

There's a valley in Spain called Jarama

The development of the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades and its influences



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Image frontpage: photograph taken by South African photographer Vera Elkan, showing four British volunteers of the International Brigades in front of their 'camp', possibly near Albacete.

Imperial War Museums, London, Collection Spanish Civil War 1936-1939.

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Introduction

In October 1985 a small crowd gathered in the South Bank district of London. Between the high-rise buildings echoed the words of *Jarama Valley*, a song written half a century earlier:

*There's a valley in Spain called Jarama,
It's a place that we all know so well,
It is there that we gave of our manhood,
And so many of our brave comrades fell.*¹

Amongst those singing that day were several elderly men who had witnessed the events in Jarama Valley which the song described. It was a battle from the Spanish Civil War, a brutal struggle that raged from 1936 to 1939.² It was a war with multiple dimensions. What started out as a military uprising by right-wing generals against a left-wing government, soon evolved in a much wider ideological conflict with foreign involvement on both sides. Part of this international aspect were the International Brigades, volunteers from various countries who fought on the side of Spain's government. The occasion for the gathering in London in October 1985 was the unveiling of a national monument in commemoration of the British volunteers of these Brigades. The elderly men present there had traveled to Spain in the 1930's and had been part of the Brigades. The unveiling marked an important moment for them. Up till that point there had been no national monument in commemoration of their comrades. In fact, up till the early 1980's there had only been a handful of monuments throughout the country in commemoration of individual or local volunteers. This number has since, however, rapidly increased to 78 as of June 2016.³ A remarkable development that lends itself for interesting historical research, especially considering that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.

¹ J. Jump, ed., *Poems from Spain: British and Irish International Brigadiers on the Spanish Civil War* (London 2006), 141.

² The Spanish Civil War broke out on 17 July 1936 and lasted until 1 April 1939. The conflict was fought between the 'Republicans', who supported Spain's left-wing government, and the 'Nationalists', a Falangist force fighting under command of Francisco Franco.

³ 'Memorials', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/memorials>, retrieved 23-06-16. The total number of monuments is 100, but of only 78 a date of unveiling is given. The remaining 22 can therefore not be incorporated in this research.

This is an excellent moment for historians to look back and research topics that have previously remained unexplored.

How were things remembered? Firstly by the veterans of the International Brigades themselves, but also by others. This thesis focuses on remembering in the public sphere, mainly through the analysis of published recollections, but also – to a lesser extent – through the analysis of other forms of public remembering, namely monuments and memorial services. Commemoration is a rather broad concept: It encompasses everything done by individuals or groups to remember or honor persons or events from the past. When engaging in historical research in regard to commemoration there are certain factors that need to be taken into account. Oral history studies have shown that later circumstances can be of major influence as to what witnesses remember of events and how they remember it.⁴ This change in the commemoration is an exciting field of research which to date has remained understudied with regard to material history and the International Brigades.⁵ This is a historiographical gap that this thesis aims to fill.

Analysis of activity of the aforementioned core aspects of commemoration is an important facet of my research. In this regard the website of the International Brigade Memorial Trust (IBMT) has proven immensely useful. The IBMT is a British registered charity which has as its aim the protection of the legacy of the International Brigades.⁶ Because of this aim it cannot be regarded as a neutral source. On its website the IBMT maintains extensive records on published personal accounts by volunteers and constructed monuments. Analysis of this data indicates that with regard to the commemoration of the Brigades in the United Kingdom three unique time periods can be distinguished. This designation is based on multiple factors. Patterns of activity can be established through analysis of the publication dates of

⁴ Examples of this include the studies by Alessandro Portelli, Selma Leydesdorff and Luisa Passerini. A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (New York 1991); S. Leydesdorff, *Het Water en de Herinnering* (Amsterdam 1993); L. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge 2009).

⁵ It is important in this regard to note the differences that exist between remembering and commemoration. The former is generally used to refer to the action of individuals, while the latter generally refers to the actions of a collective. The existing literature on the British volunteers of the International Brigades generally uses commemoration to refer to the actions of both individuals and collectives. I have opted to in this thesis continue this practice for sake of continuity.

⁶ 'International Brigade Memorial Trust', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/content/international-brigade-memorial-trust>, retrieved 23-06-16.

personal accounts and the dates of unveiling of various constructed monuments. This is shown respectively in figures 1 and 2.⁷

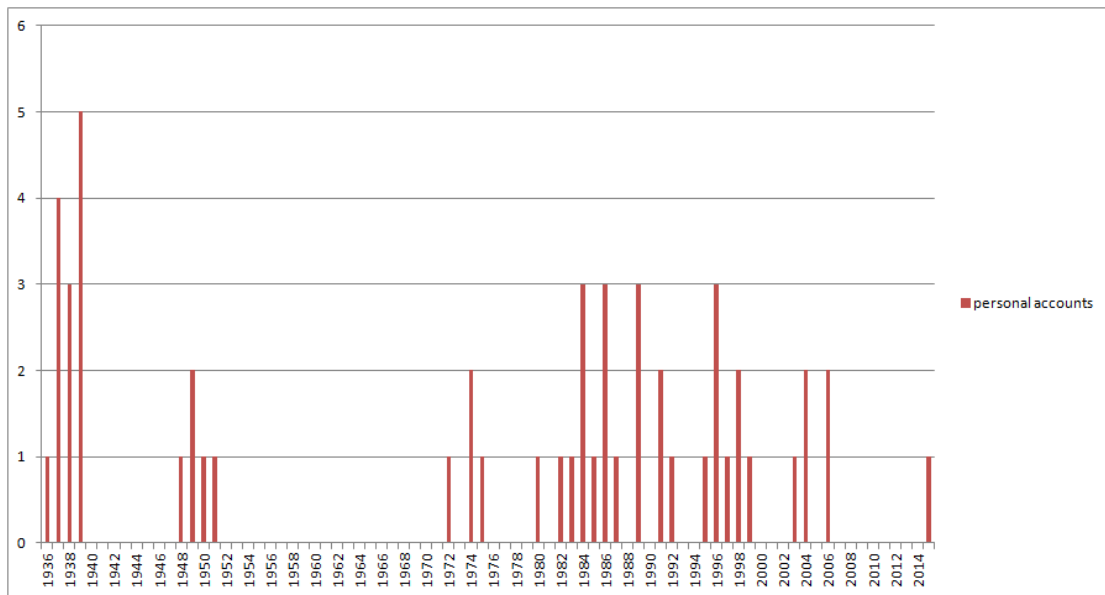


Figure 1: Overview of published personal accounts by date.

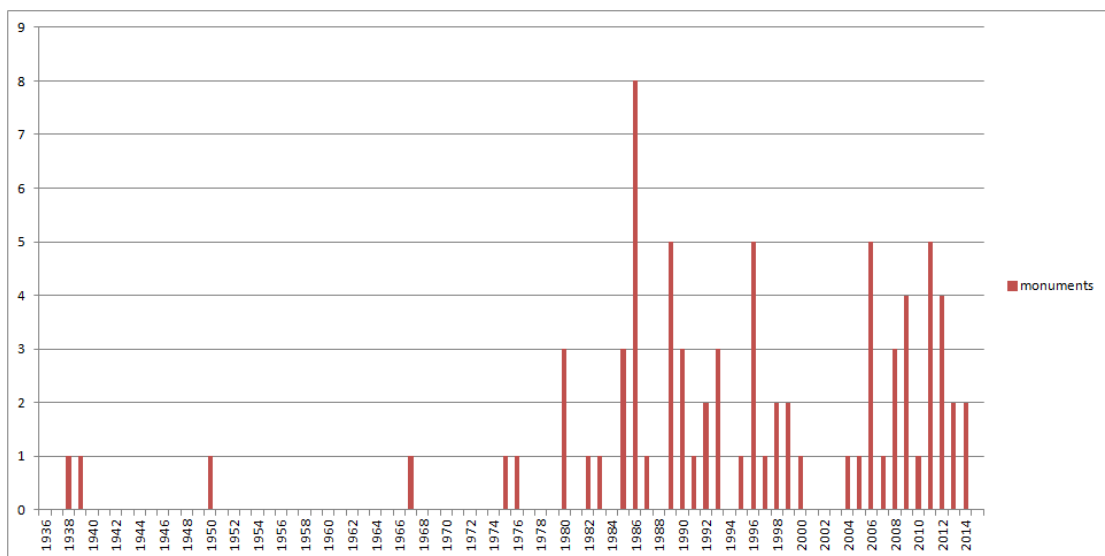


Figure 2: Overview of constructed monuments by date.

⁷ Source of data:
 Personal accounts: 'Memoirs', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/content/memoirs>, retrieved 23-06-16.
 Monuments: 'Memorials', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/memorials>, retrieved 23-06-16.
 When added up the number of total personal accounts is 53 and that of the monuments is 78. As noted earlier, there are 22 monuments listed on the website of which no date of unveiling is given. These monuments are not incorporated in my research.

From this data four waves of activity can be distinguished. After contextualizing these waves with historical events three unique successive time periods appear: The first of these took place between July 1936 and September 1939, beginning with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and ending with the outbreak of the Second World War. The first wave of activity roughly corresponds with this time period. Characteristic for the time period was a high number of published personal accounts and a very limited number of constructed monuments. The accounts of what the volunteers experienced in Spain were published with the intent of promoting or discouraging the joining of the Brigades. Towards the end of the period influence by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) on personal accounts increased and accounts became increasingly politicized. The second time period began with the outbreak of the Second World War and ended with the death of Francisco Franco on 20 November 1975. It included two waves activity: The first taking place from the late 1940's till early 1950's and the second occurring in the early 1970's. There were several matters characteristic for this time period. Firstly, the number of published personal accounts was high and the number of constructed monuments was limited. Secondly, there were major differences between the personal accounts published during the first wave of activity and those published during the second. This was a reflection of the political climate of the Cold War. Both the rising tensions between the East and West and the later period of detente were reflected in the way former Brigadiers wrote about their experiences. The decline in importance of the CPGB was also echoed in the accounts, leading to a decrease of the politicization. Following the death of Franco major shifts occurred in the way the Brigades were remembered. One thing that changed in this third time period was the length of the waves of activity. Previously, these had lasted for a maximum of several years. However, the early 1980's saw the beginning of a wave which is still ongoing today. The politicization that had previously dominated published personal accounts declined even further, with the accounts having an increasing historical character. The most dramatic change occurred in regard to the number of constructed monuments. Whereas in the two previous time periods this number had remained extremely limited, a rapid expansion took place from the mid 1980's on. Lastly, the third time period also saw the transition of active commemoration of those who had experienced the war in Spain personally to their family and friends.

As a result of the ideological nature of the Spanish Civil War much of the historiography has been extremely politicized. It could be argued that for both sides the war did not end with the defeat of the Spanish Republic in April 1939. This was very much the case in Francoist Spain where the government strongly promoted its own version of events, while alternative views were repressed. It was impossible for historians to do independent research.⁸ Until the early 1960's there were no accounts of the war other than those sanctioned by the Franco regime. While there were accounts that offered contrary views, these were limited to personal memoirs.⁹ It is probable that this lack of neutral histories stems from the fact that the vast majority of primary sources were unavailable to historians. Francoist Spain limited access to state-approved historians. In a similar fashion the Republican records kept by the Soviet Union were also difficult to obtain. Much of the information regarding the Communist International (Comintern) was not available to historians until after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Lastly, there was also a substantial portion of records which remained in the hands of individuals belonging to the community of Spanish exiles. Access to this information was also notoriously problematic.¹⁰ British historian Hugh Thomas wrote the first general history of the war published outside of Spain.¹¹ This 1961 account was followed by more general histories of the war.¹² The account by Thomas is still regarded as one of the most comprehensive general histories of the war. The work has been updated with several new editions, each incorporating newly discovered information. Another highly valued general history of the war is the 1982 work by fellow British historian Antony Beevor.¹³ Historian Paul Preston's 1986 history of the war also needs to be mentioned in this regard, although it needs to be pointed out that this account was biased in favor of the Spanish Republic.¹⁴ Its value lay in Preston's work regarding the ideological conflicts which formed the roots of the Spanish Civil War. He elaborately described Spain's political

⁸ J. Ruiz, 'Seventy Years On: Historians and Repression during and after the Spanish Civil War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 44, 3 (2009), 449-472, 451.

⁹ S. Faber, *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War: Hispanophilia, Commitment, and Discipline* (New York 2008), 78.

¹⁰ Ruiz, *Seventy Years On*, 117.

¹¹ H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (New York 1961).

¹² Examples of this include: P. Broué; E. Témime, *La Révolution et la Guerre d'Espagne* (Paris 1961); G. Jackson, *The Spanish Republic and the Civil War 1931-1939* (Princeton 1965); S.G. Payne, *Franco's Spain* (London 1968).

¹³ A. Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (London 1982).

¹⁴ P. Preston, *The Spanish Civil War: Reaction, Revolution and Revenge* (London 1986). An example of Preston's bias is the fact that he dedicated the book to the memory of the International Brigades.

system and how its issues of corruption, electoral fraud and a repressive regime eventually led to an unsustainable situation. Both Thomas and Beevor had discussed these matters in their accounts, but not to the extent of Preston who dedicated roughly a third of his book to this and going much more into depth on it.

The historiography of the International Brigades was also for a long time dominated by ideological struggles. Several histories of the Brigades were published already during the Spanish Civil War. Some of these were officially sanctioned by the Republican government of Spain, while others were written by those affiliated with communist parties throughout the world.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly all of these promoted the Brigades. The politicization of the historiography of the Brigades continued for longer than that of the Civil War. The death of Franco in 1975 accelerated an existing process of de-politicization. Historian Judith Cook's 1979 account was groundbreaking at the time, although it was not written from a neutral position.¹⁶ Cook for instance described internal strife within the Republican faction as a 'Nationalist putsch', a view which most likely originated from her political views rather than historical evidence.¹⁷ The value of her work lay purely in the fact that she was the first to write a general history of the Brigades. Her book has since been superseded by new discoveries. While there are general histories of the Brigades as a whole, most relevant research has been concentrated in accounts which focus on volunteers from specific countries.¹⁸ British historian Richard Baxell has in the past two decades established himself as the leading expert on the British volunteers of the International Brigades. His 2001 account has been republished on several occasions, each adding newly discovered information.¹⁹ Fellow British historian Tom Buchanan can be regarded as the leading expert on Britain's involvement in the Spanish Civil War. He has written several comprehensive works on this topic.²⁰

¹⁵ An example of such sanctioned histories is F. Ryan, ed., *The Book of the XVth Brigade: Records of British, American, Canadian and Irish Volunteers in the XV International Brigade in Spain 1936-1938* (Madrid 1938).

¹⁶ J. Cook, *Apprentices of Freedom* (London 1979).

¹⁷ 'Memories of Spain', *The Guardian* 08-03-1979, p. 16.

¹⁸ Examples of such works include: P. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford 1998); M. Petrou, *Renegades: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War* (Vancouver 2008); R. Skoutelsky, *L'espoir guidait leurs pas. Les volontaires français en Espagne républicaine. Les volontaires français dans les Brigades internationales, 1936-1939* (Paris 1998).

¹⁹ R. Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (London 2001).

²⁰ T. Buchanan, *The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement* (Cambridge 1991); T. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge 1997); T. Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Brighton 2007).

