

On the Republican forces around Córdoba, December 1936

Introduction

This article can be read in conjunction with my article *On the Policía Montada de Sevilla, 1936-1937*, and deals with the Republican units that fought the Nationalist forces during the operations east of Córdoba in December 1936, Operation Olive.

Units

Per On 1 November 1936, the republican units in southern Spain were distributed in the areas of Badajoz, Córdoba, Granada and Malaga. The Córdoba section, which is relevant here, was divided into three subsections - Villafranca and Bujalance as well as - north of the area shown on Map 1, approx. 75 km north of Córdoba - Pozoblanco. The force numbered 3,732 soldiers and 3 batteries, with a total of 16 light artillery pieces.

The commander of the Córdoba section was Lieutenant Colonel Hernández Saravia, with headquarters in Montoro. The chief of the Bujalance subdivision was Don Joaquin, with headquarters in Bujalance.



*FAI-CNT militia soldier
from Columna Durruti 4) [__](#)*

The force consisted mainly of militia units whose organization, training and equipment left much to be desired. The following Republican units are mentioned in Sources 1-3:

- Batallón Villafranca (Chief: Francisco del Castillo, Commissioner: Pedro Garfias) 1) [__](#)
- Regimiento Garcés (from Villanueva de Córdoba; Commander: Enrique Vazquez.)
- Regimiento Jaén
- Columna de García Vallejo 2) [__](#)

- Columna Andalucía y Extremadura, which consisted of: Columna de la FAI-CNT [3](#)) de Castro del [Río](#) Columna de la FAI-CNT de Bujalance.

In addition, i.a. militia units from Málaga, Ciudad Real, Córdoba and Jaén as well as some companies of marines, 200 cavalrymen and 3 artillery batteries.



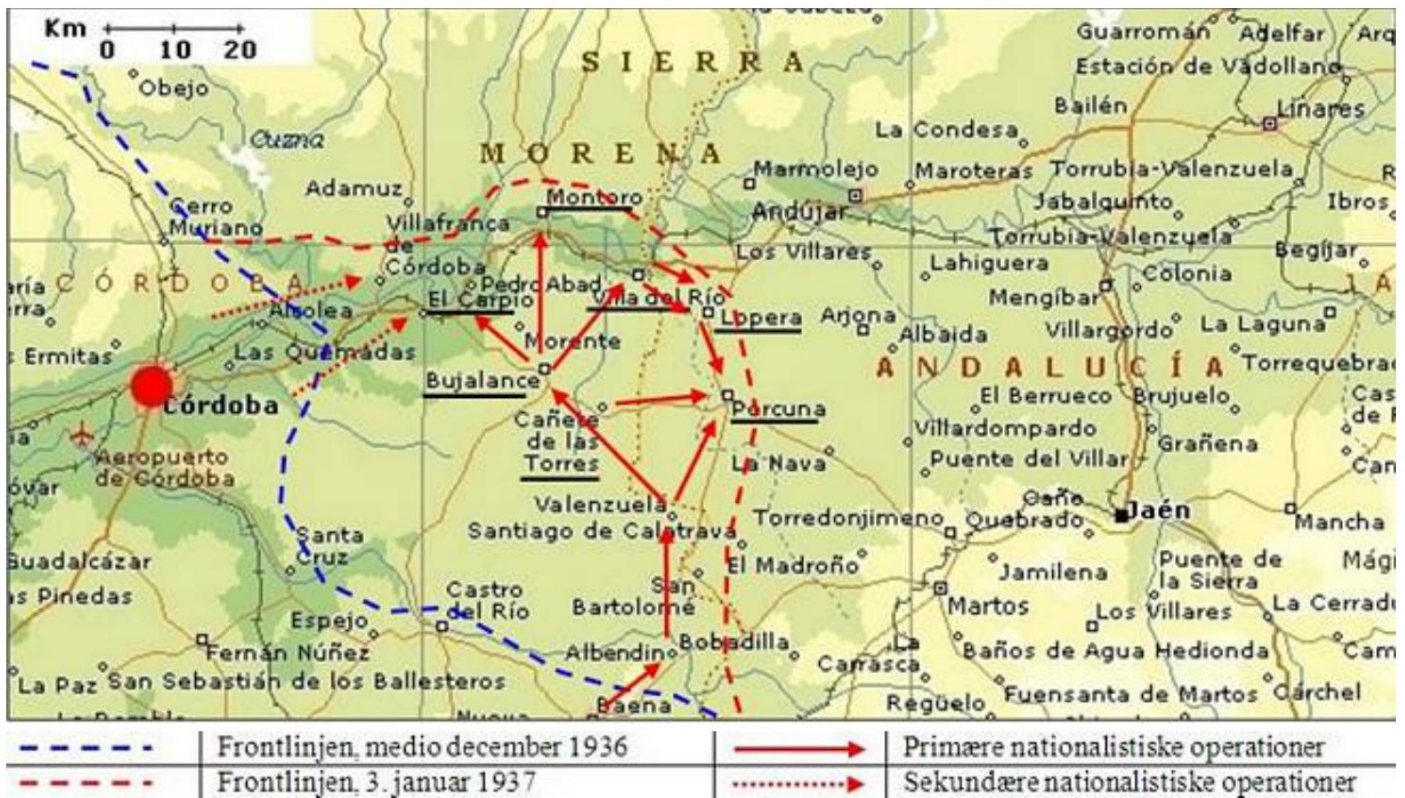
Republican regular soldier.
From Source 4.

