There’s a valley in Spain called Jarama
It’s a place that we all know too well,
For ‘tis there that we wasted our manhood
And most of our old age as well”.\(^5\)
brought his brigade in across the bridge at San Martin de la Vega and, with Asencio, formed a new offensive towards the town of Morata de Tajuna.

The 15th International Brigade had originally been positioned in reserve, but was now moved in front of Ascencio and Saez de Buruaga. They held the Nationalist assault towards Morata de Tajuna but with massive casualties, Lister’s Communist brigade also moved in to support the 15th brigade and after two days fighting they held the Nationalists in place.

The 11th International Brigade with the help of Russian tanks pushed Saez de Buruaga back to the river, though he later regained the heights in what was to be the last Nationalist advance of the battle.

On the 17th, the re-organised Republicans, now under the overall command of General Miaja, launched more counter-attacks. In the north, one attack pushed the nationalist commander Barron away from the Valencia road, securing it from artillery attacks, and another crossed the Rio Manzanares. In the south, General Gal sent his American Abraham Lincoln Battalion of the 15th Brigade against the strongest part of the Nationalist line, the Pingarron heights. Advancing without artillery support, they suffered nearly 2/3 casualties and failed in the attack.

From then on, both sides proved too strong for the other to attack. The front line didn’t move in this sector until the war ended.

The Republicans lost territory 15km deep along a 20km front, but the road to Valencia remained open. Both sides claimed victory, the Republic losing 25,000 casualties and the Nationalists 20,000. 

THE BRITISH AT JARAMA

When the Rebel offensive began, the British Battalion was shipped by rail then road to a point 10 miles SE of the front line. They were, with the rest of the 15th Brigade, to be held in reserve. When the bridge at San Martin de la Vega was taken by stealth, and the rebels poured across, the 15th Brigade was ordered forward to the front line.

Early on the morning of 12 February, the British assembled for the march. It was a clear sunny day, the birds were singing, there was no sound of battle. The countryside around was of low hills, olive groves and gorse, and the scent of wild thyme and sage was heavy in the air. The British marched up onto a plateau, acting ‘more like a Sunday outing than an army’ (7). High above they watched the spectacle of an aerial dogfight. The Battle of Jarama was one of the few times in the War that the Republican Airforce achieved supremacy. The British were not dogged by the kind of aerial assaults they faced in future engagements.

The plateau was about two kilometres long before it sloped down towards the Jarama valley. The slope was crossed by a small ridgeline, with two high points. One high point was called Casa Blanca as it had a small white house on top, afterwars named Suicide Hill. The other high point was named Conical Hill.

As the British crossed the plateau, distant gunfire was heard ahead. The orders were for Companies 3 and 4 to occupy Casa Blanca. Number 1 company was to occupy a bare conical hill just to the left of Casa Blanca. Number 2 company, the machine gun company, was to dig in on the edge of the plateau above the other positions, and act in support and as a reserve. A hundred yards to their rear was a sunken lane, and here commanding officer Wintringham set up Battalion command. The land below Casa Blanca sloped down for two km to meet the River Jarama.

The British left flank was exposed, though neither side realised this on the day. On the right flank the Franco-Belge Battalion were deployed.

The British had only been issued with their weapons upon leaving their base the day before. The rifles were all old and out of date Russian models that came
with bayonets, which the whole battalion threw away once the action began. The companies were issued with machine guns; ancient French Chauchets and more up-to-date Colts. The Chauchets all jammed after firing a few shots, and took too long to clear, and the Colts, although good guns, had ammunition belts that were so perished they couldn’t be used. Number two company were issued with eight very old but very reliable Maxim heavy machine guns, and these proved invaluable as the action began. The Battalion had no mortars and the artillery support never materialised.

The Battalion could see Fascists moving in the valley below, and rifle fire was coming their way. The British position looked strong, and Number 2 Company began to dig a fortified position for their guns.

Then came the orders from the Russian Colonel Gal. The British were to advance out of their hill top positions and were to sweep the Fascists back into the Rio Jarama. As number 1, 3 and 4 companies rose and set off down the slope; ‘all hell broke loose’. The hills erupted in fire and smoke as Nationalist artillery, heavy machine guns and musketry poured onto the British. The inexperienced British had no protection from the steel that flew around them; they hugged the Spanish earth, unable to reply to the enemy.

Only the experienced men of number one Company found some cover on the reverse of the slope. Briskey, commander of 3 Company was killed and the Company was down to half strength. Overton of 4 Company lost his nerve and so the company was in all effect leaderless. Everyone needed water. The wounded kept trickling back throughout the barrage.