As noted previously, my research draws heavily from primary sources. The majority of these consists of published personal accounts by former Brigadiers, although constructed monuments in commemoration of former Brigadiers and interviews with former Brigadiers are also used. In this regard the lists of published personal accounts and constructed monuments on the website of the IBMT has been of tremendous help. Although I have not been able to acquire all listed accounts, I do believe that the selection of works that I was able to acquire is representative for the entire catalog. In order to contextualize the above mentioned personal accounts I have used a broad list of secondary sources. Secondary literature and scientific articles form the majority of this, while contemporary newspaper articles have also proven vital.

In the historical research that has been conducted so far on the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigades there has been considerable attention for the aspect of commemoration. Historians, however, have insufficiently focused on the influences on commemoration and the changes that occurred with regard to this. Additionally, much of the research into the commemoration of the Brigades has focused on the period until the death of Franco in November 1975. The developments that took place after this point have remained understudied, leaving a gap in the historiography. This thesis aims to contribute to the historiographical debate by studying these aspects. There are several points that need to be clarified regarding the limitations of this thesis. The British volunteers of the International Brigades often fought alongside other English-speaking volunteers. These non-British nationals add to the complexity of the subject. In my research I have opted to focus solely on the British volunteers. Although the commemoration of, for example, the Irish volunteers developed along a similar path, including this in my research would also require discussing British-Irish relations and the incredibly complex conflict in Northern Ireland. This would significantly expand the thesis past its limitations. This also applies to British volunteers who traveled to Spain and served in units other than the International Brigades. This was famously the case for author George Orwell. Although this group will be referenced at times, this thesis does not go into depth on the development of the commemoration of this group.

This thesis takes a chronological approach to the development of the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades. The three previously described time periods are each assessed in a chapter with a set format.

First an overview is given of the historical backgrounds in which the commemoration took place. This is then followed by an analysis of the commemoration itself. Through this setup this thesis traces the development of the commemoration and asserts what influenced it.

Chapter One: The Spanish Civil War

This chapter discusses the first time period of commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades. This time period began with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War on 16 July 1936 and lasted until the outbreak of the Second World War on 1 September 1939. Dating the beginning of the wave is problematic. Commemoration is a broad concept and as such it can be difficult to pinpoint where eyewitness reports turn to commemoration. However, British volunteers were amongst the first non-Spanish nationals to participate in the war, setting up units almost directly after the outbreak of the conflict and writing about their experiences. Considering these points, this thesis uses 16 July as the start of the time period. The end of the first time period is easier to pinpoint. The time span of the Second World War stands out in the commemoration in that no personal accounts were published during the war. In addition, there are significant differences between the works published before and those published after the war.

Characteristic for the first time period is the very high number of published personal accounts and the very limited number of erected monuments. The first personal account was published in 1936, but activity significantly increased in mid 1937. This situation can be attributed to the fact that this time period followed the Nationalist offensive at Madrid of November 1936 in which British volunteers first saw heavy combat. It is unsurprising that personal accounts were first published after this offensive, considering that several British volunteers were wounded in battle and returned home. This enabled them to write down their experiences and find a publisher. This was a course of events which throughout the war wounded volunteers would continue to do. Following the fighting at Madrid the British volunteers fought in several other battles. Since the return home was often concluded on an individual basis, it is impossible to trace other battles to activity in publication. The offensive at Madrid is an exception since the number of British volunteers at the time was limited and the events of the battle held prominent places in the accounts.

The first section of this chapter discusses the background of the International Brigades and the British volunteers. It is important to understand why people volunteered as the motivations greatly influenced how people wrote about their

experiences. The main questions answered in this section are as follows: what were the origins of the International Brigades and who were the British volunteers? The second section of this chapter discusses the commemoration of the International Brigades in Britain from 1936 till 1939. The main question answered in this section is as follows: how did commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades develop during the first time period of commemoration? This is achieved through a chronological analysis of personal accounts, monuments and memorial services.

1.1. Historical background – The International Brigades

What were the origins of the International Brigades? This is a matter which has attracted considerable historiographical debate. During the early days of the Brigades there was speculation about the involvement of the Communist International (Comintern), although such rumors were never definitively proven. Amongst historians there was the longstanding belief that Maurice Thorez, the leader of the French Communist Party, had suggested the formation of the force to Joseph Stalin in the autumn of 1936.²¹ For a long time the Soviet Union maintained that the Brigades were formed spontaneously by volunteers, denying that any Soviet involvement in the war had taken place. This line was repeated by contemporary communist histories of the war.²² It was not until 1956 when the Soviet Union was going through the process of De-Stalinization that Soviet involvement in the war was formally acknowledged.²³ Soviet documents on the Spanish Civil War remained unavailable to Western historians until after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The opening of the Russian State Archives in the 1990's has led to new discoveries in regard to the International Brigades. Recent research has shown that the Comintern was indeed responsible for the formation of the Brigades. The early successes by the rebel Nationalists together with the military aid provided by Germany and Italy had alarmed the Comintern, which in response sought to provide support to the Spanish Republic. Non-Spanish

²¹ H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London 1961) 295.

²² An example of this official line can be found in B. Rust, *Britons in Spain* (London 1939). William (Bill) Rust was the correspondent in the Spanish Civil War for the *Daily Worker*, the official newspaper of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

²³ P. Monteath, 'German Historiography and the Spanish Civil War: A Critical Survey', *European History Quarterly* 20, 2 (1990) 255-283, 261.

volunteers had fought for the Spanish Republic since the outbreak of the war, although this had been on a rather small-scale basis. Late in the summer of 1936 the Comintern, in coordination with communist parties worldwide, set up a system which provided support for potential volunteers. The number of volunteers who made their way to Spain significantly increased after this, numbering ca. 35,000 in total.²⁴

The International Brigades proved to be an important military force for the Spanish Republic. They fought at key battles in the war and suffered heavy casualties. The use of foreign volunteers was controversial and opposed by the members of the Non-Intervention Committee (NIC), which consisted of France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union.²⁵ It had agreed to a policy of non-intervention on 24 August 1936 in order to prevent an escalation of the conflict. In practice however only France and Great Britain upheld this promise. Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union consistently breached the agreement with financial and military aid for respectively the Nationalists and the Republicans.²⁶ In the summer of 1938 a British initiative for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the war appeared to receive the backing of both sides of the conflict. Germany and Italy had however secretly advised Franco to delay the actual withdrawal. In a speech to the League of Nations on 21 September Spanish Prime Minister Negrín announced the unconditional withdrawal of foreign volunteers who fought on the side of the Republic. It was hoped that by doing so, the Nationalists would be forced to do the same. This appeal however did not have the intended consequences. Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy were occupied with negotiations in Munich about the future of the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia. As such the withdrawal of foreign forces only applied to those fighting on the Republican side.²⁷ The International Brigades were finally disbanded in October 1938.²⁸ The Spanish Civil War dragged on for several more months, during which the Republican forces remained on the defensive. On 1 April 1939

²⁴ R. Baxell, 'Myths of the International Brigades', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 91, 1-2 (2014) 11-24, 12.

²⁵ R. Baxell, *British Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: The British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939* (London 2004), 20.

In the United Kingdom joining the International Brigades was forbidden with an extension to the Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870. Previously the act did not apply to volunteers. This extension was added in February 1937.

²⁶ A. Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War* (London 1982), 109-116.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 240-241.

²⁸ Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 113.

Franco proclaimed victory in a radio speech. This date is generally accepted as the end of the war, although small pockets of resistance continued to exist afterwards.²⁹

1.2. Historical background – The British volunteers

Who were the British volunteers? Where did they come from and what drove them? The total number of British volunteers on the Republican side of the war is regularly put by historians at ca. 2,400.³⁰ However, it is problematic to give an exact number. The CPGB kept very detailed accounts of the recruitment process. There are, however, many documents missing and various issues exist with the documents that did survive. For example, records often contain clerical errors such as phonetic spelling or imprecise handwriting. This resulted in contradictory and sometimes plainly unreliable information. In addition, not all British volunteers went through the recruitment process of the CPGB in the first place. Mortality data is also notoriously unreliable. Brigadiers did not always carry documents that could be used for identification and in the chaos of the war bodies of fallen comrades were not always recovered. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for Brigadiers to use pseudonyms. There were multiple reasons for this. Enlistment in the Brigades was made illegal for British nationals in February 1937. It was also common for Jewish volunteers to Anglicize their surnames in order to hide their origins. This was for instance the case with Sam Russell, who was born as Mannasasah Lesser in London.³¹ Lastly, not all British volunteers fought in the British Battalion. The estimate of ca. 2,400 is the result of elaborate research of many records of various sources by historians.³²

Although there is data on the geographic origins of the British volunteers, this is also plagued by the same aforementioned issues. Many of the archive entries are

²⁹ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 272-273.

Although the Spanish Communist Party abandoned its armed struggle in 1948, the last group of guerilla fighters was not defeated until 1960.

³⁰ Baxell, 'Myths of the International Brigades', 11.

'Volunteers', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/content/volunteers>, retrieved 26-06-16.

M. Hughes, 'The British Battalion of the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39', *The RUSI Journal* 143, 2 (1998) 59-74, 60-61.

S. Jackson, 'The British International Brigades as Labour Party Dissidents', *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 18, 1 (2005) 3-21, 3.

³¹ 'Sam Russell obituary', <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/11/sam-russell-obituary>, retrieved 05-06-16.

³² Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 19-21.

vague or simply incorrect. While addresses were listed, the documents do not make clear if this was the place of birth, residence of the volunteer, or residence of the next of kin. Historians have been able to clarify most issues by comparing documents from various sources. In this regard the opening of the Moscow State Archives has been of great importance. Shown in figure 3 is regional distribution of volunteers in percentages.³³ There are a few things that need clarification. Firstly, the figure also includes Irish volunteers. Although these form a small minority in the data, this means that the figure is not completely accurate. Despite this the figure accurately displays the proportions of the geographical origins of the British volunteers. As such it can still be used to illustrate the data. Secondly, it is necessary to note that this data is skewed by the location of the major British cities. The North-west section includes Liverpool and Manchester, the Southeast section includes London and the Scotland section includes Edinburgh and Glasgow. Another issue with the data arises from the fact that many volunteers who came to London from other areas of the United Kingdom gave a temporary London address on their documents.³⁴

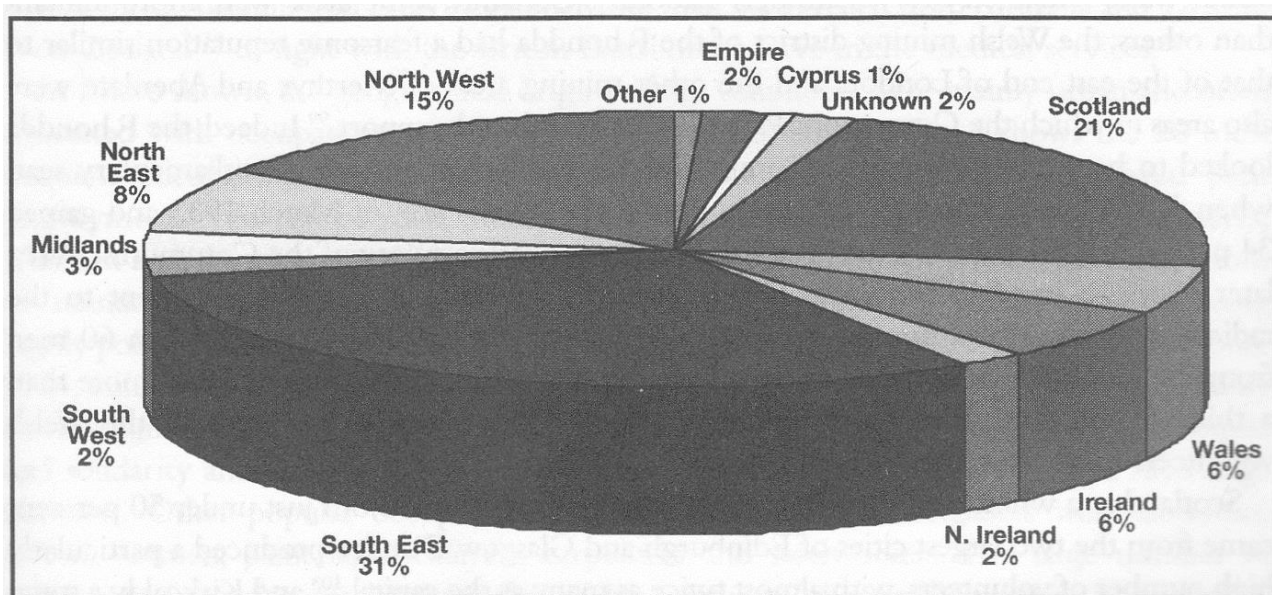


Figure 3: Overview of regional distribution of volunteers.

It seems that the vast majority of British volunteers had a communist background. Of those who gave their political affiliation when signing up for the

³³ Source of diagram: Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 25.

³⁴ Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 25-26.

Brigades, nearly 75 per cent were members of the CPGB. It is important to note that the actual number may have been even higher as volunteers often chose to hide their affiliation out of fear of being singled out when captured by the enemy. Party membership was not mandatory for volunteers going through the recruitment process of the CPGB. However, it does appear that being a party member did have some advantages as many of the rank and file members who volunteered were recent recruits. This was for instance the case for David Lomon, a Jewish volunteer from London. He joined the party in order to get to Spain and resigned his membership and joined the Labour Party instead when he returned to the United Kingdom in 1938. Unlike in other battalions there appears to have been little pressure on Brigadiers to join the CPGB once in Spain.³⁵ Members of the Labour Party formed the second-largest political group amongst volunteers. Although the party itself had supported the British government's policy of non-intervention, many of its members had disagreed with this choice. A rather limited number of volunteers belonged to the Independent Labour Party (ILP), though this low number could possibly be explained by the mistrust that existed between ILP and CPGB members. Most of the ILP volunteers did not serve in the British Battalion, but were instead attached to various militias or medical units.³⁶ Author George Orwell belonged to this latter group and famously fought in the left-wing POUM militia.³⁷ As a result of ideological differences between volunteers who fought in militias like the POUM and those who fought in the International Brigades, the commemoration of the former developed along a different path.

Nearly half of the British volunteers had undergone some sort of military training before joining the Brigades. There were major differences in training between individual volunteers. While some had served in the British Army in the First World War, others had not even once fired a weapon. One persistent belief regarding the Brigades as a whole has been that volunteers were all young idealistic men, often from well-off backgrounds, who were rushed into war without any proper training. While this was in fact true for the early days of the conflict, before the Comintern involvement, it needs to be noted that from October 1936 onwards volunteers from

³⁵ Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 14-15.

Baxell, 'Myths of the International Brigades', 14.

³⁶ Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 15.