Until the middle of December 1936, the Republican High Command had been busy with the defense of Madrid, but they now began to professionalize the Republican units. The process, which i.a. set out to convert the many militia units into actual military units, did not proceed without problems, as the anarchist organizations in particular were not very willing to give up their independence [5](#)).

In connection with the reorganization, the Republican Southern Army was formed, with General Martinez Monje [6](#)) as commander and [Lieutenant Colonel Pérez Gazzolo](#) as chief of staff.

The Southern Army, whose troops were located around Malaga, Granada and Córdoba, had its headquarters in the city of Jaén (the neighboring region of Córdoba).

At the end of December, the XIV. International Brigade, nicknamed "La Marsellaise" for the area, just as the Republican Army unit, 3ª Brigada Mixta, was briefly deployed in the area.



Map 1: Operation Olive, December 1936-January 1937 17), drawn on a contemporary map.

From Lopera (Jeanpedia) (in lightly edited form).

On December 17, 1936, the garrison of Valenzuela was reinforced with a unit designated as the Columna de Garcia Vallejo. The unit consisted of an infantry battalion, a machine gun unit from Alicante and a 105 mm battery. The commander of the battle group was Colonel Sánchez Ladesma and from 18 December 1936, Colonel Primitivo Peire.

At the turn of the year 1936-37, the Republican forces during the battles for Porcuna included the following units: (Source 2)

- 375 militia soldiers from Porcuna
- 3rd Machine Gun Regiment from Alicante (Regimiento nº 3 de Ametralladoras de Alicante)
- Grenadier Battalion Jaén (Batallón de Dinamiteros de Jaén) 7) __
- Militia Battalion "The Invincibles" from Jaén (Batallón de Milicianos "Los invencibles" de Jaén)
- A militia regiment (Regimiento de Milicianos)
- Battlegroup "Garcés" (Columna "Garcés") 8) __
- 9th Volunteer Battalion from Córdoba (Batallón de Voluntarios de Córdoba nº 9)
- 11th Regiment "Tarifa" (Regimiento Tarifa nº11) 9) __
- The remnants of militia units from Porcuna, Valenzuela, Santiago, Higuera and Lopera
- A motorized unit from Jaén (Sección motorizada de Jaén) 5th
- (light) Artillery Division (Quinto Ligero de Artillería) 6th (light)
- Artillery Division (Sexto Ligero de Artillería)
- A transport park (Parque móvil).

The force numbered approx. 3,000 men.

The XIV. International Brigade "La Marsellaise"

The brigade was established on 2 December 1936 in the city of Albacete (near Valencia), which was the depot area of the international brigades.