After three hours of bombardment the artillery stopped and the Fascist advance began. Although moving across open terrain uphill, the Nationalist force was made up of the Moroccan Moors. The Moors were experts in making maximum use of cover and moved forward presenting very little targets for the British. The Moors’ rifles and LMGs barked fire up on the beleaguered defenders. To the north, the Franco-Belge was also suffering from a similar heavy assault, and they pulled back, exposing the British right flank.

The British survivors hung on, but their inexperienced musketry and lack of machine guns could not hold up the Moorish advance. Fire was also coming from the right flank where the Franco-Belge had pulled back, and the Moors had occupied a knoll there. The fire was not effective, but created an added panic to the British about being ‘cut-off’.

Against orders from High Command to fight to the death, Wintringham pulled the few survivors back on Number 2 Company.

The Moors soon occupied the top of Casa Blanca, and gathered for another assault across the valley to edge of the plateau. They were met by a terrific surprise as they began to move up to the plateau. Waiting until the Moors were at very close range, the Maxim machine guns opened fire. The British Maxim guns had not fired all day because of a lack of ammunition, which, having arrived, needed feeding into the belts by hand. Number 2 Company had been working desperately, watching their comrades suffer in the front line. When the Moors advanced down Casa Blanca, threats of being ‘punched up’ by second in command, Fred Copeman, stopped the gunners firing until the enemy was nearly on top of them. The eight British Maxim guns burst into action at close range, slaughtering the Moors and sending them racing back to cover.

The Maxims then silenced Fascist machine gunners in the white house on Casa Blanca and the first day’s action ended as night drew in.

Less than half the battalion was left, and most of its officers lost. During the night stragglers were rounded up, and many wounded were later found dead and dying where they had either crawled off to hide or been left and forgotten about.

The night passed without incident, the survivors collapsing into exhausted sleep along the sunken lane. In the morning, the soldiers awoke to another bright sunny day. Battalion Commissar George Aiken appeared with a truck full of 30 stragglers, hot coffee and ‘a box of hugely thick bully-beef sandwiches’. Aiken rallied the unit and its commanders back into a fighting force and new positions for the day were organised.

Fry’s Number 2 Company with its eight Maxim HMGs were still dug into their very strong position to the front edge of the plateau. Overton with about 50 men of 4 and 3 Companies were strung to the right of number 2 Company, and the assistant quarter-master, Andre Diamond, was given command of what was left of 1st Company, covering the left flank.

The British were still in an isolated position. They could see no one to the left of them, though Lister’s Communist infantry and cavalry were supposed to be there. To the right the Franco-Belge Battalion was in position, but there was a 700 yard gap between them and the British.

The British were given orders from the Russian brigade staff to advance, with promises of tanks and aircraft support,
and typical Soviet threats of what would happen if they didn’t. Wintringham led a small party of men forward, but as soon as they left cover they were subject to massive machine gun and artillery fire and pulled back. The artillery fire continued and a Nationalist assault began.

All morning the British had heard heavy fighting to their right and in fact the Franco-Belge Battalion had been driven back. The fighting on the right, plus the sight of advancing Fascists, panicked Overton, and he withdrew his company without informing any one.

The next incident has become part of the legend of the Battle of Jarama. It was alleged at the time, and the story appeared in many Leftist papers, that the Machine Gun company was over run by a group of Moors that came forward singing ‘the Internationale’ with their fists raised in the Republican salute, pretending to be turncoats. Once they entered the trenches, weapons appeared and Number 2 Company, including the Commander Fry, were taken prisoner.

Eyewitnesses refute the story, claiming it to have been made up to cover the failings of the commanders. In reality they claim the machine gun company was over-run because their right flank was completely exposed. The Moors had made their way around, and with the Maxims facing forward the British found themselves surrounded and would have been killed if they hadn’t surrendered.

Whatever the truth, the rest of the battalion were shocked to find their Maxims turned on them and opening fire. Wintringham, Overton and Aiken gathered about 40 men around them to retake the trenches. As they launched their charge, ‘it was rather like some totally improbable incident out of the Boys Own Paper’. The handful of men set off against eight machine guns and 100 riflemen. Only six managed to get back to the cover of the sunken lane. The Battalion commander Wintringham had been hit immediately in the leg and retired from the field.

All that was left at the end of the second day were 30 men sheltering in the sunken lane under the command of the only effective officer, Commissar Aiken. The Nationalists were secure enough in their position to wait it out for the next day. The British did receive one boost to their morale that evening, an old commander of Number 1 company, the popular Jock Cunningham, appeared having escaped from a hospital bed, and took over command from Aiken.