³⁷ The *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM) was a Spanish communist party which had been formed in a fusion of the Trotskyist *Izquierda Comunista de España* and the *Bloc Obrer i Camperol* in 1935.

wider backgrounds found their way to Spain. Based on research historians have been able to establish that the average age of volunteers was 29.³⁸ There are issues with this estimation however. The age of volunteers played a major role in the recruitment process. Volunteers under the age of 18 were highly discouraged from joining in the early period of the conflict. From February 1937 onwards they were not even accepted at all. Underage volunteers who by this time were already in Spain, were either sent home or transferred to duties away from the frontline. There are several instances known of volunteers who lied about their age to avoid being sent home. For instance Michael Patton and John Longstaff claimed to be 19, but were in reality only 17. As such this data is not fully reliable.³⁹ In addition, while the majority of the early volunteers were from well-off backgrounds, it needs to be noted that this group was more likely to write about their experiences. The CPGB was also eager to use these writings to further their cause, thereby skewing the overall image of the volunteers.⁴⁰

As noted previously, the British volunteers were amongst the first non-Spanish nationals to fight in the Spanish Civil War. When the war broke out on 17 July 1936 a small group of left-wing Britons were already in Spain for the so-called *People's Olympiad*. This event was organized in Barcelona by the Spanish government as a protest against the 1936 Olympic Games, which were held in Berlin. The left-wing government boycotted these games and decided to organize their own international event. Of the ca. 6000 athletes who had traveled to Spain for the *People's Olympiad* some 200 decided to stay and fight for the Republic after the outbreak of the war.⁴¹ There were several British volunteers in this group.⁴²

Barcelona was held by the Republic in the early days of the war and as a result of this became a major gathering ground for British volunteers. It also was here that British volunteers first organized themselves in August 1936 in the so-called *Tom Mann Centuria*, named after the Roman military unit of ca. 100 men. Other British volunteers fought as part of French, German or Spanish groups. On 12 October 1936 the Spanish government formally ordered the formation of the International Brigades. The *Tom Mann Centuria* fought as part of the German *Thälman Battalion* in the Siege

³⁸ Baxell, 'Myths of the International Brigades', 13.

³⁹ Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 24.

⁴⁰ T. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge 1997) 126.

⁴¹ 'Refugees arrive in France', *The Manchester Guardian* 25-07-1936, p. 17.

⁴² T. Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain: War, Loss and Memory* (Eastbourne 2007), 3.

of Madrid until early December 1936.⁴³ Around Christmas of that year the number of British volunteers in Spain was deemed to have grown enough for the group to warrant the formation of its own British Battalion, which fought as part of the XVth International Brigade.

The International Brigades were often used as shocktroops and as a result of this suffered heavy casualties. The British Battalion was no exception in this regard. Its first major engagement came at Jarama in February 1937. This was followed by action at Brunete, Aragon, Teruel and lastly at the Ebro.

Although the Brigades were formally disbanded in October 1938, as a result of bureaucratic issues the vast majority of British volunteers did not leave Spain until early December. A group of ca. 300 volunteers arrived by train at London's Victoria Station on 7 December. They were welcomed by a large crowd, which also included major figures from the Labour movement such as Labour Party leader Clement Attlee and Communist MP Willie Gallacher. Several volunteers had however remained in Nationalist prisons and would not return home until months later.⁴⁴

A key moment for many British volunteers was the creation of the *International Brigades Association* (IBA) in March 1939. Its founding members believed it to be necessary to formally organize the returned Brigadiers in order to protect the legacy of the movement. Following the return of the Brigadiers in late 1938, political groups had been formed which used the events from Spain to further their cause. Amongst these groups was the *International Brigade League* (ABL), a small organization consisting of anti-communist activists. Members of the ABL had been very vocal about their experiences in Spain and their version of events had been well received by the right-wing and Catholic press. While there were several local veteran organizations which opposed this point of view, a national organization of the sorts did not yet exist. The IBA was not founded specifically as a counter force to the ABL, but fears of other groups using the legacy of the Brigades also played a large role. At the founding of the IBA Tom Wintringham, a former commander of the British Battalion, gave a speech in which he argued that the IBA needed to be a fully independent organization, not connected to 'any political person or organization'. Similar sentiments could also be found in the IBA's constitution, which stated the organization's goals as follows:

⁴³ Baxell, *British Volunteers*, 51-55.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 114.

*To carry on in Britain the spirit and tradition of the International Brigade as front-line fighters for the defence and advance of democracy against Fascism; for the rapid development of common action and purpose among all anti-fascist people; to spread the truth about the struggle of the people, army and government of Republican Spain and to win all necessary support for the Spanish Republic. By this and other activities, to honour the immortal memory of those who fell in Spain.*⁴⁵

Although the IBA was intended to be independent, within a short period of its founding it became closely connected with the CPGB. It is unclear how this happened exactly. Membership for the IBA was restricted to the ca. 2000 surviving British volunteers. There is not a lot of data regarding membership figures. From what is available it seems that the vast majority of these surviving volunteers did not join the IBA.⁴⁶ Wintringham most likely alluded to the CPGB in his speech (he had left the party himself in 1938 following years of tensions), but there is no material suggesting a takeover of the IBA by the CPGB. Considering that Wintringham was not active in the IBA in the following years, it appears that he left the organization rather quickly. Based on the previously discussed political background of volunteers, it seems likely that the majority of the IBA's members were communists at the organization's founding. Despite the rhetoric, the IBA was closely connected with the CPGB from its founding.

⁴⁵ T. Buchanan, 'Holding the Line: The Political Strategy of the International Brigades Association', *Labour History Review* 66, 3 (2001), 294-312, 295.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 295-296.

1.3. Remembering during the Spanish Civil War

This section of the chapter discusses the various forms in which commemoration took place in the United Kingdom. The main question it answers is as follows: How did commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades develop during the first time period of commemoration? It first looks at personal accounts by Brigadiers. This is followed by an analysis of monuments and memorial services. As noted previously, this thesis uses the extensive lists maintained by the IBMT of published personal accounts by volunteers. Unfortunately as a consequence of the limitations of this MA thesis I have not been able to obtain all nine works listed by the IBMT for this period. I am of the opinion that the seven works that I was able to obtain do provide a clear view of the accounts.

1.3.1. Personal accounts

As noted previously, the first personal accounts by Brigadiers were published in 1936, but activity significantly increased in mid 1937. This development can be attributed to the fact that British volunteers first returned home following the Nationalist offensive at Madrid. These early accounts reflected the aforementioned composition of the volunteers in the early period of the war.

Esmond Romilly was arguably the archetype of the young idealistic volunteer from a well-off family. He came from an aristocratic family, but did not care much for this upbringing. This was much to the disappointment of Winston Churchill, who was Romilly's uncle through marriage to the sister of Romilly's mother. At a young age Romilly had already rebelled against his family. Together with his brother Giles (who later also joined the International Brigades) he refused to take part in the Officer's Training Corps at Wellington College and eventually ran away from the school altogether. Romilly's behavior was eagerly reported on by the press for which the link with Winston Churchill made the whole affair rather scandalous.⁴⁷ As a result of his background Romilly was often highlighted in the coverage of events in Spain by the

⁴⁷ "Out of Bounds", Schoolboys at Hyde Park Demonstration', *The Manchester Guardian* 16-04-1934, p. 18.

press.⁴⁸ Romilly was one of the first British volunteers in Spain and fought in a British group as part of the German *Thälmann Battalion*. He was the sole survivor of this group after it was caught up in heavy combat in the Nationalist offensive at Madrid in December 1936. Romilly contracted dysentery and returned home. There he married socialite Jessica Mitford and wrote down his experiences in Spain during his honeymoon in May 1937.⁴⁹ His work *Boadilla* was one of the first published personal accounts by British volunteers. Romilly claimed to have only had the intention of giving an unbiased account of events, but this claim is questionable. Although the work was written in a frank manner, it also served to commemorate the volunteers of the group the author had served with. The book was after all named after the town where these men fell.⁵⁰ The frankness with which *Boadilla* was written, was representative of the early accounts of the war. This was for instance also true for *Single to Spain*, which detailed the experiences of British volunteer Keith Watson.⁵¹ Both works describe the events from an anti-fascist perspective, but without a clear allegiance to a political group. Romilly was particularly frank in this regard:

*I met Keith at lunch. We had a few friends in common in London. 'Are you one of the faithful?' he asked me. 'Faithful? How do you mean?' 'Member of the Communist Party, I mean, you know, see the holy light.' I told him I belonged to the Labour Party. 'It's religion you know,' he went on. 'You'll have enough of it in the next few weeks.' [...]'*⁵²

Both Romilly and Watson describe the chaos of the war and the amateurism of the volunteers in the early period. Romilly for instance notes that he feared of being of little use in Spain because he did not even know how to load a rifle.⁵³ Watson highlighted the contrast between the professional African troops of Franco and the Brigadiers:

⁴⁸ 'Franco Reorganizing His Forces; Awaits His Contingent of Germans', *The New York Times* 27-12-1936, p. 1.

⁴⁹ E. Romilly, *Boadilla* (London 1937).

⁵⁰ *Boadilla* refers to the town of Boadilla del Monte near Madrid.

⁵¹ K.C. Watson, *Single to Spain* (London 1937).

⁵² Romilly, *Boadilla*, 62.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 32-33.

The word went round: “les Marocains!” The Moors were coming! The dead woman on the bed, their legendary cruelty, “shoot yourself first before capture” - it all flashed through my mind.⁵⁴

The start of the Comintern involvement marked a key moment in the war, as well as in the publication of personal accounts. Although Romilly and Watson were anti-fascists, their accounts were written without any allegiance to a political organization. After the Comintern involvement accounts were published which were either in favor or against the CPGB. An early example which reflected this politicization of accounts was the work by Scottish volunteer Robert Martin, which was published in the magazine *Controversy* in September 1937.⁵⁵ Martin described his experiences in Spain in a manner highly critical of the CPGB and the Soviet Union. His account emphasizes role of the CPGB in the recruitment process. It also goes in detail on the difficult relations between anarchists and communists in Spain, noting how on several occasions there were warnings for anarchists, despite there being no real basis for them as a threat. The work is well summarized in one of its final paragraphs:

This had been a bitterly disappointing experience. I went to Spain as a worker to fight the fascists. I responded to the appeal of the Communists. Instead of enabling me to fight the fascists, the Communists put me in prison. I must say the treatment I received might have been expected from fascists, but I never expected it from Communists. My only offence was that I protested against the differentiation of treatment between men and officers in what was supposed to be a workers' army.⁵⁶

It needs to be noted that there is no information available on Robert Martin after this account. The publication offered only a short biography, which described him as a 'politically unaffiliated socialist who went to fight in Spain'. As noted previously, not every volunteer returned home as convinced of the cause as when they had left. Martin is not described in any other accounts or in works following this period. It is therefore quite possible that this account was in fact written under a pseudonym.

⁵⁴ Watson, *Single to Spain*, 125-126.

⁵⁵ R. Martin, 'With the International Brigade', *Worker's Liberty* November 1995, p. 28-30, originally published in *Controversy* September 1937.

⁵⁶ Martin, *Ibidem*, 30.

There are similar issues regarding the author of the pamphlet *In Spain with the International Brigade*, which was published in 1938.⁵⁷ This publication was also highly critical of the CPGB, as well as communist parties in the rest of Europe. The author defended the anonymous nature of his writing with the argument that he was forced to do so as a result of his criticism of the events in Spain. It is very much possible that the author belonged to either the ABL or a similar organization. The pamphlet was published by the Catholic publishing house Burns & Oates and uses language rarely used by leftist activists. The author for instance argues that he was misled and that he found himself fighting for a Bolshevik state. This term originated in Russian politics and refers to a faction which formed within the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1903. This faction left the party in 1912 and would eventually be renamed to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1952. The use of 'Bolshevik' as a derogatory term originated in the Russian Civil War and the German Revolution of 1918-1919. Although the main party in the Soviet Union was named the *All-Union Communist Party (bolsheviks)* between 1925 and 1952, the term was used in the rest of the world mostly as a derogatory term. Certainly not how a strong believer in communism would refer to himself.

Although Comintern involvement in the war began in October 1936, the first accounts with clear links to the Comintern were not published until 1938. In February of that year an official account of the English speaking members of the International Brigades was compiled and edited by Irish communist Frank Ryan and published by the Spanish Ministry of War in Madrid.⁵⁸ Ryan led the *Conolly Column*, an Irish group which fought alongside the British Battalion in the XVth Brigade. The account was argued to not be an official history of the Brigade as the volunteers were 'as yet too busy making history'.⁵⁹ Despite this claim, the account can in fact be regarded as an official history up to that point. As such the *Book of the XV Brigade* presented the reader with a good view of how the command of the Brigades wished to portray the Brigades. It placed great emphasis on the heroic nature of the conflict and the sacrifice by volunteers.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Anon., *In Spain with the International Brigade* (London 1938).

⁵⁸ F. Ryan, ed., *Book of the XV Brigade: Records of British, American, Canadian, and Irish volunteers in the XV International Brigade in Spain, 1936-1938* (Madrid 1938).

⁵⁹ *Ibidem* 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem* 10.

As far as the Brigadiers were concerned, the struggle against fascism did not end with their withdrawal from Spain in late 1938. Volunteers remained active in their support for the Spanish cause through organizations such as the IBA. The close links between the IBA and the CPGB were also reflected in the published accounts. This was most visible in *David Guest: A Scientist Fights for Freedom*, which was a memorial for a fallen Brigadier. It was written and compiled by Carmel Guest after the death of her son in 1938. The work included writings by Guest as well as testimonies by those who knew him. The close connection with the CPGB was very apparent in the fact that CPGB secretary Harry Pollitt wrote the foreword. David Guest was presented as a martyr for communism and the struggle against fascism. The account was a reflection of the aforementioned eagerness by the CPGB to use the experiences of well-off volunteers to further their political goals. Guest was the son of Labour MP Leslie Haden-Guest and had enjoyed a privileged upbringing.⁶¹ He had studied at Trinity College in Cambridge and had left a position as a lecturer of mathematics at University College in Southampton to volunteer in Spain in March 1938. Just three months later he was killed at the battle of the Ebro. Guest had been in Spain for a relatively short period of time. As such it was unsurprising that the account by his mother did not include too much information on his time in Spain. Rather, the book was written in a very deterministic fashion, starting with the dramatic death of Guest and then painting the picture of his early childhood:

He joined them and in the great offensive on the Ebro last summer, David was at his observation post and was killed. And so passed from our ranks a comrade, who as he lay dying said:

“Never mind me . . . carry on . . . get the men up the hill . . .”⁶²

I can recall many incidents of my short periods of leave in England; an old woman trudging up a hill in Hythe with a heavy bundle on her back, and an insistent little boy going up to her and offering to carry her load that was almost as big as himself. [..]⁶³

⁶¹ 'M.P.'s son killed in Spain', *The Manchester Guardian* 08-08-1938, p. 12.

⁶² C.H. Guest, ed., *David Guest: A Scientist Fights for Freedom* (London 1939), 14-15.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 23.

Although the influence of the CPGB on the commemoration increased in the later period of the war, it could not be argued that they took over the commemoration completely. Tom Wintringham, former commander of the British Battalion, for instance published his experiences from Spain in 1939.⁶⁴ His account rather resembled the early account by Romilly, although, as a result of Wintringham's military background, it went into greater detail on the aspect of military strategy. The account by Wintringham reflected his stance at the founding of the IBA, when he argued for the need of an organization which was anti-fascist, but at the same time fully independent. Although he had left the CPGB in the year before publication of his experiences, there does not seem to have been any criticism of the party in his book. It served to commemorate the volunteers who gave their life in the conflict, rather than to choose sides in the commemoration.