The brigade commander was the Polish-Russian officer Karol Wacław ywierzewski, nicknamed General Walter

[10](#)). The chief of staff was the Italian lieutenant Aldo Morandi; the Frenchman André Heussler was the commissar of the brigade.

The XIV. The International Brigade at this time consisted of the following battalions:

Battalion Surname	Created	The soldiers came primarily from	Discontinued	
9th Battalion	Sans Nom or Neuf Nationalities	15.12.1936	Balkans, Germany and Poland	16.1.1937
Battalion 11)	Vaillant-Couturier 10.	2.12.1936	France, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Bulgaria and Scandinavia	OCT 1938
12. Battalion La Marseillaise 12)	30.11.1936	France and England		22.4.1938
13. Battalion Henry Barbusse 13)	NOV 1936	France		25/10/1938



Infantrymen from one of the regular units of the Republican forces.
From Source 4.

In Source 10 it is stated that the brigade was equipped with French steel helmets of the Adrian type, Model 1926 [14](#)). _____

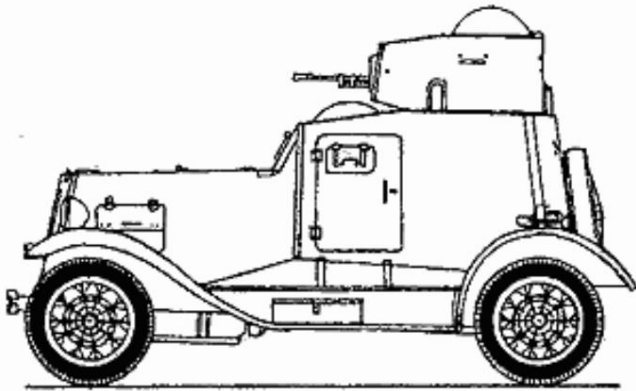
The soldiers may have gone out as shown in the illustration here.

The brigade's weapons were of many different types and mostly older models. It is mentioned, among other things, that the English company, which was part of the 12th Battalion, was equipped with Austrian Steyr rifles, probably of the type Steyr-Mannlicher Model 1895 [15](#)). _____

The brigade also included:

- An artillery battery (*Bateria "Agard"*). The battery, which was under the leadership of the French captain Agard, was according to Source 14 equipped with 4 pcs. 75 mm guns and 2 pcs. 115 mm howitzers.
- A cavalry squadron (60 men), under the command of French First Lieutenant Dallier.

- An engineering company, under the command of the Belgian Captain Klekker.
- A telegraph company (*Compañía de Transmisiones*).
- A sanitary unit, under the direction of the Polish-Jewish doctor, dr. Mieczyslaw Domanski ("Dubois Domanski") and with the German doctor, dr. Theodor Balk as assistant 16).



Armored car of the type FAI.

Source unknown.

In addition, 3 Russian-built armored vehicles of the type FAI 17) were included in the XIV. International Brigade during the current operations.

Two of the armored vehicles were deployed during the battles for the town of Lopera.

The battalions

The 9th Battalion took part in the battles for Villa del Rio (approx. 50 km east of Córdoba), while the rest of the brigade was deployed during the battles for the town of Lopera (approx. 10 km south-east of Villa del Rio). The brigade was deployed in the area from 23 December 1936 to 7 January 1937.

The international brigades later became known as quite effective units, but as the overview of the battalions shows, at this time they were all quite new, and neither commanders nor soldiers necessarily had any special training.

The many nationalities made commanding difficult and a large number of interpreters were necessary so that orders could be communicated to the units/soldiers. This later led to units being composed more by nationality.

9th Battalion "Sans Nom/Neuf Nationalités"

The commander of the 9th Battalion was a Bulgarian named Stomatov, while a Serb named Petrovich was the commissar. The battalion consisted of approx. 700 men, probably organized in 4 companies. The battalion had 36 machine guns (probably both light and medium); when the battalion arrived in the area of operations on 23 December 1936, only 4 machine guns were able to be deployed, the rest being inoperable due to sabotage.

10th Battalion "Vaillant-Couturier"

The commander of the 10th Battalion was a Belgian captain named Rasquin. The battalion consisted of 4 companies - one French, one Franco-Belgian, one German and one composed of soldiers from different countries, including Sweden and Denmark.