Cunningham gathered the boys together to form a defensive line on the third day, but as daylight came the sound of tanks heralded the fascist attack. With no automatic weapons and no anti-tank guns the British stood no chance and fell into a full retreat back towards the Brigade HQ and the battalion cookhouse.

It looked as though the Nationalists now had a clear run to take the Madrid-Valencia road, the object of the offensive. There then followed a small miracle. Described as ‘The Great Rally’, the broken battalion gathered itself and marched back. Commissar Aiken, the undefeatable Cunningham and the Brigade Commander Gall persuaded the men to rally. They grouped them into a column and set off back up the road they had first marched on three days ago. Frank Ryan, an Irish commander of the battalion, shouted over his shoulder ‘Sing up, ye sons of guns’. The men began to sing The Internationale, and the sight of them, ‘bearded, dirty, ragged, covered in blood, who after three days hard fighting were proudly marching along’ drew in other stragglers from the surrounding hillsides, Spanish and French as well as British, to join the column.

The Republicans advanced back to the sunken lane, and firing all the way, the Nationalists into thinking this was an attack by fresh reinforcements. The Nationalists then retreated back to their positions on the Casa Blanca.

At this point both sides dug in and effectively the British were no longer active in a battle that came to a stalemate after the last actions on 27 February. The Nationalists had also exhausted themselves, using all their reserves, the Moors losing 40% to 50% of their numbers. The battle ended, but the British, much to their dismay, had to remain in the front-line for months before being pulled back to their base.

The British battalion was rebuilt over the summer of 1937, and fought in most of the major battles of the war until September 1938. At this time, according to the wishes of the Non-Intervention Committee, the Republican government sent all of its foreign fighters home. They left Spain after a tremendous sending off ceremony through the streets of Barcelona, and huge crowds greeted the British on their arrival at Victoria Station, London.

Below: The Nationalist Foreign Legion.
THE END OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The war carried on for two more years following the Battle of Jarama. The Republic never got the upper hand, and the Nationalists, under the total command of General Franco, slowly took territory after territory. By March 1939, the Republic had only Madrid and the Southeast section of Spain left. It was isolated internationally, it had no money, no arms, and Stalin had left them to their own devices following the Nazi-Soviet pact, so the inevitable surrender came on 31 March.

General Franco then ruled Spain for the next 36 years. Keeping out of the Second World War, he was the only one of the European Fascist dictators to survive the 1940’s. The effects of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s reign still reverberate around Spain to this day. If you wish to read more on the effects of the war today please visit the BBC news website:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/5192228.stm

EPILOGUE

The British action at the Battle of Jarama has been described by some commentators as one of the most ferocious actions of the whole war. The British, inexperienced and ill-equipped, though a combination of bravery, commitment and naiveté, hung onto Suicide Hill in the face of an attack by one of the most dangerous professional armies in the world at that time. They halted the Nationalist assault, which if successful, would have surrounded Madrid, forcing it to surrender.

Ultimately, it was to no avail as the Republic lost, but like the Charge of the Light Brigade, the heroism of the individuals involved should not be lessened because of the events that surround them. The British at Jarama were all volunteers, they were hardly paid for their efforts, yet they fought as tenaciously as any British soldier throughout history, not for their Country, or a leader, but for an ideal.