1.3.2. Monuments and memorial services

As noted previously, the number of monuments constructed during the first wave of commemoration was rather limited. Before the founding of the IBA, there had been no nation-wide group which represented the Brigadiers. This does not mean that no commemoration took place in this period. There were initiatives by the CPGB to use the events in Spain to further their political goals. Writer Ralph Fox was the first prominent British communist to die in the war, doing so in January 1937. His death was publicized for several days in the party's newspaper the *Daily Worker*, a memorial meeting was held and a fund was established in his memory. The same happened a short period later when writer and poet John Cornford fell in the war, although his death was somewhat overshadowed by that of Fox. The CPGB held a large memorial service at the party congress in September 1938, during which all fallen volunteers were commemorated. The party also organized a rally in Aberdeen in commemoration of five local volunteers who had died in the conflict. There was a large rally at the Empress Hall in London in January 1939, when ca. 9,000 people commemorated the fallen British volunteers. This was followed by a nation-wide tour of Brigadiers. However, the frequency of this type of events significantly declined

⁶⁴ T. Wintringham, *English Captain* (London 1939).

after the return of the majority of the volunteers. In July 1939 money was raised by the IBA and the CPGB for disabled volunteers in the so-called 'Debt of Honour' weeks. This proved to be the last large-scale event. With the war in Spain at its end, the public was no longer interested in the Brigades. This became painfully clear when a 'National Memorial Fund' did not attract a fraction of the intended donations. The initial goal of £50,000 in September 1938 was scaled down several times and eventually only a fifth of this was collected by July 1939.⁶⁵

The CPGB and the IBA focused on immaterial forms of commemoration. The four monuments that were constructed in this period were mostly done through private initiatives. This was for instance true for a plaque in commemoration of Lewis Clive. He came from a well-off family, which held a prominent place in the village of Wormbridge. After his death at the Ebro in August 1938 a memorial plaque was placed next to similar plaques which commemorated other family members.⁶⁶

1.4. Conclusion

The first time period of commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades started with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and ended with the outbreak of the Second World War. Volunteers had fought in Spain from the outbreak of the war, but their numbers significantly increased after the Comintern set up a system which aided potential volunteers in their journey to Spain. The image of the volunteers as young, idealist and untrained men from well-off backgrounds holds some truth, but this applied mostly to the early period of the war. After the Comintern involvement the background of the volunteers became much more diverse. Of the ca. 2,400 British volunteers it is estimated that some 75 per cent were CPGB members. Exact numbers cannot be given as records often contain errors or are missing. The demographic change of the volunteers was also reflected in the publication of personal accounts. Early works were not as closely connected to the CPGB and the Comintern as later works. Themes such as an anti-fascist message and the commemoration of fallen volunteers continued to be used, although other themes such

⁶⁵ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 135-137.

⁶⁶ 'Memorials', <http://www.wormbridgeandstdevereux.co.uk/Memorials.htm>, retrieved 07-06-16.
'Wormbridge', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/content/wormbridge>, retrieved 07-06-16.

as loyalty to the party and an emphasis on fallen volunteers as martyrs of the anti-fascist struggle became prominent. The growing communist influence was also reflected in the immaterial commemoration. Although the IBA was founded as an independent organization, it was closely connected to the CPGB from the beginning. Both the CPGB and IBA focused on memorial services rather than on constructed monuments. The overall number of monuments constructed in the first time period was very limited and mostly done through private initiatives. Activity declined in both material and immaterial commemoration in significant ways after the return of the British volunteers in December 1938.

Chapter Two: The Second World War, Cold War and Détente

This chapter discusses the second time period of commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades. This period began with the outbreak of the Second World War on 1 September 1939 and lasted until the death of Francisco Franco on 20 November 1975. Within this period two waves of activity can be distinguished. The first of these was closely connected to the rising tensions between the Western and Eastern Bloc during the early period of the Cold War. It is problematic to precisely date the beginning of this wave, as the beginning of the Cold War itself remains a point of debate amongst historians.⁶⁷ Rather than engaging in this debate, this thesis uses the end of the Second World War (2 September 1945) as the beginning of the wave. The end of the first wave is easier to pinpoint as it was closely connected to the Soviet Intervention in Hungary in October and November 1956. The second wave is also difficult to date precisely as it was not connected to any major events, but rather a consequence of the advanced age of former Brigadiers. It took place between ca. 1970 and November 1975.

Characteristic for the second time period is the difference in the personal accounts published during the first wave of activity and those published during the second wave. As noted previously, those published during the first wave were closely connected to the rising tensions of the early period of the Cold War. These accounts were highly politicized, speaking out either in favor of communism or denouncing it completely. Such politicization was much less present in the works published during the second wave, when authors wrote down their experiences not for political reasons, but in order to tell their stories before they passed away.

The first section of this chapter discusses the historical background of the International Brigades in the second time period. It chronologically discusses the events in both Britain and the rest of the world which were of influence on the commemoration of the Brigades. The main question answered in this section is as follows: How did the Second World War and the rise and ebb of the Cold War influence the commemoration of the International Brigades? The second section of

⁶⁷ American historian John Lewis Gaddis is widely considered to be the leading expert on the Cold War. His work holds an important place in the debate. See: J.L. Gaddis, *We Know Now: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford 1997).

this chapter discusses the commemoration of the International Brigades in Great Britain. The main question answered is as follows: How did commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades develop during the second time period of commemoration? This is achieved through a chronological analysis of personal accounts, monuments and memorial services.

2.1. Historical background – The Second World War

How did the Second World War influence the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades? Soon after its founding the IBA had become closely connected to the CPGB. This was both a blessing and a curse for the organization. Although it had access to the network of the party, this close association also meant that the IBA could not operate independently from the CPGB. Actions by the IBA, such as political campaigns, had the intention of furthering the party's political goals.⁶⁸ The connection was very visible in the fact that the IBA followed the party line on political matters. This was for instance true for the non-aggression pact of August 1939 between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Former Brigadiers believed that the war in Spain was only the first stage of a greater struggle against fascism. This put them in a precarious position when the Soviet Union and Germany unexpectedly agreed to not fight each other. The position of the CPGB and the IBA became even more problematic in September 1939 after the declaration of war on Germany by the United Kingdom following the German invasion of Poland. The CPGB leadership initially declared its support for the war, but a few weeks later reversed its position following instructions to do so from Moscow. The war was argued to be 'imperialist and unjust'. CPGB secretary Pollitt resigned over this change of course, but eventually recanted, explaining his initial reaction as a consequence of the personal responsibility he had felt to the sacrifice of the fallen Brigadiers.⁶⁹

The CPGB and the IBA were isolated even further when the Soviet Union declared war on Finland on 30 November 1939, a conflict which became known as the Winter War. The case of a small nation standing up against a powerful neighbor

⁶⁸ Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 294.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 179.

led many to draw comparisons with the Spanish Civil War. The IBA responded to this by sending out a letter urging former Brigadiers to speak out against these comparisons. It also condemned the Labour Party for its support of Finland. Emphasis was placed on the condemnation of Clement Attlee, who held a special place for many former Brigadiers as a result of his support for the Brigades. Once the Labour Party leader had a company in the Brigades named after him, now the IBA wished to have nothing to do with him.⁷⁰ The British government's policy of non-intervention during the Spanish Civil War had drawn heavy criticism. As Finland held its ground against the Soviets, pressure grew on the government to not repeat this mistake. By January 1940 the British government sent out aircraft, ambulances and munitions to the cost of £ 15,000 to Finland.⁷¹ In early March 1940 a small contingent of British volunteers under command of Kermit Roosevelt, son of former US president Theodore Roosevelt, was sent to the north of Finland.⁷² In the spirit of the Brigades this small group sought to fight for Finland, but the war ended before they arrived at their destination.⁷³

Not all former Brigadiers were affiliated with the IBA or the CPGB. Perhaps the best known of these volunteers was Tom Wintringham, the former commander of the British Battalion. After being wounded twice he had returned to the United Kingdom in October 1937 and eventually wrote down his experiences in Spain. Like many other former Brigadiers Wintringham had believed that the war in Spain was the first part of a greater struggle against fascism. After his return to the United Kingdom Wintringham argued that the country needed to prepare itself for this war. In his view a people's army, styled after the International Brigades, would form an essential component of the British defense in the case of a German attack.⁷⁴ Such ideas were not uncommon in the early days of the war, though there were differing views about the exact implementation. In May 1940 the British government called for volunteers to join the so-called 'Local Defense Volunteers', an organization which would later become the Home Guard.⁷⁵ Wintringham saw this as an opportunity to get

⁷⁰ Ibidem, 180.

⁷¹ E. Roberts, 'The Spanish Precedent: British Volunteers in the Russo-Finnish War', *History Australia* 3, 1 (2006), 7.1-7.14, 7.2.

⁷² P.W. Doer, 'Frigid but Unprovocative': British Policy towards the USSR from the Nazi-Soviet Pact to the Winter War, 1939', *Journal of Contemporary History* 36, 3 (2001), 423-439, 438.

⁷³ Roberts, 'The Spanish Precedent', 2-6.

⁷⁴ H. Purcell, 'Tom Wintringham: Revolutionary Patriot', *History Today* 54, 10 (2004), 11-17, 13.

⁷⁵ The Home Guard was a defense organization within the British Army from 1940 to 1944. It was composed of those who were too young or too old to serve in the regular branches of the military. It

his concept of a people's army realized. He organized a media campaign and through contacts with MPs he was able to set up a private training facility in late May and early June at Osterley Park, a mansion near London the use of which was granted to Wintringham by its owner George Child Villiers, the 9th Earl of Jersey. There Wintringham assembled a rather colorful crew to train volunteers. This crew included former Brigadiers, other veterans from Spain and famously the artist Roland Penrose who used his skills to teach camouflage. The activities at Osterley Park were met with a mixed reception. The training itself was regarded as useful. For instance in a debate on the Home Guard in November 1940 Labour MP Frederick Bellenger argued that too much of the training consisted of ceremonial drills. He pointed at the guerilla tactics taught at Osterley Park as an example of how training should be done nationwide.⁷⁶ The British government, however, viewed Osterley Park with increasing distrust. In late 1940 the government took over the facility and slowly replaced its leading figures.⁷⁷ Wintringham accused the government of undermining the activities at Osterley Park and eventually resigned in June 1941, claiming that he could “do more to help the Home Guard and the country by criticizing foolish War Office policy than by carrying on his Osterley work.”⁷⁸

The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 ended the isolation of the CPGB and the IBA. Both organizations embraced the idea of the war as a continuation of the Spanish Civil War and argued for the need to learn from the experiences in Spain. For instance Peter Kerrigan, former political commissar of the British Battalion and member of both the CPGB and the IBA, argued in January 1942 that the British government needed to remove appeasers from its ranks, much like how the Spanish government had done with 'pro-fascists' several years earlier. Comparisons were also drawn with the Spanish Civil War on military matters. The need to open up a second front on the European continent was compared by Kerrigan

also included those who served the country in occupations vital to the war effort. As a result of this it was often nicknamed 'Dad's Army'. The BBC broadcasted a popular television sitcom with this name from 1968 to 1977.

⁷⁶ 'Home Guard's Future Role', *The Manchester Guardian* 20-11-1940, p. 7.

⁷⁷ Purcell, 'Tom Wintringham', 16.

'Our London Correspondence: Our Opportunity', *The Manchester Guardian* 23-06-1941, p. 4.

The leadership at Osterley Park was replaced through various administrative measures. For example Hugh Slater, former Chief of Staff in the Brigades, and Roland Penrose were both called for military service.

⁷⁸ 'Our London Correspondence: Our Opportunity', *The Manchester Guardian* 23-06-1941, p. 4.

with the Republican offensive at the Ebro of 1938.⁷⁹ The events of the Second World War soon however eclipsed the Spanish Civil War. The memory of the war remained with the former Brigadiers, while the general public in Britain had more urgent matters to attend to. The neutrality of the Spanish State also meant that despite the political campaigns by the IBA, the overthrow of Franco was not a possible war-aim.⁸⁰

2.2. Historical Background – From Cold War to Détente

How did the rise and ebb of the Cold War influence the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades? Historian Tom Buchanan argues that the memory of the 1930's and the Spanish Civil War were influential factors in the electoral victory by the Labour Party in July 1945. He pointed out that, for instance, the *Daily Herald* ran the headline 'A Vote for Churchill is a Vote for Franco'. The paper also urged readers to question the 'friendly attitude' by Churchill's government with regard to the Spanish State.⁸¹ It seems however that for the general public the memory of the Spanish Civil War was not of major influence. Although the events from the 1930's certainly played a role in the election, it was mostly the policy of appeasement by the Conservative Party, rather than the policy of non-intervention in Spain that influenced voting.⁸² The CPGB and the IBA attempted to capitalize on the Labour Party's electoral success by connecting it with their political campaigns for Spain, arguing that they had laid the basis for the defeat of the Conservative Party at the ballot-box. However, there was no proof to substantiate this claim both at the time and in later research by historians.⁸³ Also, this did not result in any influence of the CPGB on Labour policy.

As noted previously, the IBA did not have many members. There is barely any data on actual numbers, but historians have been able to establish that in 1946 there were just 376 full members and 159 associate members. Most of these were based in either London or Glasgow, giving the organization only a strong regional presence,

⁷⁹ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 183.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 184.

⁸² S. Fielding, 'What Did 'the People' Want?: The Meaning of the 1945 General Election', *The Historical Journal* 35, 3 (1992), 623-639, 625-626.

⁸³ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 184.

rather than the intended national one. As a consequence of their low membership the IBA had very limited resources. This translated in a policy which only devoted resources to those 'worthy' of support. IBA secretary Nan Green noted in 1946 that there was "a handful of no-goods who drift round the country and try to get help from the I.B. In every town where they land."⁸⁴ Given the close relationship between the IBA and the CPGB, this case of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' former Brigadiers is an interesting matter. Its origins go back to the founding of the organization when there had been political tensions between returned volunteers over communism and the role of the Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War. It does need to be noted that although the IBA did expel members who were at odds with the leadership of the organization, there were also former Brigadiers who tried to take advantage of the network of support offered by the IBA.⁸⁵ Therefore, although at first sight it seems probable that the IBA simply removed those deviating from the party line from the organization, the reality was in fact more complex.

In the years following the Second World War the close connection between the IBA and the CPGB continued to exist. This isolated the IBA, as the organization found it difficult to combine the support of the party line with political campaigns against Spain. Support of the CPGB also put the IBA at odds with its own members. This was for instance the case in 1948 when tensions rose between Tito's Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Yugoslavian former Brigadiers in a letter called upon the IBA to back their position. At its annual general meeting in 1949 the IBA voted in favor of a resolution which pointed out that the Soviet Union had been "the most consistent friend of the Spanish people" and which also declared that the IBA would not align itself with "traitors and enemies of socialism and democracy". Members from the IBA's Glasgow branch protested against this resolution, noting that the Yugoslavian letter had not been circulated before the vote on the resolution. They also protested against the condemnation of fellow former Brigadiers as traitors, arguing that doing so would not be beneficial to the cause. Tensions rose to the point where George Murray, secretary of the Glasgow branch, resigned from the IBA. Murray was later also expelled from the CPGB over his political views.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 137.

⁸⁵ Buchanan, *Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 138; Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 298.

⁸⁶ Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 304.