12th Battalion "La Marseillaise"

The commander of the 12th Battalion was a French lieutenant colonel named Gaston Delesalle. The battalion numbered about 670 men, probably organized into 4 companies - one [English 18](#)) and probably three French.

13. Battalion "Henry Barbusse"

The commander of the 13th [Battalion 19](#)) was a French reserve captain named Joseph Putz [20](#)), a veteran of the First World War. The battalion was probably organized into 4 companies, probably all French.

Battery "Agard"



75 mm field gun Model 1906.

From El Archivo Rojo - AGA,33,F,04040,53317,001
(Ministerio de Cultura España).

My only source for the information about the pamphlets in Batteri Agard comes from Source 14, but identifying the pamphlets from this information is difficult.

The 75 mm guns may well be the standard piece of pre-war Spanish field artillery - a Schneider field gun Model 1906.

At the start of the war, the republican forces had 144 pamphlets of this type.

As far as I can trace, a 115 mm howitzer was not part of either the Republican or Nationalist field artillery, so perhaps it is a clerical error.



105 mm field howitzer Model 1922.

From El Archivo Rojo - AGA,33,F,04052,54351,001
(Ministerio de Cultura España).

Perhaps it should say 105 mm, which in that case could be the English-built 105 mm field howitzer Model 1922, which was a standard piece in the Spanish field artillery before the war.

The gun was basically an English 18-pdr Mk IV, fitted with a different barrel.

At the beginning of the war, the republican forces had 108 pamphlets of this type.

The closest I can get to a 115mm howitzer is the English 4.5" howitzer (114mm) which was delivered from Russia [21](#). About 200 leaflets of this model were delivered to the Republican forces from October 1936 to February 1939.

The 1936 organization of a Spanish field artillery regiment was 2 light divisions - one equipped with the 75 mm field gun Model 1906 and the other with the 105 mm field howitzer Model 1922. Each division consisted of 3 batteries.

3ª Brigada Mixta

On December 26, 1936, the Republican units in the area were reinforced with the 3ª Brigada Mixta [22](#)). ___
The brigade was created on 5 November 1936 in Alcázar de San Juan. The soldiers consisted primarily of *carabineros*, which here can roughly be translated as (border) gendarmes [23](#)).

The commander of the 3rd Brigade was originally a major in the gendarmerie José María Galán [24](#)), but he was wounded during the brigade's deployment in the defense of Madrid. Emeterio Jarrillo Orgaz, originally a captain in the gendarmerie, then took command.



Soldiers from the 3ª Brigada Mixta at a flag presentation 13 June 1937.

From El Archivo Rojo - AGA,33,F,04067,55887,001

(Ministerio de Cultura España).

At the outbreak of war, the gendarmerie numbered approx. 15,000 men, all armed and under military command. Many of the gendarmes were former soldiers and veterans of the battles in Spanish Morocco.

Just over half (about 8,750 men, divided into 54 companies) remained loyal to the Republican government and made up some of the best troops in the Republican Army.



Corporal from one of the regular units of the Republican forces.

From Source 4.

The brigade originally numbered just over 2,500 men and consisted of:

- 9th Battalion

- 10th Battalion
- 11th Battalion
- 12th Battalion

The battalions consisted of a staff company, 4 infantry companies and 1 machine gun company.

The brigade included a heavy company, equipped with infantry guns, mortars and/or anti-tank guns, an engineer company, a train company and a staff company.

The brigade was ordered back to Madrid on 3 January 1937, as the threat here was deemed greater than on the southern front section.

The battles at Lopera

Antony Beevor writes in his book *The Spanish Civil War* [25](#)) the following [about](#) the current operations:

"Between the two parts of the offensive on the Corunna road [the battles for Madrid], the Republicans fought an unsuccessful blow to the south, when [Queipo de] Llano's forces advanced to capture the rich olive region of Andújar. It was a very inauspicious start for the new XIV International Brigade under General "Walter", a Polish communist who later led the 2nd Polish Army during the Red Army operation at Berlin.