NOTES

(1) The comparison with the Charge of the Light Brigade comes from Britons in Spain by William Rust.
(2) Apologies to readers who know that the British Battalion also included a large number of Irish members. Most of the Irish in the original English speaking unit left before the Battle of Jarama and joined the American Battalion in protest that UK newspapers were not mentioning their participation, referring to the unit as British. A number of the Irish were also ex-IRA men, who had fought against British soldiers only a few years before, and this had created tensions. Not all the Irish left at this time, and it must not be forgotten that 20 of them lost their lives over the three days of fighting as part of the British Battalion.
(3) As described in his book A Moment of War.
(4) The Germans in Spain fought under an organisation called the Condor Legion. It was mostly airforce, but included artillery and tanks with advisors. They did not send any infantry formations, though in November 1936 Hitler’s representative did advise sending a German Infantry division. He claimed it would smash through any Republican opposition. Hitler decided against it, but this would make a very interesting ‘what if’ scenario. In contrast, the Italians sent not just aircraft, tanks and artillery, they sent whole armed divisions of Fascist ‘volunteers’ to fight for the Nationalists.
(5) Originally written for the British Battalion by the Commissar Alex Wade, it was also adapted for the Abe Lincoln Battalion. Listen to the Woodie Guthrie version of the song at http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/abell Lincoln.html and the lyrics can be found at Wikipedia “There’s a valley in Spain called Jarama”
(7) Crusade in Spain autobiography of British Brigade member Jason Guerney.
(8) Nottingham International Brigader Walter Gregory refutes this in his memoir The Shallow Grave. He claims the rifles were ‘brand-new’ and that ‘this Soviet rifle was a very good weapon’. He also says the training was perfectly adequate and the British were ready for action by the time of Jarama. Such are the problems facing historians. It must be said though, the co-writer of Gregory’s book who covers the historic overview does describe the British as ‘hastily trained and equipped’.
(9) Eyewitnesses claimed the Nationalist HMGs were German Condor Legion.
(10) The Internationale, the anthem of Socialism; This is the final struggle. Let us stand together, and tomorrow. The Internationale. Will be the human race (Listen to a version on the net: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Internationale)
(11) Legend had it that the Colt LMGs had been supplied to the White Russians in the Revolution, the guns went to Archangel and the belts and ammunition to Odessa. They only met up in 1937 in Spain, by which time the belts had perished. Whatever the truth, they did arrive with the British in their original wrappings.
(12) Britons in Spain William Rust.
It isn’t my intention in this article to go through all the ways you can re-fight this battle with different scales and various rules, but just to recount how I’ve approached it.

I’ve been collecting 28mm Spanish Civil War figures a lot just recently, and the intention was to use them for small unit actions. Warhammer Historical released The Great War rules in early 2008 and I got to know them well, being the distributor of Great War Miniatures, which feature heavily in the book. The rules use 28mm figures for battalion level games. It occurred to me that during the Spanish Civil War the same weapons were being used as in 1918, and if anything the tactics were cruder than the British and German armies of that period. So I gave the rules a go with my SCW armies and was quite pleased with the results.

The British at Jarama then came to mind as a good action for these rules. The British Battalion are at full strength, defending a fixed position in isolation to the rest of the battle. There are no flanking forces to arrive and no ‘off table’ support. The Nationalists attack head on up the hill, they don’t attempt any wide out flanking manoeuvres. This was a feature of Nationalist battle plans, noticed time and again, they would attack a foe head on, where a more tactical approach would have saved lives and shortened the war. Wintringham puts this down to the naturally dull minds of the Fascist German advisors, not quite right but amusing none-the-less.

I will just cover the first day of action. The second day was a desperate situation marked by the strange incident of the singing Moors, difficult to recreate on the tabletop, but worth some thought! The third day was a wholesale Republican retreat, which was then followed by wholesale Nationalist retreat. The area covered is outside the scope of a gaming table for 28mm figures.

Refighting the British Battalions action at the Battle of Jarama

Rules: Warhammer Historical’s The Great War

Figures: 28mm.

Table: 6’ x 4’
THE REPUBLICAN ARMY

The Republican army for this game is the British Battalion of the 15th International Brigade. They are at full strength, numbering 600 men in four companies. They were enthusiastic, but poorly trained, volunteers. Most men had no previous military experience. The officers and NCOs were ex-forces, but of variable quality.

They are armed with Russian rifles, few if any grenades, no mortars and very poor light machine guns. They were issued with Colt LMGs that couldn’t fire because the ammunition belts had perished, and the French Chauchats that jammed after a few shots.

They did have eight ancient (none dated after 1916) Russian Maxim guns, whose aim was very inaccurate, but which were reliable and highly efficient.

There was in theory artillery support and tank support, but as none of it arrived on the first day we won’t include it.

At this stage of Spanish warfare, air to ground support was very primitive and the kind of close support seen in World War Two was not happening yet. The British did see their airforce early in the morning chasing the Nationalists away. The control of the air space above the battlefield is cited as one of the reasons the Republicans managed to halt the Nationalists at Jarama. The superior Russian tanks were also part of the reason, the T-26 Light Tank with its Russian crew had helped the Republicans since they were first used against the rebel attack on Madrid.

COMMISSARS

The Republican army had within its command structure political commissars. They were there to look after the physical, mental and political (most had studied in Russia) well being of the men and to advise the officers. There were shades of the later WW2 Soviet-style Commissars within Spain, shooting deserters, looking for Trotskyite Fascist spies, etc., but it seems within the British Battalion they were all well liked ‘good sorts’. They took over in the absence of a commander; Aiken taking over the Battalion on the second day for example.