The resignation of Murray came at a difficult time for the IBA. He had held the position of secretary for several years and as such activities by the IBA in Glasgow were hampered. At the same time former Brigadier Hamish Fraser was setting up a 'Friends of Spain' branch in the city. This was a small-scale group which advocated closer relations with Spain. Fraser had joined the Brigades, but after his return turned away from communism and converted to Catholicism.⁸⁷ Such rather extreme shifts of political views were not entirely uncommon amongst volunteers. 'Friends of Spain' had been established during the Spanish Civil War, but never reached the level of support it had enjoyed before the Second World War. As such it hampered the actions by the IBA, but could not pose a serious threat.

In the post-war years the IBA supported anti-Franco guerillas with both political campaigns as well as through the raising of funds in support of their actions. The Spanish Communist Party abandoned the military struggle in 1948 after it suffered years of heavy casualties fighting Franco's forces.⁸⁸ This prompted the IBA to also change its tactics and instead focus on campaigns in support of political prisoners in Spain. This included sponsoring lawyers and sending observers to trials. The success of these efforts varied. For instance, the Spanish communist activist Gregorio Lopez Raimundo was released after a trial which was attended by an observer sent by the IBA. The organization had also sent petitions to the Spanish embassy and organized protests. The release of the Raimundo was most likely also influenced by a desire of the Spanish government to return to a position of international respectability in the early 1950's.⁸⁹ The IBA's involvement in cases was not always appreciated. There were various instances in which those representing prisoners complained about the IBA's involvement, arguing that it was not in the best interest of their defendant. The Trade Union Congress also condemned the IBA's efforts as exploitation in order to further their political goals at the cost of the imprisoned.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 304-305.

⁸⁸ Beevor, *The Spanish Civil War*, 272-273.

⁸⁹ Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 305.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 306.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) is a federation of trade unions in England and Wales. It represents the majority of trade unions. During its existence it has often campaigned to draw attention to the plight of workers abroad. With regard to Spain the TUC often campaigned on behalf of imprisoned union leaders.

The CPGB loyally supported the Soviet Union in the years after the Second World War. It continued to do so after the death of Stalin in March 1953 and the suppressed uprising in East Germany in June 1953. The denouncement of Stalin by Khrushchev in 1956 and the following process of De-Stalinization brought the excesses of Soviet policy to the light. This caused tensions in the CPGB as the party had previously defended the Soviet Union against such accusations. The suppression of the Hungarian uprising in October and November 1956 had disastrous consequences for the CPGB. It is estimated that between a quarter and a third of all members left the party following the events in Hungary. The party never recovered from this event and went in decline after 1956. The CPGB declined even further after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces in 1968. Internal tensions increased, dividing the party in those who supported the Soviet Union and those who supported 'Eurocommunism', a reformist movement within communist parties which emphasized the need for the development of a theory and system of social change which was more relevant for Western European countries. This also included an emphasis on independence of the Western European communist parties from the Soviet Union and its party line.

The CPGB dragged the IBA along in its decline. The organization engaged in multiple political campaigns in the 1960's and early 1970's, but faced increasing competition from other political pressure groups focusing on Spain such as Amnesty International. Overall, the IBA's efforts were negatively influenced by its close association with the CPGB. Former Brigadiers unaffiliated with the IBA but with close ties to trade unions, such as Bob Edwards, Jack Jones and Will Paynter, played important roles in organizations which had no connection with the CPGB and which thereby could count on the support of major figures in the labor movement.⁹¹ The Spanish Civil War was overshadowed by the events of the Cold War and no longer spoke to the imagination of the general public.

⁹¹ Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 306.

2.3. Remembering between 1939 and 1975

This section of the chapter discusses the various forms of commemoration which took place in the United Kingdom between 1939 and 1975. The main question it answers is as follows: How did commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades develop during the second time period of commemoration? It first looks at personal accounts by former Brigadiers. This is followed by an analysis of monuments and memorial services.

2.3.1. Personal accounts

The Second World War halted the publication of personal accounts by former Brigadiers. This was not the result of a coordinated effort of some sort. Rather, it seems likely that former Brigadiers were too busy to write down their experiences. The fact that paper was deemed vital for the war effort and as such was rationed by the British government should also not be overlooked. Personal accounts were first published again in 1948.⁹² Major differences can distinguished between the works published before and those published after the war. The political climate of the early period of the Cold War greatly influenced the works published during the first wave of activity between 1945 and 1956. Themes which tied in with this dominated the accounts. As noted previously, there was a group of former Brigadiers who made a radical shift of political views after their return from Spain. In the years immediately after the Second World War there was a large group of people who published accounts on their disillusionment with the CPGB, the Soviet Union or with communism in general.⁹³ The best known of these works was *The God That Failed*, a collection of essays by prominent disillusioned communists edited by Labour MP Richard Grossman.⁹⁴ This volume was published in 1949 and went through several printings within a short period of its publication. Similar sentiments could be found in the accounts by former Brigadiers Fred Copeman, Hamish Fraser and Stephen

⁹² The first personal account published after the Second World War was F. Copeman, *Reason in Revolt* (London 1948).

⁹³ 'Communist Ways', *The Manchester Guardian* 29-10-1948, p. 3
This article describes three works released in 1948 by disillusioned communists. It illustrates the existing trend at the time.

⁹⁴ R. Grossman, ed., *The God That Failed* (New York 1948).

Pollack.⁹⁵ All three warned the reader for the dangers of communism and what they saw as falsehoods professed by the CPGB and the Soviet Union. Much like the authors of the essays in *The God That Failed*, they defended their past actions as misguided and misled. Copeman for instance noted:

*Doubts crept into my mind. The callousness of many leading Party people to human suffering was surely not the product of my ideals. The beauty of a Communist society, as I had visualised it, surely meant that men's hearts could not harden as I had seen them do. Could goodness come from hate? Was the class war the true road to human happiness? I could not answer this. I was within myself a very unhappy man. I felt frustrated and wondered if I had been misled. [..]*⁹⁶

Copeman and Fraser lost their belief in communism shortly after their return from Spain. They both converted to Catholicism and became active in anti-communist groups.⁹⁷ There was considerable time between their disillusionment with communism and the publication of their experiences. This was different for Pollack. He had spent more than a decade in Soviet service, taking part in underground communist networks throughout Europe. It seems Pollack became disillusioned with communism only after the communist takeover of his native Czechoslovakia in 1948. Pollack settled in the United Kingdom after this.⁹⁸ In his account he warned for Soviet networks similar to the ones he had been a part of.

A sharp contrast to the accounts by disillusioned former Brigadiers was the 1954 work *Good to Be Alive: The Story of Jack Brent*. This account was sanctioned by the CPGB and written by the journalist Stanley Harrison, a member of the party. It commemorated Jack Brent who had served as secretary of the IBA from 1941 to 1943. Brent had only served in the International Brigades for a very brief period, but later became a very popular figure in the IBA and the CPGB. His first engagement of

⁹⁵ F. Copeman, *Reason in Revolt* (London 1948); H. Fraser, *The Truth About Spain* (Oxford 1949); S. Pollak, *Strange Land Behind Me* (London 1951).

The account by Douglas Hyde was also part of this trend. However, Hyde did not travel to Spain and was only associated with the Brigades through his recruiting of volunteers. As such it does not fall in the scope of this thesis. See: D. Hyde, *I Believed* (London 1950).

⁹⁶ Copeman, *Reason in Revolt*, 150.

⁹⁷ 'Force Called Futile Against Communism', *The New York Times* 14-09-1948, p. 17

⁹⁸ 'Stephen Pollak', <https://images.nationalarchives.gov.uk/assetbank-nationalarchives/action/viewAsset?id=59169>, retrieved 26-06-2016.

the war had left him paralyzed from the waist down. Despite this severe injury he had been tireless in his efforts for the IBA and the CPGB, often at the cost of his own health. His death in 1951 at the age of 39 was closely related to his wartime injury. The CPGB commissioned Harrison to compile a book in commemoration of Brent. In this regard the work was very similar to the earlier account which commemorated David Guest. The work on Brent consisted of letters sent by Brent, eyewitness accounts by those who knew him and a biographical section written by Harrison. The account glorified the fact that Brent continued his efforts despite being plagued by his wartime injury. Similar to David Guest, Brent was also described as a martyr for the cause.⁹⁹

As noted previously, the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 had disastrous consequences for the CPGB. The declining influence of the CPGB and the IBA was reflected in their lack of involvement in publication of personal accounts after the work in commemoration of Jack Brent. Throughout the late 1950's and 1960's there were no personal accounts by former Brigadiers published at all. A second wave of activity began only after the publication by Will Paynter of his experiences in 1972.¹⁰⁰ This was followed by the accounts of Jason Gurney and Richard Kisch.¹⁰¹ It was not a political event which led these former Brigadiers to have their experiences published but rather their advanced age. Paynter's experiences were published after his retirement from the position of general secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1969, Kisch wrote his at the age of 62 and Gurney's experiences were even published posthumously.

All three authors were disillusioned with communism to some extent. Of the three authors only Paynter was affiliated with the CPGB. He had left the party after a minor dispute in 1969, but rejoined a short period later. Despite this membership he spoke out against several decisions of the party, most notably its support for the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Despite this he continued to believe in the ideals of communism and remained a member of the party until his death in 1984. Paynter's account looked back at his entire life, most notably his work as a union leader for miners in Wales. The Spanish Civil War only played a minor part in his work. This

⁹⁹ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 139.

¹⁰⁰ W. Paynter, *My Generation* (London 1972).

¹⁰¹ J. Gurney, *Crusade in Spain* (London 1974); R. Kisch, *They Shall Not Pass: The Spanish People at War 1936-1939* (London 1974).

was different for both Gurney and Kisch, who wrote specifically to address issues they felt to be important. Kisch for instance noted:

*I feel myself forced to write this book for two compelling reasons. The first is that I can no longer avoid facing the fact that a political and ideological edifice which has been dear to me, and for which I, with thousands of others, have made great sacrifices, is built on feet of clay. Millions still look to Communism to answer the age-old strivings of the human race to a mode of life which ensures complete sufficiency for all, coupled with all the freedoms of the individual necessary to his happiness. It has failed to answer those strivings, and must always fail, for it to me is the very negation of freedom.*¹⁰²

Gurney's account stands out in the historiography for its frank and almost cynical writing.¹⁰³ He wrote his experiences in order to dispel what he believed to be myths about the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigades. With regard to the training of the Brigades he noted:

*We had no rifles which made the whole operation of giving covering fire to advancing groups a little absurd. But despite the rain and the mud and the general unreality of the whole thing, everybody did their best and remained fairly cheerful. It was unfortunate that we only learned to advance over open country – any other manoeuvre being considered negative in its approach to the problems of war. In the event, what we most needed to know was how to fortify a position and hold it, or how to beat an organized retreat, but neither of these things formed part of the curriculum, with disastrous results on the very first day that the Battalion was in action.*¹⁰⁴

In this regard his work contrasts with that of Kisch and Paynter, who both remained positive about the Brigades. Paynter argued about the Brigades:

¹⁰² Kisch, *They Shall Not Pass*, 7.

¹⁰³ D. Pastor García; A. Celada, 'Victors Write History, the Vanquished Literature: Myth, Distortion and Truth in the XV Brigade', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 89, 7-8 (2012), 307-321, 318.

¹⁰⁴ Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 76.

*From it all emerges one thing at least, and that is that the International Brigade [sic] and the British Battalion as part of it, is not some noble and gallant band of crusaders come to succour a helpless people from an injustice, it is the logical expression of the conscious urge of democratic peoples for self-preservation. [...] The Brigade is the historic answer of democratic people to protect their democracy, and the urgency of the need for that protection would warrant an even greater response.*¹⁰⁵

Another contrast with earlier works was the complete absence of guidance by the IBA and CPGB in the publications. While the works held strong politicized messages (although this more the case with Gurney and Kisch than with Paynter), they were not written in connection with either the IBA or CPGB. This reflects the decline in influence of both organizations.

2.3.2. Monuments and memorial services

As noted previously, the commemoration of fallen Brigadiers by the IBA was not done for the sake of commemoration, but to advance the CPGB's political goals. As such there was no impetus from the IBA to create a public memorial in honor of those fallen in Spain. IBA secretary Nan Green noted in reaction to a proposed campaign for such a memorial in Glasgow in 1949:

*If people can't be won to think about Franco's Role as a war danger and the Spanish people's fight for peace, I don't think they will be won over for a memorial plaque.*¹⁰⁶

Considering this stance, it is rather unsurprising that the IBA was not involved in the creation of the first public memorial less than year later. A committee representing the Halifax labor movement raised the funds to construct a plaque in honor of former Brigadier Ralph Fox.¹⁰⁷ A plaque was placed on a bench on what would have been

¹⁰⁵ Paynter, *My Generation*, 68-69.

¹⁰⁶ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 139.

¹⁰⁷ 'Ralph Fox', *The Manchester Guardian* 10-02-1950, p. 6.

Fox's fiftieth birthday. Relatives of Fox did not attend the ceremony as they disagreed politically with those in the committee. They issued a statement distancing themselves from the committee, noting that Fox had died before communism had become “the evil thing it is now”. They also expressed their doubt over the fact whether the people of the committee had ever even known Fox personally.¹⁰⁸ Activity regarding monuments remained very limited throughout the second time period of commemoration. At the initiative of the Aberdare Labour Party and the local trades council a small wooden carving was installed in the Labour Party's local headquarters on 27 December 1967. This carving honored two local volunteers who had died in the Battle of the Ebro in August 1938.¹⁰⁹

2.4. Conclusion

The period of remembering began with the outbreak of the Second World War and ended with the death of Franco. The close connection between the IBA and the CPGB negatively impacted the IBA's efforts. Both the IBA and the CPGB became isolated when the latter was ordered by Moscow to not support the British involvement in the war. This isolation came to an end with the German invasion of the Soviet Union. After the end of the war the IBA again suffered from the link with the CPGB. When the party supported the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, between a quarter to a third of all members resigned. This set in motion a decline from which the party never recovered. This decline also affected the IBA. Its political campaigns suffered from the association with the CPGB and could not compete with campaigns from other organizations. Former Brigadiers played important roles in campaigns which received support from a wider range of political figures than the IBA could attract.

The political climate of the early period of the Cold War had a major influence on the publication of personal accounts. During the first wave of activity (1945-1956) several accounts were published in which former Brigadiers spoke out about their disillusionment with communism. This fit in with existing trends at the time. Exception to this trend was the 1954 CPGB sanctioned publication in commemoration of Jack Brent which echoed the earlier work on David Guest. There were no accounts

¹⁰⁸ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 140.

¹⁰⁹ 'Aberdare', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/content/aberdare>, retrieved 26-06-16.

published during the late 1950's and the entire 1960's. The second wave of activity began in 1972 and lasted until November 1975. The advanced age of the former Brigadiers played an important role in the motives for the publication of these accounts. This was also reflected in the fact that Paynter discussed his entire life in his account rather than just his time in the Brigades. Disillusionment was also a major theme, with Gurney and Kisch writing specifically to address issues they believed to be wrong. The close connection between the IBA and the CPGB was reflected in the commemoration with regard to the number of monuments. Because the IBA focused on political campaigns rather than on public monuments, the overall number of monuments in the period of remembering was very limited.

Chapter Three – Commemoration after Franco

This chapter discusses the third time period of commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades. This period began in November 1975 with the death of Francisco Franco and is still ongoing today. The end of the Cold War had a major influence on the commemoration.