The brigade included the French Marseillaise battalion, which had a British company.

The main battle took place at the rural town of Lopera just after Christmas and was noted for the fall of the British communist poets John Cornford and Ralph Fox. The battle began on the morning of December 28 and ended thirty-six hours later.

Walter had been ordered to recapture Lopera, but he had no telephone contact with his units and no air or artillery support.

The Nationalists inflicted heavy casualties on them with fire from machine guns, mortars and artillery. XIV.

The International Brigade had received virtually no training. As militiamen in similar circumstances, many of the soldiers turned around after being surprised by the machine gun fire.

About 800 bodies were left among the olive trees, and 500 men deserted from the front line."

After the fighting, André Marty, a gruff gentleman who was commissar at the High Command of the International Brigades, accused the commander of the 12th Battalion, Gaston Delasalle, of espionage and treason. He had apparently been tipped off by the brigade's commissar, André Heussler, and was now executed [26](#)).

A Scandinavian angle

The Scandinavian volunteers mentioned in connection with the 10th Battalion consisted of a group of 20-30 men, under the leadership of the Swedish sergeant Georg Ernstedt [27](#)). The [Scandinavians](#) formed a machine gun platoon and were attached to the 10th Battalion's German Company; the division was equipped with 4 machine guns.



Soldiers from the 4th Machine Gun Company in the 8th Battalion "Czaplaew", December 1936, which included Sergeant Ernsted's machine gun platoon. From Source 12.

The battalion was part of the XIII. International Brigade "Dombrowski", but Sergeant Ernsted's machine gun division was, cf. Source 18, attached to the 10th Battalion in December 1936 [28](#).

One of the group leaders was the Dane Peter Davidsen, who half a year earlier had attended corporal school in Haderslev. Another Dane in the group was Børge Sørensen, who had served his military service as an engineer soldier.

The book *De danske Spaniensfrivillige* (Source 18) contains pictures of Peter Davidsen and Børge Sørensen, who both fell on 13 January 1937 at Las Rocas on the Madrid front, to which the XIV. The International Brigade was sent after the fighting at Lopera.

Peter Davidsen and Børge Sørensen were the first Danish Spanish volunteers to die in the war.

Sources 18 and 19 do not directly mention the Scandinavians' participation in the Battle of Lopera, but Leo Kari mentions in Source 18 that *"... 10th battalion - the name has not been determined - was sent to the southern front after a few days of training in December 1936, where the brigade successfully carried out an offensive that was only brought to a halt 25 km east of Cordoba."*

It is not known where the idea that the brigade was lucky came from, but it harmonizes very poorly with other sources' portrayal of the battles.

English and Irish volunteers

Among the many accounts of the experiences of the Spanish volunteers, I have, among other things, supported me for the following:

The articles *A Brief History of the British Battalion of the International Brigades 1936 -1938* and *Who served in the British Battalion* by Richard Thorpe (La Columna - The Spanish Civil War Living History Group) provide further information on the English soldiers who took part in the Spanish Civil war.

The story *With the Reds in Andalusia* by Joe Monks (Ireland and the Spanish Civil War) describes an Irishman's experiences during the war, where he, among other things, served in the 1st (English) Company and took part in the Battle of Lopera.