For the purpose of the game, Aiken isn’t involved as he arrived on the second day, but each company has a commissar within the Command Group. They take over if the commander is killed. The Battalion Commissars are well documented, but I’ve only come across the name of 1st Company’s Commissar so far.

Command Groups have a 12” Command Range

BATTALION COMMAND GROUP

Captain Tom Wintringham and two soldiers (Battalion scouts)

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Equipment: Wintringham is armed with a pistol. The soldiers are armed with rifles.

1ST COMPANY

Made up of the veterans of the Battalion, 1st Company had already been in action in Madrid and further south at Cordoba.

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1st Company is made up of a Company Command Group and three Platoons.

The Company Command Group consists of Conway, a Commissar and four Soldiers. A Company Platoon consists of 10 Soldiers.

Equipment: Conway is armed with a Pistol. All Commissars have pistols. All Soldiers have a rifle. Each Platoon has a Chauchat.

2ND COMPANY

2nd Company is actually a heavy machine gun battery with rifle platoons, commanded by Harry Fry.

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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissar</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldiers</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>5+</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2nd Company is made up of a Company Command Group, a battery of four Maxim heavy machine-guns and three rifle Platoons.

The Company Command Group consists of Fry, a Commissar and four Soldiers. Each Maxim gun has three crewmen. A Company Platoon consists of 10 Soldiers.

Equipment: Fry is armed with a Pistol. All Commissars have pistols. All Soldiers have a rifle. The Maxims are Heavy Machine Guns.
3RD COMPANY

Third Company was made up of volunteers who had not seen any action and only received their weapons days before the battle. The popular Bill Briskey led them.

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<tr>
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<td>3+</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5+</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3rd Company is made up of a Company Command Group and three Platoons. The Company Command Group consists of Conway, a Commissar and four Soldiers. A Company Platoon consists of 10 Soldiers.

**Equipment:**
- Brisk is armed with a Pistol. All Commissars have pistols. All Soldiers have a rifle. Each Platoon has a Chauchat.

4TH COMPANY

Fourth Company was made up of the volunteers who had not seen any action and only received their weapons days before the battle. Bert Overton led them. Overton was one of the first British in Spain, and had fought well in Madrid and following battles before joining the British Battalion. Unfortunately he was promoted to a position beyond his capabilities and fared very badly at Jarama.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>LD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overton</td>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3+</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soldiers</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4th Company is made up of a Company Command Group and three Platoons. The Company Command Group consists of Overton, a Commissar and four Soldiers. A Company Platoon consists of 10 Soldiers.

**Equipment:**
- Overton is armed with a Pistol. All Commissars have pistols. All Soldiers have a rifle. Each Platoon has a Chauchat.

**Special Rules:** The Commissar does not command the Company unless Overton is killed.

**CHAUCHAT LIGHT MACHINE-GUN**

This weapon has been described as the worst machine gun ever produced, and that was when they were new. At the Battle of Jarama, the British were issued with 20-year-old models. Soldiers were seen firing a few rounds, then attempting to strip it to clear the jammed ammunition under artillery fire and before advancing enemies. Not one was brought back in the retreat. The famous writer Caudwell was killed on the first day when his gun jammed.

Because of the age of the guns, I’ve changed the standard rules as written on page 37 of Warhammer Historical’s The Great War. The Chauchat will jam on the roll of one or more 1s. The rest of the rules are as written.
The Nationalist forces in front of the 15th International Brigade were the two brigades that had crossed the Rio Jarama near the town of San Martín, and then stormed the Pingarrón heights. The first was led by Asensio (4th Brigade), and the second by Saenz de Buruaga (2nd Brigade).

4TH BRIGADE
Colonel don Carlos Asensio Cavanillas had two regiments in his Brigade, the 7th and the 8th.

The Seventh Regiment was made up of:
1st and 3rd Tabor of Tetuan. (Moors)
2nd Expeditionary Battalion of Tenerife.
(I’m not sure about this unit, they may have been Army or Civil Guard)

The Eighth Regiment was made up of:
6th Bandera of the Legion (Spanish Foreign Legion)
7th Tabor of Melilla (Moors)

2ND BRIGADE
Colonel Eduardo Saez Buruaga y Polanco had two regiments in his Brigade, the 3rd and the 4th.

The Third Regiment was made up of:
9th Bandera of the Legion (Spanish Foreign Legion)
1st Tabor de la Mehal-la del Rif (Moors)

The Fourth Regiment was made up of:
1st Tabor of Alhucemas (Moors)
7th Tabor of Tetuan (Moors)

Bandera of Moroccan Falange (Again not sure of this unit apart from the obvious, that it is a Militia of the fascist Falange party)

A Bandera and a Tabor are both equivalent to a Battalion.