This period can therefore be divided in two smaller periods: 1975-1991 and 1991 until the present. Although the wave began in late 1975, the level of activity in the commemoration did not significantly change until the early 1980's. There are several factors which caused this delayed reaction. While the death of Franco was a major event for the IBA and many former Brigadiers, a democratic Spain was seen as the end-goal. Spain did not turn democratic overnight. Instead it went through a transitional phase which arguably lasted until the victory by the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) in the 1982 elections.¹¹⁰ In addition, although the death of Franco was cause for former Brigadiers to write about their experiences, the writing process and search for a publisher took considerable time. The works published in this period were published by various publishing houses. This variation indicates a lack of a standardized procedure.

Characteristic for the third time period are the very high numbers of published personal accounts and erected monuments. Both rose sharply in the early 1980's. The publication of personal accounts peaked in the 1980's and continued on a consistently high rate the following decade. This has since declined, although new accounts are still occasionally published and some books have gone through several printings.¹¹¹ The number of monuments honoring British volunteers has grown consistently in the past thirty years. Starting in 1976 the Imperial War Museums (IWM) interviewed many former Brigadiers about their involvement in the Spanish Civil War.¹¹² Many of

¹¹⁰ R. Fagel; E. Storm, ed., *Het Land van Don Quichot, De Spanjaarden en Hun Geschiedenis* (Amsterdam 2011), 334.

¹¹¹ The most recent publication is the 2015 account by Bob Cooney which was published posthumously.

See: B. Cooney, *Proud Journey* (London 2015).

For examples of works that have been republished, see: J. Cornford, *Collected Writings* (Manchester 1986); T. Wintringham, *English Captain* (London 1939). These accounts were republished in respectively 2016 and 2011.

¹¹² 'Search Our Collection',

[http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search?query=%22international%20brigades%22&f\[0\]=mediaT](http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search?query=%22international%20brigades%22&f[0]=mediaT)

them had by this time already written about their experiences or would do so later. The fact that these interviews were held is a reflection of the changing character of the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades. Because of the politicization of the commemoration it was previously unthinkable for such a respected organization to record the experiences of former Brigadiers.

The first section of this chapter first discusses the events in Spain from the time of the death of Franco to the present day. It takes a chronological approach to the history of Spain post-Franco, which is then followed by an analysis of the position of the International Brigades in Spain itself. The main question answered in this analysis is as follows: how did the events in Spain impact the commemoration of the International Brigades in that country? This is followed by a similar analysis of the political situation in the United Kingdom. Discussed are the decline of the CPGB, the change that the IBA went through and the position of the International Brigades in the United Kingdom.

The second section of this chapter discusses the commemoration of the International Brigades in Great Britain between 1975 and the present. The main question answered is as follows: how did commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades develop during the third period of commemoration? This is achieved through a chronological analysis of personal accounts, IWM and The Guardian interviews, monuments and memorial services.

ype%3Aaudio, retrieved 26-06-2016.

Unfortunately the website of the IWM does not feature a dedicated page for the interviews with the former Brigadiers. Instead one has to conduct a search in the IWM's catalog. A list of all interviews is available on the website of Richard Baxell: http://www.richardbaxell.info/iwm_scw/

3.1. Historical background – Spain and its path to democracy

Francisco Franco died on 20 November 1975 after struggling with health problems for multiple years. It was during these years that several factions within Franco's own *Falange*¹¹³ party vied for power. In 1969 Franco had designated Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón, grandson of the last king of Spain Alfonso XIII, as his heir-apparent. He intentionally bypassed the prince's father infante Juan as he feared him to be too liberal to continue his legacy. Juan Carlos on the other hand had been educated in Spain from a young age and was therefore considered to be more reliable politically. Contrary to Franco's expectations however the prince did not intend on continuing along the path that was plotted for him. Although he supported Francoist ideals in public, the prince secretly met with political opposition figures and exiles. Two days after the death of Franco, on 22 November 1975, the Spanish parliament proclaimed him King of Spain.

The new king soon instituted political reforms which set the country on a path towards democracy. This period in Spanish history later became known as *la Transición*. The reformist policies of Juan Carlos were by no means readily accepted by everyone. Prime Minister Arias Navarro for example was dismissed in July 1976 over his opposition. A major political reform was the legalization of the PSOE in 1977. The king met PSOE leader Felipe González at the Zarzuela palace in Madrid in May 1977 in what is regarded as a landmark within *la Transición* as it signaled the acceptance of the monarchy by what had formerly been a Republican party. The PSOE received nearly a third of the vote in the first post-Franco elections in June 1977. Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of the 1978 constitution which, amongst other things, asserted the position of Juan Carlos as head of state in a constitutional monarchy.

On 23 February 1981 resistance to the reforms once more became very apparent when a group of ca. 200 Francoist hardliners from the *Guardia Civil* seized the parliament in an attempted military coup. This was coordinated with efforts in Valencia where tanks and other forces were ordered on to the streets of the city.¹¹⁴ Juan Carlos quickly responded with a nationally televised speech in which he

¹¹³ The party's official full name was *Falange Española Tradicionalista de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional Sindicalista*, although this was also shortened to *FET y de las JONS* or simply *Falange*.

¹¹⁴ F.L. Solís, '23 F – Redemption or Derailment of Spanish Democracy?', *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 20, 3 (2007), pp. 207-229, 208.

condemned the coup. This condemnation is widely regarded as having been decisive in the thwarting of the coup which later became known as *23-F*.¹¹⁵ The coup had a major influence on Spanish politics and was, amongst other things, a factor in the 1982 election victory by the PSOE. The socialists won consecutive electoral victories and ruled the country with González as prime minister until 1996.

There is minor historiographical debate on the exact end date of *la Transición*. Although the coming to power of the PSOE in 1982 is often regarded as the culmination of the process, some historians instead view the accession of Spain to the Europe community on 1 January 1986 as the end of the era. They point at the significance of the normalization of ties between Spain and the rest of Europe.¹¹⁶ I believe that although this event was indeed significant, it needs to be noted that Spain already cooperated militarily with the United States since the Pact of Madrid in 1953.¹¹⁷ In addition, Spain had joined NATO in May 1982, a move which could not have gone ahead without approval of the other European members of the organization.

3.1.1. The position of the International Brigades in Spain

The death of Franco marked the beginning of the end of an era for many former Brigadiers. As discussed in earlier chapters, Franco had, as leader of the Nationalists, been the embodiment of the enemy during the Spanish Civil War. The focus had been on the defeat of Franco and the return of democracy. This focus carried over to the Second World War. Because of the close connections between Spain and the Axis powers Germany and Italy, many had hoped that victory in the war would also lead to the removal of Franco from power. As such the death of Franco was for many an important event. During *la Transición* former Brigadiers were finally able to return to Spain, although this only took place on an individual or small-scale basis. The first organized tour of former Brigadiers did not occur until May 1981 when the IBA was invited by communist and socialist workers organizations to participate in the May

¹¹⁵ Fagel, Storm, ed., *Het Land van Don Quichot*, 333.

¹¹⁶ D. Conversi, 'The Smooth Transition: Spain's 1978 Constitution and the Nationalities Question', *National Identities*, 4, 3 (2002), 223-244, 223.

¹¹⁷ Fagel, Storm, ed., *Het Land van Don Quichot*, 304.

Day march in Madrid.¹¹⁸ This was followed by another organized tour in October 1983, with the initiative for this coming from former Brigadiers themselves.¹¹⁹

These initial tours were followed by many others. Although *la Transición* had already been completed, the reception these former Brigadiers received was mixed. When for instance nearly 800 veterans visited Madrid in 1986 for the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of the war, the only political official welcoming them was the mayor of the city. The PSOE government did not send a representative to the event as they had found the matter too politically sensitive. For the local youths the group of aged veterans presented a mystery. Having grown up in Francoist Spain, the Spanish Civil War had not been an overly discussed topic and the International Brigades even less so. They mistook the former Brigadiers for tourists and pointed them to the Escorial.¹²⁰ The position of the Spanish government towards the International Brigades remained cautious in the following years as was visible at the 50th anniversary of the disbandment of the Brigades in 1988 when plans for a parade had to be canceled.¹²¹

At the disbandment of the Brigades in 1938 Spanish Prime Minister Juan Negrín had promised to extend the Spanish nationality to all foreign volunteers. The later events of the Civil War unsurprisingly had made it impossible for such a promise to actually be fulfilled. In January 1996 however the Spanish parliament voted in favor of a motion to follow through on the matter. At the 60th anniversary of the disbandment in October 1996 all living former Brigadiers were awarded a certificate which would enable them to get Spanish citizenship. In order to do so however, they would have had to renounce their other nationalities. This was something which not many did. A renewed politicization of the International Brigades occurred in Spain in the 1990's. Having lost the election in March 1996, at a ceremony at the PSOE headquarters former Prime Minister González accused the ruling conservative *Partido Popular* of boycotting the events surrounding the 58th anniversary of the disbandment of the Brigades.¹²² A rather ironic statement considering that the PSOE government had done the same thing in the previous fourteen years when it had been in power. It

¹¹⁸ Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 307.

¹¹⁹ 'Abraham Lincoln vets hold a reunion: 'Wonderful to see Spaniards smiling'', *The Washington Post* 05-10-1983, p. A30

'Lincoln veterans muster on battlefields of Spain', *New York Times* 24-10-1983, p. A2

¹²⁰ 'Veterans' tears honour Civil War dead', *The Guardian* 20-10-1986, p. 1.

¹²¹ 'Catalonia welcome for Civil War heroes', *The Guardian* 29-10-1988, p. 6.

¹²² 'Spain honours its debt to the foreign brigades', *The Guardian* 09-11-1996, p. 16.

was not until the 75th anniversary of the Brigades' disbandment in 2008 that Spanish citizenship was finally extended without any small print.¹²³

Today in Spain the International Brigades remain a divisive topic. A monument in memorial of the Brigades unveiled in Madrid in 2011 was met with resistance in the planning stages. Once unveiled, conservative groups remained highly critical and in 2013 filed a lawsuit to remove the memorial.¹²⁴ As of June 2016 the monument remains standing, although it is often the target of right-wing vandalism.¹²⁵

3.2. Historical background – Developments in the United Kingdom

The CPGB was a party in crisis in the mid 1970's. Much like in the rest of Europe, the events in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 had caused a deep rift within its ranks. While the party's leadership had slowly embraced Eurocommunism, many of its members had not agreed with this choice. Illustrative of the crisis was the fact that the party sold its longtime London headquarters in 1976, a building which in an ironic twist of fate now houses a branch of the HSBC bank.¹²⁶ In 1977 the CPGB debated potential changes to the party program *Britain's Road to Socialism*. This led to a flare up in tensions and resulted in the breakaway of an anti-Eurocommunism faction which launched the rival *New Communist Party of Britain* (NCP). This by no means caused an exodus of those opposing Eurocommunism. A sizable group who disagreed with the party leadership remained in the CPGB. This faction held close ties with the trade unions. Relations between the party leadership and the anti-Eurocommunism faction were highly strained and were put under even more pressure following an incident in 1984, when members of the faction in London went against the party leadership by suggesting giving previously suspended members full rights once again. The party leadership saw this as rebellion and responded by closing down the local district congress. Following this the anti-Eurocommunism faction formed a

¹²³ 'Freedom fighters welcome honour, 70 Years on', *The Guardian* 11-10-2008
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/11/spain-military>

¹²⁴ 'Spanish Civil War monument must be pulled down, court rules', *The Guardian* 05-06-2013
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/05/spanish-civil-war-monument-court>, retrieved 26-06-16.

¹²⁵ 'Making sense of Madrid memorial attacks', IBMT Newsletter May 2016, p. 10.

¹²⁶ 'What happened to the Communist Party of Great Britain's millions?', BBC News 13-06-2012,
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-18351323>, retrieved 29-05-16.

campaign group which in 1988 broke away from the CPGB and formed the *Communist Party of Britain (CPB)*. Already decimated in membership and the elections, the leadership of the CPGB chose to disband the party in response to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It then founded the think tank *Democratic Left*, which was in turn dissolved in 1999 and replaced with the *New Politics Network*. This organization eventually merged with left-leaning campaign group *Charter 88* in 2007 to form *Unlock Democracy*, a small pressure group. As of June 2016 the NCP and CPB are very marginal parties with no political power.

3.2.1. Decline of the Communist Party of Great Britain

The 1980's were a troubling time for Great Britain. Economically the country had been in decline since 1960, but these issues became more apparent in the early 1980's with widespread unemployment and the disappearing of jobs in (heavy manufacturing) industry. This resulted in a fall of the standard of living and issues to maintain the strength of the Pound. Relations between the trade unions and the British government had been strained at times, but cooperation did take place. A notable example of this was the 1974 agreement between secretary of Transport and General Workers Union Jack Jones and the Labour government of Harold Wilson. During the subsequent Labour government of James Callaghan relations soured. The situation reached a low point in the winter of 1978-1979 when there were widespread strikes in the public sector as unions demanded larger pay rises than the government would accept. This 'Winter of Discontent' had a major influence on the 1979 general election which brought Margaret Thatcher to power. During her three terms as prime minister the government sought to reduce the power of the unions. Unsurprisingly, this did not sit well with the unions, which organized multiple strikes.¹²⁷ Overall British society became more polarized in the 1980's, conditions which had a major influence on the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades.

¹²⁷ J. Black, *A History of the British Isles* (Houndmills 2012), 279-281.

3.2.2. A changing IBA and the position of the International Brigades in Britain

As discussed in the previous chapter, the IBA found it difficult to adapt to a changing world. The organization had been able to engage in political campaigns against Franco's regime to some extent in the post-war period when Spain was politically isolated, but this became much harder to successfully carry out after Spain moved out of isolation. The death of Franco and the period of transition that followed only reinforced the difficult position of the IBA. Already in 1971 IBA secretary Nan Green had underlined the increasingly historical character of the Spanish Civil War in Great Britain. Former Brigadiers discussed their experiences with history students, generations for which the Spanish Civil War was just a historical event.¹²⁸ As members of the IBA grew older, many became less active in the organization. This was a hard hit, especially considering that membership for the IBA had never been very high in the first place. Transition to a new generation was vital if the organization was to continue its existence.¹²⁹

The political campaigns by the IBA presented the organization with a dilemma. Not only were they a costly affair, they also did not always have the desired outcome. After the death of Franco the IBA chose to not take a prominent role in Spain's transition to democracy out of fear that conservative groups in Spain would use the IBA's involvement to invoke comparisons with the Civil War. Individual members however did play a role through various other organizations.¹³⁰ The IBA once again took an active approach to Spain after its members were invited by communist and socialist workers organizations to participate in the May Day march in Madrid in 1981, although this did not include political campaigns such as in the years before.¹³¹

After the death of Franco the focus of the IBA shifted from political activism to commemoration. In the previous decades the close connections with the CPGB had led to a policy which was solely focused on furthering the political goals of the party, with the vast majority of this happening through campaigning. With this influence gone and Spain a democracy, the IBA was transformed in a commemorative organization. Although it maintained its ideals, the IBA became a broader political

¹²⁸ Buchanan, *The Impact of the Spanish Civil War on Britain*, 195.

