IDEOLOGY AND THE CANADIANS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-9

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Abstract

In the late 1930s, a civil war broke out in Spain between the left-wing government and the reactionary forces of the right. The government was supported by volunteers from several countries, including Canada. While the subject of the Canadian volunteers has been the focus of a few works in the past, the question of the level of their ideological commitment to the anti-fascist cause in Spain has been left largely unexplored. This thesis was written to explore, in much greater depth than ever before, the conviction of these volunteers to a cause not their own, and the nature of that conviction.

This thesis examines both quantitative and qualitative data to prove that the volunteers did indeed believe in this cause. Much of the thesis relies upon recently-released documentation, gathered by the Comintern, concerning the performance of the Canadians during this civil war. Some of this information was used to create a database, to provide some numerical support for the conclusions. The research in this thesis supports the previous assumptions that the volunteers were, indeed, ideologically very committed to the Republican and anti-fascist cause. The volunteers were so motivated even though they were not necessarily pro-communist.

Acknowledgments

As with any major piece of research, this thesis could not have been completed without the help of several other people. They helped me in several different ways, and all behind the scenes. Among those who gave me much assistance are those on the staff of the Harriet Irving Library on the UNB campus. They are helpful and friendly, and always willing to be of assistance. The staff in the library archives are especially to be noted, providing both a copy of Lobigs' thesis to read, and a quiet space to work.

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Greg Page, 8 Jan 1998.

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Introduction

In July 1936, war broke out in Spain between the government on one side, and some rebel generals supported by other reactionary forces on the other. Both sides received support from foreigners; the rebels, called Nationalists, were supported by the German and Italian armies, especially the Italians. The government forces, called either the Republicans or the Loyalists, relied on volunteers from all over the world, the vast majority of whom fought in the International Brigades. Among the foreign volunteers in these Brigades were nearly 1600 Canadians. It seems odd that so many from Canada would fight in a war with which they had so little connection; the number of Canadians of Spanish descent who volunteered to fight was so small as to be insignificant. Since the Spanish Civil War was portrayed in ideological terms, there remains a question of the extent to which ideology was a factor in the motives of the Canadians who volunteered to fight.

Ideology can be defined as a set of beliefs, often as a basis for political or economic theory, through which all human behaviour can be explained, and which determines the actions of its adherents. A key characteristic of ideology is that it retains its integrity even when faced with conflicting evidence. Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, found three totalitarian elements inherent

in ideological thinking. The first element is the historical nature of ideology. It is concerned with motion from past to future through the present, although that motion is not necessarily seen as progressive. The second element is an ideology's independence from experiences which might not appear to fit its explanation of events. Ideology focuses past perceived reality to some "true" reality behind sensory data. This "true" reality is the driving force behind the motion of history, and conflicting evidence is explained as a cycle or a remnant from some earlier period. The final element is the order which an ideology imposes on experience. Ideology sets a basic axiomatic premise, from which actions can be logically or dialectically deduced.[1]

Writers have suggested several reasons why the volunteers fought in the Spanish Civil War. Jack Reid, a British volunteer, saw four categories of British volunteers: adventurers, "holiday-boozers", idealists, and communists. "Holiday-boozers" were the type of person who would have travelled to Spain purely on a whim, and probably would have left as soon as their situation became slightly difficult.[2] Victor Hoar, an American, and the first to write about the

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[1] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951, p. 470-1.

[2] Reid, from an interview with Victor Hoar, quoted in Hoar, *Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1969. p.20-1. Hoar's follow-up is on p.22.

Canadians who fought in Spain, followed up Reid's comments by applying his categories to the North Americans. Hoar found that three of these applied to Canadians and Americans; there would have been very few of the holiday-boozers from the New World. For those who travelled from Britain, Spain was a day's journey away. Travelling to Spain from North America required a much greater time commitment. The journey took several days by boat across the Atlantic, often on top of several days' travel to reach the East Coast to board the ship. The length of time required to reach Spain would have discouraged those who might have gone for the perceived fun of it, not for the rightness or adventure. There were also other factors which would have weeded out the potential "holiday-boozer" volunteers. In 1937, the Canadian government applied the Foreign Enlistment Act to the Spanish Civil War. This Act made it illegal for a Canadian citizen to enlist in the army of a country to which Canada was not allied. Those who volunteered for Spain therefore broke the law in doing so, and faced the possibility of prosecution upon their return to Canada. Those who volunteered for the perceived adventure, on the other hand, would have seen these obstacles to volunteering as part of the challenge of the journey.

Of the three remaining types of volunteers found by Reid, idealists and communists were two shades of the same

type of volunteer: those motivated by ideology. It was also suggested at the time that the volunteers were actually mercenaries, who were fighting in Spain for large pay rates. These volunteers would have been attracted to Spain through promises of fame, fortune and glory, but mostly fortune. Therefore, there are three possible answers for the question of the motivations of the Canadian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. The first is that they were primarily motivated by their ideology. They would have believed that the cause of defending Republican Spain against the usurpers was just, and that this cause needed their help, and possibly their lives. The second possibility is that they were adventurers, who sought an escape from the drudgeries of life in Canada in the midst of the Great Depression. They would have been attracted by the romance of the Civil War in Spain, and would have volunteered to reap some of its glory. The third possibility was that they were mercenaries. This third group was not much of a possibility; the Brigades were paid only a very small stipend, if they received any remuneration at all. There were mercenaries fighting for the Republic, but they were exclusive to the air force.