All the British Battalion eyewitness accounts describe the Fascists on the first day as Moors. It was the Tabor of Tetuan that attacked up the hill towards the British on 12 February. The Nationalists are described as having German artillery and machine gun support. This may be just Red propaganda. Each Nationalist Brigade had their own integral heavy support, so it’s more likely to be them than the Condor Legion. But, whoever it was, there was plenty of it.

The Nationalists also had tank support, but they did not join in until day three.

As mentioned above, the Nationalist air support, so central to future battles, was not here due to the Republican airforce.

The Moors were Moroccans who were recruited from the Berber hill tribes to fight for the Spanish Army. They were part of the Army of Africa, a seasoned fighting force used in Spanish Morocco that was airlifted to Spain at the outbreak of the rebellion. The Moors were excellent fighters, especially when well led. Their officers were all Europeans, much in the tradition of the British Indian Army. They were anti-Communist and Muslim. (1). Their appearance was not very soldier-like, wrapped in their traditional ponchos, but the British at Jarama were amazed at their ability to cross seemingly open ground without being seen. ‘The effect of these brown, ferocious bundles suddenly appearing out of the ground at one’s feet was utterly demoralising’ (2).

The Moors recruited into the Spanish army establishment were titled Los Regulares, in contrast to the ‘irregulares’ the Harkas and Melhallas. The Harkas were tribal troops with a sprinkle of Spanish officers, and the Melhallas were mercenary troops lent to the Spanish by the Khaliph, again led by Spanish officers. The Irregulares do not feature in this game, but the 2nd Brigade did have a Tabor of Melhallas (1st Tabor de la Mehal-la del Rif)

TABOR OF LOS REGULARES

Tabor Command Group

The 7th Tabor of Tetuan of the 2nd Brigade are attacking in this game. A Tabor has four Companies. (3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commandante</th>
<th>WS</th>
<th>BS</th>
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<th>W</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soldiers</td>
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<td>4+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The Tabor Command Group consists of the Commandante and two soldiers.

Equipment: The Commandante has a pistol and grenades. The soldiers each have a rifle and grenades.

Infantry Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldiers</th>
<th>WS</th>
<th>BS</th>
<th>S</th>
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<th>W</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>4+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capitan</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Infantry Company consists of a Company Command Group and three Platoons. The Company Command Group consists of the Capitan and four soldiers. The Infantry Platoon consists of nine soldiers.

Equipment: The Capitan is armed with a pistol and grenades. All soldiers have a rifle and grenades. Each Platoon has one Lewis gun. (Their LMGs would have been equivalent to a Lewis.)

Special Rules: Infiltration Tactics

Machine Gun Platoon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crew</th>
<th>WS</th>
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<td>7</td>
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</table>

This unit consists of one HMG and three crewmen. The crewmen have rifles.

There is one HMG for the Tabor; they would be manned by Spanish peninsula troops. If you prefer, you can have the models representing German Condor Legion.

Field Guns

There is a battery of three Medium field guns off table. Use the German field gun profile on page 144 of the rulebook.
TERRAIN

Please look to the plan below for the layout of the battlefield. The terrain was taken from the sketch map drawn up by one of the Battalion scouts on the day of the battle. It has been said that there are a number of inaccuracies in the map, but for our purposes it is fine.

The hills have gentle slopes, with no real cover. The ground is rocky with gorse and shrubs and occasional trees. You can make small patches of cover if you like, but there should be nothing significant. There is a small white house, Casa Blanca, on the top of Suicide Hill. The British on Suicide Hill did not have time to dig in, so must only receive cover for the crest of the hill. They were also so inexperienced they didn’t run to the reverse slopes.

Number 2 Company is dug in along the edge of the plateau. I have not stretched the table back to the sunken lane as that did not feature in the action on day one. There is a lot of mention of olive groves in the accounts of the battle (4). I do not think the olive groves were actually in the area of the tabletop, but were part of the terrain in the march approach. William Rust’s sketch map shows all the left flank behind Suicide Hill as wooded, and early eyewitness accounts describe Casa Blanca as a wooded hill. I’ve put a couple of small groves on the left as a nod to those accounts.

Look to the tabletop plan for deployment. The Republicans must have the majority of their companies lining the hillcrest except Number one Company, which can have most of its platoons on the reverse slopes, at least one must be on the hillcrest.

The Nationalists enter the table along the Jarama River edge. Two companies, Battalion Command and the HMG enter first, then the next two companies follow using the Assault Wave rule. The guns are off table, and are grouped into a battery. Put a gun on the table to represent the point of fire.