Sources

1. *Offensiva Nacionalista en el frente de Córdoba, diciembre de 1936* by José María Pulido de Torres (Rincón histórico).
2. *La Columna del Teniente Coronel Redondo y el Requeté Andaluz* (Requetés).
3. *La Campaña de Andalucía - Las Pérdidas de Bujalance y Montoro* (Don Joaquín Pérez Salas).
4. *Nuovi Soldatini di Carta* by Giovanni Gandini (ed.); artist: Enric Sió, Diki Books, Milan, 1976.
5. *International Brigades* (Wikipedia)
6. *6th XIV International Brigade* (Wikipedia)
7. *Les Brigades Internacionals* (Associació Catalana de Vexil·lologia)
8. *Brigadas XIV La Marsellaise* (Associació Catalana de Vexil·lologia)
9. *XIVa Brigada Internacional* (Sociedad Benéfica de Historiadores Aficionados y Creadores)
10. *La XIV Brigada Internacional en la Batalla de Lopera* by Antonio Pantoja Pantoja and Jose Luis Pantoja Vallejo (La Guerra Civil en Jaén).
11. *Cronología de las brigades Internacionales* (Sociedad Benéfica de Historiadores Aficionados y Creators)
12. *The Swedes in Internationella Brigaderna* by Stellan Bojerud (Skalman.nu Forum) [29](#).
13. *Brigada Mixta número 3* (Sociedad Benéfica de Historiadores Aficionados y Creadores)
14. *A question about International Brigades in the Axis History Forum* (16 October 2004). The post contains information about the pamphlets in Batteri Agard.
15. *Fuerzas Armadas de la República* (Sociedad Benéfica de Historiadores Aficionados y Creadores). The source contains a lot of information about the weapons of the Republican forces.
16. *Brigada Mixta número 3* (Sociedad Benéfica de Historiadores Aficionados y Creadores)
17. *Referencias de la III Brigada Mixta* (Foro La Guerra Civil Española)
18. *The Danish Spanish volunteers* by Leo Kari, Rosenkilde and Bagger, Copenhagen 1952, p.55-56 [30](#).
19. *From Bjelkes Allé to Barcelona - Danish volunteers in Spain 1936-1939* by Carsten Jørgensen, Nyt Nordisk Forlag Arnold Busck, Copenhagen 1986, ISBN 87-17-05451-6.
20. *The quick gamers guide to the Spanish Civil War* by Greg Novak, Command Post Quarterly No. 7 & No. 8, Game Designer's Workshop, Bloomington, Illinois 1993 & 1994.

Per Finsted

Notes:

- 1) From *Guerra Civil Española en la province de Córdoba* (Wikipedia).
- 2) See *Coronel Carlos García Vallejo, Un militar Leal* by Ricardo Pardo Camacho (Aula Militar)
- 3) The unit belonged to the Spanish anarchist party *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (Wikipedia), which, in cooperation with the trade union *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (Wikipedia), formed a large number of militia units.
- 4) From *Recortables de la Guerra Civil* (Fora Anarquista) The figure here is to illustrate one of the anarchist militia units.
- 5) See e.g. my article *About the militia leader and anarchist Buenaventura Durruti*.
- 6) See *Fernando Martínez Monje Restoy (1874-1963)* (Wikipedia).
- 7) The battalion is designated in Spanish as *Dinamiteros*, which directly translates to *hand grenade launchers*, a designation that was used for units primarily equipped with hand grenades and explosive landings. See *War in Spain: Los Dinamiteros* (Time Magazine, 3 January 1938).

8) Former chief Enrique Vazquez fell during the fighting for El Carpio on December 22, 1936. See *Guerra Civil Española en la provincia de Córdoba* (Wikipedia), which also describes the operations in the area in the fall of 1936.

9) On the history of the regiment, see *Historial del Regimiento Tarifa nº 33 (La Infantería Española y sus Regimientos)*. Officially, the regiment is described as disbanded in 1936; this may cover up that it was instead part of the Republican Army.

10) See *Karol ŷwierczewski (1897-1947)* (Wikipedia). A picture of General Walter is reproduced in Source 4. The page also shows the brigade's flag, referred to as a gift from the city of Madrid in 1937; whether it was actually delivered is not known.

11) The battalion is designated from October 1937 as 11. Battalion and later as 14. Battalion. A photograph of General Walter is reproduced in Source 19.

12) In May 1937, the battalion was designated Ralph Fox, named after the author of the same name. See *Ralph Fox (1900-1936)* (Wikipedia). Ralph Fox was a commissary in the 12th Battalion's 1st Company.

13) Henri Barbusse (1873-1935) was a French communist writer, see *Henri Barbusse* (Wikipedia).

14) Many other types were used in the international brigades, see e.g. *Cascos del Siglo XX, España* (Joseba Revuelta).

15) See *Steyr-Mannlicher M1895* (Wikipedia).