¹²⁹ Buchanan, 'Holding the Line', 308.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, 307.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*.

organization. This was very visible in the campaign for a national memorial, which began in 1984 and which attracted the backing of various prominent Labour Party figures such as former Labour Party leader Michael Foot. The campaign also received funding from the Greater London Council, which at the time was dominated by the Labour Party. The monument was finally unveiled by Michael Foot on the South Bank in London on 5 October 1985.¹³² The shift towards a broader political organization aimed at commemoration rather than political campaigning was initiated by Bill Alexander, who had become secretary of the IBA in 1982.¹³³

Although the IBA became less politicized, the same could not be said of the International Brigades. Reflective of its increasing historical character, the Brigades became an abstract concept, invoked in the media when international volunteers joined a regional conflict. This was not a new development: similar sentiments had been expressed during the Vietnam War, in which the involvement of the United States was compared with that of Germany and Italy in the Spanish Civil War.¹³⁴ When it became public that the US had provided military and financial aid to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua who challenged the country's left-wing Sandinista government, the comparison between the Spanish Civil War and the present was once more made. British writer Jessica Mitford, who had been married to former Brigadier Esmond Romilly until his death in 1941, traveled to Nicaragua and took part in demonstrations at the US embassy. She compared the situation in the country with her own memories of Spain in the Civil War.¹³⁵ In a similar fashion the left criticized the British government under Thatcher for not doing enough to support the rightful government of Nicaragua against the brutality of the Contras, comparing the situation with the policy of non-intervention in the 1930's. At the Labour Party conference in October 1986 memories from the Spanish Civil War were invoked in a debate which ended with a resolution denouncing the US involvement in Nicaragua. Bill Alexander spoke out against US policy at the opening of an exhibition on the Spanish Civil War at the IWM in July 1986.¹³⁶ Despite an overall de-politicization of the IBA there was still a link with its past activism. At a festival in London on 15 October 1988 held in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the disbandment of the International

¹³² P. Corthorn, 'Cold War Politics in Britain and the Contested Legacy of the Spanish Civil War', *European History Quarterly* 44, 4 (2014), 678-702, 692.

¹³³ 'Bill Alexander obituary', *The Guardian* 14-07-2000, p. 24.

¹³⁴ Corthorn, 'Cold War Politics in Britain', 688.

¹³⁵ 'Contra Contra moves', *The Guardian* 21-02-1984, p. 19.

¹³⁶ Corthorn, 'Cold War Politics in Britain', 689.

Brigades, a fundraiser was held to support the 'International Brigade ambulances for Nicaragua'.¹³⁷

In the media the memory of the Spanish Civil War continued to be invoked in regard to wars where the world did not (yet) intervene. This was for instance the case with the conflict in former Yugoslavia in the 1990's. The Serbian army was compared to the Nationalists under Franco, while the lack of an intervention was compared with the policy of non-intervention by the British government more than six decades earlier.¹³⁸ Testament to the position of the International Brigades in British politics as an abstract concept was the fact that they were increasingly used in a context completely unrelated to the Spanish Civil War. For instance, in a 1996 report by The Guardian on an anti-terrorist summit the term was used to refer to the recruitment of Islamic fundamentalists.¹³⁹ The fact that the term's Spanish Civil War origins were not even discussed speaks of the position of the Brigades in British society.

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not have a profound effect on the IBA, most likely as result of the de-politicization. Despite the fact that Bill Alexander remained firm in his political beliefs – Alexander had opposed Eurocommunism in the CPGB in the 1980's – these did not show through in the policy of the IBA. The 1995 Ken Loach film *Land and Freedom* followed a fictional British volunteer in the International Brigades. Alexander spoke out against the film, which had portrayed an anti-communist perspective.¹⁴⁰

From its founding the IBA's membership had only been open to former Brigadiers. Alexander was in opposition to a relaxation of this rule, fearing a takeover of the name and ideals of the International Brigades by people with a different agenda. Although relatives and friends formed the separate group *Families & Friends*, this had remained a point of concern to them.¹⁴¹ After Alexander's death in 2000 the IBA and this other group merged to form the *International Brigade Memorial Trust* (IBMT), a registered charity which aims to protect the legacy of the Brigades through assistance with the construction and preservation of monuments and education of the

¹³⁷ 'Foreign legions return to Spain', *The Guardian* 15-10-1988, p. 2.

¹³⁸ 'For whom does the bell toll now?', *The Guardian* 15-07-1995, p. 23.

¹³⁹ 'Arab leaders scarce at anti-terrorist summit', *The Guardian* 11-03-1996, p. 8.

¹⁴⁰ Corthorn, 'Cold War Politics in Britain', 695.

¹⁴¹ 'Draft minutes of the annual IBMT general meeting, 17 October 2015', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/sites/default/files/AGM2015DraftMinutes.pdf>, retrieved 26-06-16.

public.¹⁴² The IBMT largely continued the efforts of the IBA, although it differs from its predecessor in certain aspects. Unlike with the IBA there are close ties between the IBMT and academics, who also sit on the organizations executive committee. As a registered charity the IBMT is forbidden to take part in any political activity other than that which furthers its aims. Although this reflected the activities of the IBA in its final years, the IBA was not explicitly forbidden to engage in political campaigns.¹⁴³

3.3. Remembering between 1975 and the present

This section of the chapter discusses the various forms in which commemoration took place in the United Kingdom after 1975. The main question it answers is as follows: How did commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades develop during the third time period of commemoration? It first looks at personal accounts by former Brigadiers. This is followed by interviews conducted by the IWM and The Guardian. Lastly an analysis is made of the monuments and memorial services.

3.3.1. Personal accounts

As noted previously, there was a considerable period of time between the death of Franco and the publication of new memoirs.¹⁴⁴ The increasingly historical character of the Spanish Civil War was reflected in these new works. This was noticeable in *British Volunteers for Liberty*, which was written by Bill Alexander, who was secretary of the IBA at the time.¹⁴⁵ With its aging members in mind, the organization felt it important to write down their experiences before they would be lost forever. Up

¹⁴² 'Constitution', <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/sites/default/files/IBMT%20Constitution.pdf>, retrieved 30-05-16.

¹⁴³ 'International Brigade Memorial Trust' <http://www.international-brigades.org.uk/content/international-brigade-memorial-trust>, retrieved 30-05-16.

¹⁴⁴ The first work published after the death of Franco was F. Deegan, *There's No Other Way*, which was published by Toulouse Press in 1980.

¹⁴⁵ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty* (London 1982).

to that point the only official historical accounts of the British volunteers had been the works by Frank Ryan and Bill Rust. These however had been published when the Spanish Civil War was still going on and, despite its value, contained many factual inaccuracies. Although Alexander claimed to have had the intention of writing a neutral and factual account, this was not reflected in the book. Instead it echoed the earlier works by Ryan and Rust. Alexander acknowledged imperfections of the International Brigades, but downplayed these as well. An example of this was the sensitive issue of the execution of fellow Brigadiers. Alexander argued that no volunteers from the British Battalion had been executed for desertion. While this was technically true, Alexander was probably well aware of the case of Allan Kemp, who had tried to cross over to Nationalist lines at Teruel in December 1938. He was found carrying a map of British machine-gun positions and was executed for his planned betrayal. Alexander made no mention of Kemp.¹⁴⁶

Although the aging membership of the IBA had led to a decline in activity, there were also former Brigadiers who after their retirement stepped up their efforts in the organization. In memoirs this was most visible in the work of Jack Jones. He retired in 1977 after a life of activism on the forefront of the trade union movement. In his retirement he served as president of the IBMT, doing so from its founding in 2000 until his death in 2009. Jones also wrote the foreword to the memoirs of several former Brigadiers.¹⁴⁷ He argued against the policy of non-intervention by the British government, which he equated to a betrayal of the Spanish people. With regard to Spain's transition to democracy Jones noted:

*Since the death of Franco and the re-emergence of democratic Government in Spain we who fought in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the elected Government feel our actions have been vindicated. We also look to the future with the fervent hope that democracy and freedom will grow ever stronger and forever prevail in that fair land.*¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Baxell, 'Myths of the International Brigades', 21-22.

¹⁴⁷ Examples of this include: B. Clark, *No Boots to My Feet* (Stoke-on-Trent 1984); W. Gregory, *The Shallow Grave* (London 1986); G. Wheeler, *To make the People Smile Again: A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne 2003).

Jones also wrote the foreword to J. Cook, *Apprentices of Freedom* (London 1979). While this is not a personal account by a former Brigadier, it is relevant and needs to be mentioned in this context.

¹⁴⁸ J. Jones in: B. Clark, *No Boots to My Feet* (Stoke-on-Trent 1984) 9.

The renewed activism by Jones is reflective of a trend. Contrary to earlier works, several of the personal accounts published in the period between 1975 and the present contain the contributions of other former Brigadiers.¹⁴⁹

The increasing historical character of the International Brigades was underlined further in the fact that several of the memoirs published in this period were written as a retrospect on the author's entire life. Jones for instance dedicated only one short chapter in his book – an account which numbered 368 pages in total – to his time in Spain. Considering the age of many of the former Brigadiers at the time, it is unsurprising that memoirs were also published posthumously. The reasons for doing so differed greatly. John Angus for instance had been a longtime member of the staff at Loughborough University until his death in 1976. Shortly before his death he had prepared an audio tape for the IBA on which he recorded his experiences in Spain. A transcription of this tape was published by Loughborough University several years later in a tribute to Angus.¹⁵⁰

Another interesting example of a posthumous publication was the memoir by John Peet, which was released a year of the author's death in 1988.¹⁵¹ Peet had worked for the Reuters news agency for several years before he defected to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) from his post in West Berlin in 1950.¹⁵² During his time in exile he cooperated with the GDR government in propaganda efforts which targeted the United Kingdom.¹⁵³ Despite his critical views of Britain and the other members of the Western block, Peet eventually found himself at odds with the government of the GDR. His memoir was written as a retrospect of his life and had originally not included his time in exile. Peet had only added this after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. While the events in Peet's life certainly differ greatly from those of the other former Brigadiers, they do reflect an existing trend of former Brigadiers putting their experiences down to paper without regard for their own reputation or that of other people, not unlike the earlier work by Jason Gurney.

¹⁴⁹ An example of this is: B. Clark, *No Boots to My Feet* (Stoke-on-Trent 1984), of which Former Brigadier Dave Goodman wrote the introduction.

¹⁵⁰ J. Angus, *With the International Brigade in Spain* (Loughborough 1983).

¹⁵¹ J. Peet, *The Long Engagement: Memoirs of a Cold War Legend* (London 1989).

¹⁵² 'A journalist goes east: Berlin conversion', *The Manchester Guardian* 13-06-1950, p. 7.

¹⁵³ 'German Reds bid for British favor', *The New York Times* 26-04-1953, p. 20.

Peet was the driving force behind the English newsletter the *German Democratic Report*, which was published from 1952 to 1975.

Although there were former Brigadiers who detailed their entire life in their memoirs, several others chose to limit the scope of their account to the years of the Spanish Civil War. This was true for the work by Bob Clark, Walter Gregory and, to some extent, also Laurie Lee.¹⁵⁴ A format which was similar to the earliest works by Brigadiers published in the first wave of commemoration, albeit for different reasons. The account by Lee is a particularly interesting case as it was the final work in an autobiographical trilogy.¹⁵⁵ Lee had become a celebrated author in postwar Britain. His 1991 account of his time in the International Brigades drew criticism from Bill Alexander who in 1998 stated that Lee had never been a member of the Brigades. Alexander did so in response to an academic account of the war by historian Tom Buchanan, in which the work by Lee was cited as historical evidence.¹⁵⁶ Alexander's accusations were likely to have been influenced by his political views. Lee had served in the Brigades with the rather small band of ILP volunteers. A group which Alexander ideologically disagreed with. The accusations themselves drew heavy criticism and were eventually found to be untrue.¹⁵⁷

As noted previously, the second wave of commemoration was marked by a process of de-politicization and an increasingly historical character in the United Kingdom of the Spanish Civil War. This trend also manifested itself in the publication of personal accounts. Works published after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 are purely historical in character and do not pursue a political goal. Historians were often involved in the publication of these works. This was for instance true for the account by David Hooper, which was edited by historian Robin Saikia.¹⁵⁸ In addition, Saikia was also the one who had convinced Hooper to write down his experiences. In a similar fashion historian David Leach was involved in the publication of the accounts by George Wheeler and Alun Williams, editing the former and writing the foreword to the latter.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ B. Clark, *No Boots to My Feet* (Stoke-on-Trent 1984), W. Gregory, *The Shallow Grave* (London 1986), L. Lee, *A Moment of War* (London 1991).

¹⁵⁵ The trilogy comprised of: *Cider with Rosie* (London 1959); *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* (London 1969); *A Moment of War* (London 1991).

¹⁵⁶ T. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford 1997).

¹⁵⁷ 'Fighter or faker', *The Guardian* 13-05-1998, p. A8.

'Memorial lecture probes Laurie Lee's role in Spain', *IBMT Newsletter* July 2004, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ D. Hooper; R. Saikia ed., *No Pasarán: A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* (London 1997).

¹⁵⁹ G. Wheeler; D. Leach ed., *To Make the People Smile Again: A Memoir of the Spanish Civil War* (Newcastle-upon-Thyne 2003), A.M. Williams, *From the Rhondda to the Ebro: The Story of a Young Life and Its Survival in the First Half of the 20th Century* (Pontypool 2004).

3.3.2. Interviews

In October 1976 the IBA organized a reunion of former Brigadiers in Loughborough. Although members of the IBA had reunited previously, this meeting marked a special occasion as staff members from the IWM were present to conduct interviews with those present about their experiences in Spain.¹⁶⁰ On later occasions the IWM would again send staff to events organized by the IBA to conduct more interviews, although interviews were also conducted on an individual basis.¹⁶¹ Although these recordings hold a treasure trove of information, accessing this can be problematic considering its sheer size. The IWM has digitized a significant part of the interviews, but many still remain accessible only on tape at the IWM archive. The limits of my thesis have prevented me from delving deep in this treasure trove. As such this section only offers a broad analysis of the IWM interviews.

Similarly to the publication of personal accounts and the constructing of monuments, patterns of activity can also be established through analysis of the dates of conducted interviews. This is shown below in figure 3.

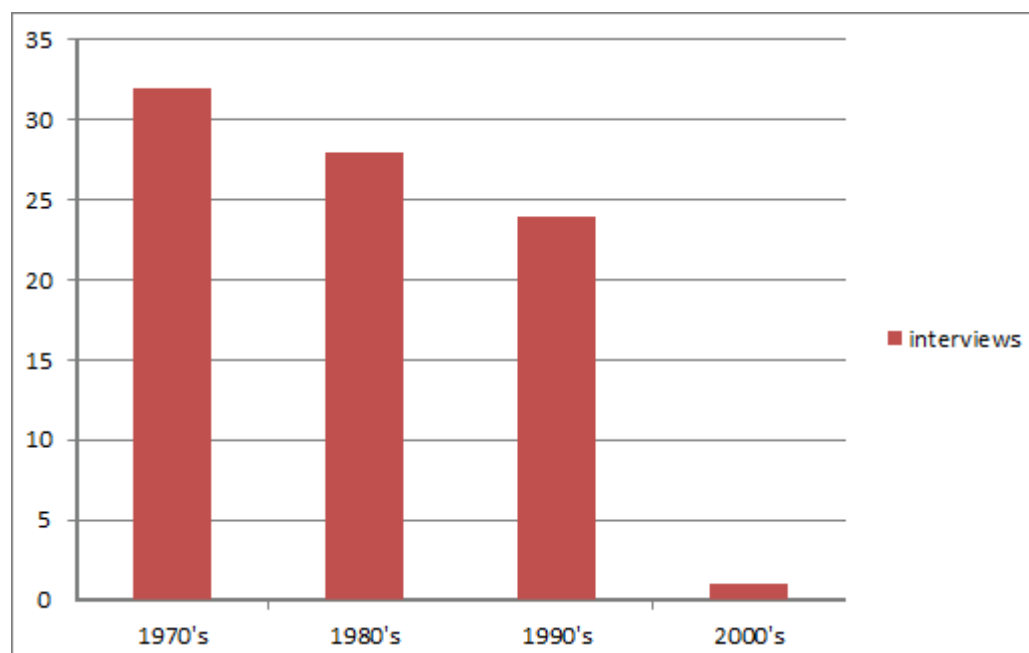


Figure 3: Overview of the number of conducted interviews by decade.