Top left: A Condor Legion MG34 HMG with crew. By Crusader Miniatures.
VICTORY CONDITIONS
The game length is seven turns with the Random Game Turn.
The winner is the player with possession of the hilltops of Casa Blanca and Conical Hill on the last turn. To do that he must have a scoring unit on the top of each hill with no scoring enemy within 6”.
For a crushing Nationalist victory, they must clear the Republican 2nd Company off the plateau as well.
For a crushing Republican victory, there must be no scoring Fascist units on the tabletop.
Any other result is a draw.

SPECIAL RULES
The British Second Company cannot move from their positions until turn 5. In reality they never left the positions, acting as a rear area redoubt for the retreating British to fall back on. The HMG platoon starts deployed, so cannot move throughout the game. The HMGs cannot fire before turn 4, representing the ammunition arriving late and having to be hand loaded into the belts.
On turn 4 they can fire if they roll 6 at the start of the shooting phase. Add +1 to this score each turn following to be able to fire the guns.

CHANGING THE GAME
Once you’ve played the scenario once or twice, you may want to introduce some extra elements that were available to the actual forces on the day, and may have swung things one way or the other if they had come into action.

TANKS
Both sides had tanks to the rear. Some accounts have the Nationalist attack on day one supported by tanks. The Nationalists use them on Day 3 to finally clear the British out of the sunken lane. For the Republicans, a Russian tank appeared on Day 2 to fire on the Fascists who had captured Number 2 Company’s HMG position.
I have not worked out specific Spanish Civil War tank stats for these rules. The Nationalists would have called on German Panzer 1s and the Republicans would have Soviet T-26s. Use the FT-17 profiles on page 133 of the Great War rulebook, giving the Panzer 1 twin Vehicle Machine Guns in the turret, and the T-26 a 37mm gun in the Turret (it was actually a 45mm gun) and a Vehicle Machine Gun, only one of which can be fired per turn.
If you want to add tank support, only one model may come on for either side.

If the British are facing tanks, allow any squad being attacked or attacking tanks to have grenades. This represents the few grenades available, passed along the line to those that needed them most.

Upgrade the Republicans
You could upgun the British platoons to two LMGs per platoon. A Colt LMG was issued to each Platoon along with a Chauchat. As mentioned earlier, the Colts were new guns, there just wasn’t any ammunition for them. We could presume the Republic was not as bad off as it was in reality by letting each platoon have a Chauchat and a Colt. Make the Chauchat more reliable as per the rulebook, and make the Colt equivalent to a Lewis Gun.

ARTILLERY
In his memoirs Guerney describes the Republican artillery as living their own life separate to the Brigade, behind the lines, growing vegetables around the gun positions and not doing much else (2). In contrast, earlier accounts of the British Battalion describe the Republican artillery deploying to the right of the British, in the gap between them and the Franco-Belge Battalion, and “that battery rendered a good account of itself” (5).

You could follow those accounts, and have a Republican Field Gun deploy to the right of Number 2 Company, off the hill. Use the German 1918 77mm field gun for this model, details on page 144 of the Rulebook.

AIRCRAFT
Aeroplanes were a major weapon in the Spanish Civil War. In nearly all accounts they make no impact on the British at Jarama, but there is no reason why you can’t give both sides Aerial Intervention as described on page 86 of the Rulebook.

Note on Wargaming the Spanish Civil War
When the SCW comes up in wargaming, a lot is often made of the rivalry between the various factions that make up the armies on both sides. Whilst this makes for unique and enjoyable ‘command and control’ problems, it isn’t something I’ve introduced here. We are only dealing with single battalions, so there isn’t much scope for different factions. The British tended to obey orders, to their death in a lot of cases on day one, so rules for troops voting to see if they’ll follow orders, which can be a part of SCW gaming, isn’t relevant to this engagement.
FIGURES AVAILABLE

There is not a terrific amount of SCW figures available in 28mm, but what there is, is of very good quality.

North Star (www.northstarfigures.com) have packs of British International Brigade riflemen. This isn’t a full range; they were designed to provide lots of figure variants for the British in Spain.

Anglian Miniatures produce a great selection of Spanish Civil War figures, including Moors and International Brigade. The International Brigade range has plenty of character figures and a HMG for Number Two Company. They also have Panzer 1 and T-26 models.

Force of Arms do a range of 28mm Spanish Civil War, both figures and tanks.