16) Dr. Dubois was hit by a sniper in August 1937 when he was chief sanitary officer in the 35th. Division which was then under the command of General Walter. After his death, his assistant, the Latvian-born English doctor, Dr. Len Crome his function. See *Obituary - Dr Len Crome (1909-2001)* (The Independent, 11 May 2001). About Theodor Balk, see *Theodor Balk (1900-1974)* (Wikipedia). A (smaller?) English sanitary unit, which included nurse Ann Murray, became part of XIV in January 1937. International Brigades Sanitary Unit. See *Ann Murray, an anti-fascist and International Brigade Nurse (CHOSE - British Health Service Union)*.

17) Russian designation *Ford-A Izhorskiy*; Spanish designation *Autoametralladora Ligera FA-1*. A total of 20 pieces. FAI tanks were delivered to the Republican forces, the first 10 in October 1936. (Source 10)

18) The company was called the 1st (English) Company and numbered 145 men - English, Irish and Dutch. The company commander was the English captain George Nathan.

19) A "veteran banner" is reproduced in *Amicale des Anciens volontaires en Espagne républicaine* (Archives communales d'Ivry-sur-Seine). The reverse of the banner lists the battles in which the battalion took part - Lopera, Las Rozas, Morata, Balsain, Jarama, La Lastra, Cuesta de la Reina, Cerro Benito, Caspe and Tortosa.

20) Joseph Putz (1895-1945) was commander of XIV. International Brigade from 15 to 28 February 1937.

Later he became commander of the 1st Basque Division. During the Second World War, Putz was the ^e *battalion you* commander of *3 Régiment de marche du Tchad* and was killed on 28 January 1945 at the town of Grussenheim in Alsace. The battalion included i.a. former Spanish soldiers in the republican army who had been deported to Algiers after the civil war. The battalion was part of the 2e Division Blindée. See *2* (Wikipedia) and ^a *Division Blindée (France)* *Division Leclerc (Juin 1944 un vent de liberte)*, the 1944 organizational chart shows a picture of Lieutenant Colonel Putz.

21) In *Taschenbuch der Heere* by Kurt Passow, JF Lehmanns Verlag, Munich 1939, it is stated that the pamphlet i.a. was part of the artillery divisions of the Russian cavalry divisions.

22) Traditionally, a Spanish infantry brigade before the Civil War consisted of 2 infantry regiments. A *Brigade*

Mixta (directly translated *a composite brigade*) was the Spanish term for what today would be called an infantry brigade, i.e. a unit consisting of infantry units as well as combat support and supply units.

23) See Carabinieri (Wikipedia).

24) José María Galán died in 1978 in Cuba. See José María Galán (Wikipedia).

25) *The Spanish Civil War* by Antony Beevor, Borgens Forlag, Copenhagen 2006, ISBN 87-21-02792-7. The book's original title is *The Battle for Spain - The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*.

26) In Source 1, however, it is stated that the suspicion was unfounded. See André Marty (Wikipedia) and *British volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: the British Battalion in the International Brigades, 1936-1939* by Ralph Baxell (Google Books).

27) Karl Erik Georg Ernstedt (1912-1938), who had been Furir (equivalent to sergeant) in the Svea Lifeguard (1. Infantry Regiment), later became captain and commander of the company "Georg-Branting"; he was wounded during the fighting at the Ebro on 25 June 1938 and died a few days later. From Source 7 and List of Swedes who died in the Spanish Civil War (Wikibin).

28) Source 7 further states that in January 1937, the 4th Maskingeværkkompagni was part of the battalion "Edgar André", which was then the 1st Battalion in the XI. International Brigade "Thäelmann".

29) The article *Från Västerbotten till Spanien* by Jonas Sjöstedt in *Västerbotten*, no. 3, 2008, p.33-51 (Västerbottens Museum), can be recommended as a description of the Swedish Spanish volunteers.

30) The article *The Danish Spanish Volunteers* (Leksikon.org) can be recommended as a description of the Danish Spanish volunteers. The article builds, among other things, on the books *De danske Spaniensfrivillige* (Source 18) and *From Bjelkes Allé to Barcelona* (Source 19).