¹⁶⁰ 'Brown, Isabel et al (IWM interview)', <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000824>, retrieved 26-06-2016.

¹⁶¹ Examples of presence of the IWM at IBA events include a conference discussion in September 1987 (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80012883>), during an organized trip to Spain in October 1994 (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80014341> and <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80014342>) and at a conference in Nottingham in June 1996.

The dates of the recordings indicate a peak in the 1970's, with the number of new interviews slowly declining in the 1980's and 1990's. In the 2000's there was only one interview. This development is unsurprising as it follows the trend of the increasing historical character of the International Brigades. In the 1970's most former Brigadiers had already retired from working life and by the 2000's only a handful were left. It must also be taken into account that once they were interviewed about their experiences, there would be little point in conducting another interview. When looking at the data the vast majority of Brigadiers were only interviewed once. Lastly, dates of IBA events with IWM presence can be derived from the dates of the interviews.

The IWM interviews were conducted along a structure where interviewees were first asked to tell about their upbringing and early life. This was then followed by their decision to go to Spain and their experiences there. The interviewers rarely strayed from this structure, asking only about specific prominent people from the International Brigades when the interviewee had mentioned these.

The Guardian published interviews held with former Brigadiers on various occasions, starting in 1996 for the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.¹⁶² These interviews were mostly biographical in character, detailing the interviewee's experiences in the war and their life afterward. This was the case for an interview with Jack Jones in September 2000 and Reginald Saxton and Rosaleen Ross in March 2003.¹⁶³ The historical character of the International Brigades also played a major role. An article in July 1996 for instance featured explanations from prominent Spanish Civil War historians Tom Buchanan and Paul Preston.¹⁶⁴ Further evidence of the historical character of the Brigades can be found in a Remembrance Day interview special The Guardian published in November 2000 titled 'Last of the Brigade'. In this special Ian Aitken, son of former Commissar of the XVth Brigade Scott Aitken, noted:

¹⁶² 'Anti-fascists carried the fight to Spain from London', *The Guardian* 13-04-1996, p. 8.

¹⁶³ 'Working class hero', *The Guardian* 25-09-2000, p. B4.

¹⁶⁴ 'The good fight', *The Guardian* 15-07-1996, p. B2.

*Around 2,400 made the journey from Britain to Spain, 526 of them to die there. Today, just 40 remain alive, the last slender link with one of the most extraordinary episodes of European history. To mark Remembrance Day, Guardian writers interviewed all the volunteers who could be traced and were well enough to talk - 23 in all. Their accounts offer a rare insight into the passions and principles that drove thousands of young men and women to risk their lives in a faraway war.*¹⁶⁵

The interviews conducted for this special were relatively short and discussed mostly the experiences in the war itself, as well being a short biographical piece on the individual Brigadiers.

3.3.3 Monuments and memorial services

As noted previously, the death of Franco was of major influence on the activities of the IBA. With commemoration rather than political activism now being the primary focus of the organization. This development translated into an explosion of the number of monuments in the United Kingdom. Only five monuments were constructed in the period between 1936 and 1975. Following this, the number rapidly grew to 78 as of June 2016.¹⁶⁶ As with the publication of personal accounts, there was a slight delay between the death of Franco and the construction of the first new monuments in 1980. This delay is not surprising, considering the efforts involved in permission, funding and design.

The vast majority of monuments consist of a metal plaque on either the side of a building or a specifically placed wooden bench. While other forms of monuments do exist, it must be noted that these are very marginal in number. With regard to the monuments there is a clear geographical connection that can be distinguished. Apart from the national monument in South Bank in London, all monuments are dedicated to a local volunteer or local volunteers. This geographical connection is again

¹⁶⁵ 'Last of the Brigade', *The Guardian* 10-11-2000, p. A2.

¹⁶⁶ As noted previously in the introduction of this thesis, while the total number of monuments is 100, the IBMT website lists dates of unveiling for only 78 monuments. The remaining 22 were therefore not incorporated in this research.

particularly clear when the origins are taken into account: The vast majority of monuments were constructed at the initiative of local city councils or trade unions.

Although it is likely that the IBA met at least once per year since its founding in 1939, the exact details of this are uncertain. The organization has kept an extensive archive, this is however located in the Marx Memorial Library in London and as such unfortunately has been unavailable to me for my research. It is possible however to draw conclusions based on the material that has been available to me. The October 1976 reunion and conference at Loughborough was most likely connected to the position at the university's staff held by former Brigadier John Angus. The work detailing the experiences of Angus during the Spanish Civil War lists him as having died in 1976 without specifying the date. It seems unlikely however that the IWM would have opted to not interview Angus if he had been present. As such, although uncertain, it seems probable there was a connection between the position of Angus as staff at Loughborough University and the reunion held there in October 1976.

After its unveiling in 1985 the national monument in South Bank in London became the stage for the annual commemoration in July of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Former Brigadiers, relatives and others held speeches and wreaths were laid by various groups both British and international. As noted previously, the IBA organized tours for former Brigadiers and their families to visit the Spanish battlefields. These first took place in the 1980's. Starting in 2002, the IBMT has held an annual lecture at the IWM in honor of former IBA president Len Chrome. Aside from lectures by academics associated with the IBMT, this event now also regularly includes book launches, film screenings and other activities.¹⁶⁷

3.4. Conclusion

The death of Franco and Spain's transition to democracy were of major influence on commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades. Since the loss of the Civil War both of these events had been viewed as major goals, although the return of democracy was regarded to be the end-goal. The IBA intentionally did not organize campaigns during *la Transición* as it was feared that this would damage the

¹⁶⁷ R. Baxell; J. Jump ed., *Looking Back at the Spanish Civil War* (London 2010) 9.

process. The longtime focus on political campaigns was abandoned and the IBA instead focused on the commemoration of the Brigades. This move de-politicized the commemoration and allowed the IBA to transform into a broader political organization. The 1984 campaign for a national monument reflected this change in that it was backed by, amongst others, various prominent figures from the Labour Party. Overall the commemoration acquired an increasingly historical character. This was the result of both the advanced age of the former Brigadiers and the de-politicization of the commemoration. The interviews with former Brigadiers by the IWM and the 1982 IBA-sanctioned official history of the British volunteers are reflections of this change of character. This also showed through in the publication of personal accounts, which often looked back on the writer's entire life rather than just his experiences in Spain. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union historians were often involved in the publication of personal accounts. Historians also hold a major role in the IBMT, the organization which succeeded the IBA.

The rapid expansion of the number of monuments in commemoration of the Brigades can be attributed to the IBA's shift away from political campaigns and focus on commemoration, although the increasing historical character was also of influence. By moving away from the campaigns the IBA contributed to the de-politicization of the commemoration, which in turn allowed the legacy of the Brigades to grow beyond its previous supporters and reach a wider audience. This development was also reflected in the constructing of monuments. The initiative for the majority of monuments came from local city councils and trade unions.

Conclusion

This thesis aims to establish how the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades developed and what influenced this process.

Three successive time periods can be distinguished in the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades. In these periods there were four waves of activity. The first time period began with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War and ended with the outbreak of the Second World War. This time span corresponds with the first wave of activity. Two waves of activity occurred in the second time period which lasted until the death of Francisco Franco in November 1975. These took place between the end of the Second World War and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in October 1956, and in the early 1970's. The third time period began after the death of Franco and is still ongoing today. The early 1980's saw the beginning of the fourth wave of activity, a process which is also still ongoing today.

Commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades began not long after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. British volunteers fought in the conflict from the very beginning, but they remained rather limited in number at first. This changed in the autumn of 1936 after the Comintern set up a system which aided potential volunteers in their journey to Spain. The demographic of the volunteers was affected by this as well. Early volunteers had predominantly been young, idealistic and untrained men from well-off backgrounds. Volunteers from more diverse backgrounds were able to travel to Spain and join the Brigades following the involvement of the Comintern. It is estimated that some 75 per cent of the ca. 2,400 British volunteers were members of the CPGB. However, research into this aspect of the volunteers is problematic as surviving records are often faulty or missing. The Comintern involvement was also reflected in published personal accounts. The first published personal accounts were written without any allegiance to a political organization. The main themes were a strong anti-fascist message and the commemoration of the volunteers who had fallen in the war. Following the Comintern involvement communist organizations actively engaged in the publication of accounts. These works emphasized loyalty to the party and regarded fallen volunteers as martyrs of the anti-fascist struggle. Similar developments also occurred in the

immaterial commemoration, with the CPGB for instance organizing large-scale memorial services. Although the IBA was founded as an independent organization, it was closely connected to the CPGB from the very start. It did not engage in political campaigns for the sake of commemoration, but did so in order to further the political goals of the party. The IBA initially faced competition from other organizations representing former Brigadiers, but quickly established itself as the group's leading organization.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War the IBA found itself politically isolated. Because of its close connection with the CPGB the IBA followed the Moscow-instructed party line which condemned the declaration of war on Germany. This was a course of action which could not count on support of the British public. The IBA's isolation ended when the Soviet Union was invaded by Germany. During the Cold War the IBA's efforts at political campaigns were again negatively impacted by the connection with the CPGB. The organization had a small membership base and because of the link with the CPGB it could not count on the support of other forces in the labor movement. When the CPGB went into decline after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, so did the IBA. Although several political campaigns were organized after this, the IBA faced stiff competition from other campaigning organizations. The political climate of the Cold War had a major influence on the themes of published personal accounts. In the aftermath of the Second World War a wave of activity took place in which several former Brigadiers spoke out about their disillusionment with communism through publication of their experiences. This was part of an international trend which notably included the 1948 work *The God That Failed*. The decline in influence of the IBA was also reflected in the publication of accounts. The organization did sanction the publication of a work in commemoration of its former secretary Jack Brent in 1954, but did not influence commemoration after that. The wave of activity in the early 1970's can be attributed to the advanced age of the Brigadiers, rather than political events. Disillusionment with communism and the Soviet Union was a major theme in the works published during this time. The decline in influence of the CPGB and IBA was reflected in the complete absence in works in this period.

The death of Franco in November 1975 and the following transition by Spain to a democratic society had a major influence on commemoration. For the IBA and many former Brigadiers the return of democracy to Spain had been regarded as the

end-goal ever since the Civil War was lost. The IBA feared that by taking an active approach in this transition through political campaigns, it would negatively impact the ongoing process. Instead, the focus of the organization shifted towards commemoration of the Brigades. By moving away from its campaigns, the IBA was able to transform into a broader political organization. This was reflected in the 1984 campaign for a national monument, which attracted the backing of various prominent Labour Party figures. The transformation of the IBA was part of a larger shift in the commemoration of the Brigades towards a more historical character. Starting in 1976 the IWM conducted interviews with former Brigadiers. This reflected the de-politicization and the increasing historical character of the Brigades. Earlier something like this would not have been possible for political reasons. In 1982 the IBA sanctioned the publication of an official history of the British volunteers. The authors of personal accounts published in the third time period were all influenced in their decision to write by their advanced age. These works often looked back on the events of the author's entire life, rather than just their time in the Brigades. The increasing historical character became even more prominent in published personal accounts following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Historians for instance were often involved in the publication. The advancing age of the Brigadiers led to an inevitable decline in membership of the IBA. In 2000 the organization merged with its sister organization to form the International Brigade Memorial Trust, a registered charity in which historians have a large role. Perhaps counter-intuitively the rapid expansion of the number of monuments in commemoration of the Brigades can also be attributed to the de-politicization and increasing historical character. Apart from the national monument in London, all monuments serve to commemorate a local volunteer or local volunteers. By moving away from its focus on political campaigns, the IBA (and IBMT) enabled the legacy of the Brigades to grow stronger and reach a wider audience. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of the monuments were in fact constructed at the initiative of local city councils and trade unions.

The aim of this thesis is to establish how the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades developed and what influenced this process. My research indicates that the commemoration began as an affair for individual Brigadiers themselves, who wished to honor the comrades with whom they served in Spain. After the Comintern involved itself with the recruitment of the Brigades, commemoration became a large-scale undertaking used to further the political goals

of the CPGB. When the influence of the party and the IBA declined, commemoration again became a matter for individual Brigadiers. The decision by the IBA to move away from its focus on political campaigns led to a de-politicization of commemoration. This, together with the advanced age of the former Brigadiers, gave the commemoration an increasingly historical character and enabled commemoration to become a phenomenon which could be supported by a wider audience than just communists.

This thesis addresses points not previously discussed in the existing literature. The change in themes prevalent in published personal accounts is an aspect of the commemoration which has not been studied sufficiently. The existing literature has focused on either the composition and background of the British volunteers and their role in the Spanish Civil War (Baxell), or on the Spanish Civil War and its place in British history (Buchanan). While Buchanan does discuss the commemoration of the British volunteers and the influence that, for instance, the IBA and CPGB had on this, he does so only in order to address the role of the Spanish Civil War in British politics. This thesis contributes to the existing literature by making the analysis of the influences on the commemoration the primary focus of its research. This is important, because it enables others to form insights not previously considered. As such this thesis can serve as a steppingstone for future researchers. The outcome of this research has shown how the legacy of those who fell in war can become the subject of conflict itself. This is a topic which is not confined to the context of the International Brigades. For years there has been considerable debate in the Netherlands regarding the possible presence of a delegation from the German government at the annual ceremony of national commemoration of the Second World War on 4 May. In 2013 a new dimension was added to this debate when the *Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei* spoke out against including Dutch collaborators and German dead with those remembered.¹⁶⁸ This prompted others to declare that they would decide for themselves who they would choose to remember.¹⁶⁹ Although the debate has since reached a stalemate, the example of the Netherlands shows that change is in fact inherent to commemoration. In the seventy years since the end of the Second World

¹⁶⁸ '4 mei is niet voor verzoening', <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4492/Nederland/article/detail/3435137/2013/05/02/4-mei-is-er-niet-voor-verzoening.dhtml>, retrieved 26-06-2016.

¹⁶⁹ 'Ik maak zelf wel uit wie ik op 4 mei herdenk', <http://www.volkskrant.nl/magazine/-ik-maak-zelf-wel-uit-wie-ik-op-4-mei-herdenk~a3435303/>, retrieved 26-06-2016.

War German-Dutch relations have improved in an almost inconceivable way. The fact that the aforementioned debate even has two sides is indicative of the changing nature of commemoration. A fact that is also reflected in the development of the commemoration of the British volunteers of the International Brigades.

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