I have used the Crusader Miniatures Early WW2 German MG34 as the Condor Legion machine gunners for the Nationalists. Artillery I have used the Great War Miniatures German 77mm FK96 field gun with crew from converted figures and Anglian Miniatures anti-tank crews. See www.northstarfigures.com for Crusader Miniatures and Great War Miniatures.

FLAGS!!

The Spanish Civil War is of note for being one of the only 20th Century conflicts in which the participants still carried flags into battle. There were many reasons why, but one very practical reason was for aerial recognition. Radio was unsophisticated in Spain 1937, so what better way to show who you were to the flyers above. So make sure you have lots of flags in your army, you can buy 28mm Spanish Civil War flags from the North Star website.

SCW Flags:
1) Nationalist Spain
2) Carlist
3) Moorish Tabor of Tetuan
4) Carlist

REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

There have been tyrants, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it - always. (Mahatma Gandhi, 1869-1948)

The victors, it has been said, write history. The Spanish Civil War is unique in that Franco’s enemies have written more in English about the war than his friends have. I have not found a book on the Battle of Jarama from the Nationalist side, or even a neutral source that gives the depth of information that I have on the Republicans.

For this reason, the article has been written from the Republican point of view. There are Nationalist sources in Spanish on the Internet that you can translate, and I’ve taken as much information from them as one can without speaking Spanish. There are also some Republican sources I would like to have read but could not get hold of.

Tom Wintringham’s account An English Captain (out of print) is high on that list.

BOOKS

The Spanish Civil War - Hugh Thomas. The first definitive work on the War in English, written in 1961.

The Battle for Spain - Anthony Beevor. This account by the highly readable historian is comparable with Thomas. With the advantage of time, Beevor had access to sources not available in 1961.

Britons in Spain - William Rust. This contemporary history of the British battalion was written while the war was still on. You have to give a very smile when he describes the Ebro campaign, now seen as the ‘Death-knell of the Republic’ as a ‘Brilliant Counterstroke’. But the Roll of Honour at the end of the book gives a moment of reflection on just how many British and Irish died fighting for their cause.


Crusade in Spain - Jason Gurney. Memoir including the Battle of Jarama by one of the Battalion scouts.

International Brigades in Spain 1936-39 - Ken Bradley. Osprey Elite series, always a first port of call for Wargamers interested in a new period, I find. The actual Men-at-arms book on the SCW is good, but has flaws, for example the author never refers to there being a Battle at Jarama!

The Shallow Grave, A Memoir of The Spanish Civil War - Walter Gregory. A Nottingham man’s memories of serving in the British battalion. Gregory is wounded very early in the battle, so although his account is very gripping and evocative, it ends before the end of the first day. He contradicts other accounts, in terms of how prepared the British were and the dispositions of the Companies at Jarama, but that is what makes history interesting.

XV International Brigade. Written by members of the 15th Brigade in 1938. An excellent original sourcebook.

WEBSITES

www.international-brigades.org.uk: A website set up by the International Brigade Memorial Trust. Lots of information about the Brigades and the Battle of Jarama. Visit the links section, and look for John Corcoran’s Jarama site in particular for photos of the battlefield today.

www.lacucaracha.info/scw/index.htm: Spanish site in English with lots of information and photographs/ soundtrack from the war.

es.geocities.com/batalla_jarama/: Spanish site dedicated to the battle of Jarama. Lots of information on both armies, maps and orders of battle. If you go to it via Google you can get it translated into English.

NOTES

(1) The irony here is the Nationalists compared themselves to the Crusaders of old Spain, as they were fighting to protect the Spanish Catholic Church against godless Communists. It was a fact that a lot of the anger of the Left was directed against the church, as in Spain the church had always been part of the ruling elite. Churches were usually the first places to be burnt down by triumphant Anarchists. The Crusaders of the Reconquista in Medieval times had thrown the Moors out of Spain, now the best part of the new Reconquista’s army was the very same Moors.

(2) Crusade in Spain autobiography of British Brigade member Jason Guerney.

(3) One of the great sources of information about the Spanish Civil War that I have not got hold of is a book on uniforms by the Spanish author Bueno. In it he claims the Moor-Tabor was a half Battalion, and this is often repeated in later works. My friend Jesus Serrano Mateo of Wargames and Toys, Bilbao, informed me that it is incorrect, and the Tabor was the same as a regular Battalion with four companies. This made more sense for the scenario, and so I went with my friend’s advice rather than Bueno.

(4) Poem by Volunteer John Lepper:

Death stalked the olive trees.
Picking his men.
His leaden finger beckoned.
Again and again

(5) Britons in Spain William Rust.