Authors who wrote on the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, the largely Canadian battalion in the International Brigades, relied primarily on the documents collected by the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. This organization was

created in 1937 to provide assistance to the volunteers from Canada, in the form of care packages and letters; it also raised money to send more men overseas. The documents it collected contain several accounts by the volunteers, dating from just after the war, with more recent memoirs. They also include letters written by several of the volunteers, and copies of over 600 file cards on the volunteers. These file cards were created by the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, and contained biographical information on these few volunteers.

In 1995, the National Archives of Canada acquired from Moscow some of the records kept by the Comintern on the Canadians in the Spanish Civil War. These records included several reports on the volunteers, listing biographical information or party affiliation. They also contain an attempt to fit the returning men into the Communist Party of Canada, by pointing out the Party functions for which the men would be most suited upon their return to Canada. These evaluations were based on the performance of these men while they were in Spain. There were also several letters, a few diaries, plus several partially-completed questionnaires, filled out by the men. There were also examples of poetry, songs, and articles submitted by the volunteers for publication in the various newspapers and bulletin boards kept by the units of the Brigades.

All of this documentation provides the information which allows an in-depth study of the level of ideological commitment of the Canadians who fought in Spain. The letters, diaries, poetry, songs, and articles, plus the information provided by the Comintern on the performance of the men provides the means for some qualitative and quantitative analysis of the men and of their level of ideological commitment to the anti-fascist cause. It is through the meaning of these numbers, and through the culture portrayed in the literature left behind by the men, that the picture of the strength of the commitment of the volunteers comes into focus. These documents lead to the conclusion that the Canadian volunteers for the Spanish Civil War had volunteered because they believed in the cause of the Brigades and the Republic. In other words, the volunteers were motivated by ideology more than by anything else.

The secondary literature surrounding the Canadians in the International Brigades can be divided into three categories. The first consists of the more general works on the Brigades as a whole. The second category is the set of books and articles which focus specifically on the Canadians. Bridging these two categories are the few books which focus on the volunteers from Canada and from the United States of America.

The books which examine the International Brigades as a

whole do not provide much detail in exploring the question of the motivations of the volunteers. Some of them, such as Verle Johnston's book *Legions of Babel*, written in 1967, are generally descriptive of the activities and organizations of the Brigades. In his book, Johnston provided nothing more firm for an analysis of the ideological motivations of the volunteers than a list of their political affiliations. He found that a majority of the volunteers were communists, and that there were socialists, liberals, and democrats among the volunteers, yet he gave no proportions other than the rough estimate of at least fifty percent for the communists.[3] Johnston's book was mostly descriptive of the Brigades and the events in which they took part. In one chapter, he began to question the prominence of the commissars in the Brigade hierarchy, and it was only in the last chapter that he drew a few conclusions about the usefulness of the Brigades in the larger scheme of the war. The rest of the book was primarily a description of the tasks and organization of the Brigades.

R. Dan Richardson argued that the dominant force of the Brigades was the communists and the Comintern. Indeed, he thought that the International Brigades were a crucial element in the policy of the Soviet Union toward the Spanish

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[3] Johnston, *Legions of Babel: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967, p. 92-3.

Civil War. In his 1982 book, *Comintern Army*, Richardson argued that the Comintern used the communist organizations within each country to recruit the volunteers. Many of these recruitment efforts moved through the subordinate organizations of the communist parties, and called for party members because time was short. There were many attempts to recruit from outside the party, but these met with only slight success. Those who were not party members had to undergo a longer process to determine their sincerity.[4] According to Richardson, most of the volunteers were communist, and the political commissars placed the whole of the International Brigades under the orders of Moscow, through the Comintern. The closest Richardson came to discussing the level of ideological commitment held by the volunteers of the International Brigades for the Republican cause was his statement that the majority of the volunteers were either communist, or else screened for political reliability.

Michael Jackson was critical of Richardson's views. He outlined his critique in part of his book *Fallen Sparrows*, written in 1994. He argued that Richardson's work focussed more on the upper echelons of the Brigades, and overlooked

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[4] Richardson, *Comintern Army*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982, p.34-6.

the diversity of the men in the ranks. Jackson listed several motives for someone to volunteer to fight in the International Brigades. First, an exiled European might want to continue the fight which he had lost in his home country, and which was the cause of his exile. These exiles would then hope to transplant that revolutionary fervour back into their homeland. Secondly, there were many economically displaced people who might have associated Hitler with the captains of industry responsible for their own situation. Franco was seen as a subordinate to Hitler, and fighting the two of them in Spain would be a means of getting back at the capitalists who disadvantaged these volunteers. Thirdly, there may have been some who feared the importation of fascism into their own country. This third possible motive would especially be true of the North Americans. In Canada, many volunteers fell into the second and third categories. Many had gone to work in the relief camps, which operated until 1936; they were then found to be a breeding ground for radical thought and were closed down. A fourth category comprised those who anticipated the coming war against fascism, and wanted to fight it on foreign soil such as Spain. Many of the volunteers directly from Europe would have been in this category. Finally, there were some adventurers. Jackson found that mercenary soldiers fighting for the Republic were confined to the air force, with very

few if any in the infantry. Adventurers, on the other hand, would have been found almost anywhere.[5] Of these five categories, the first three fall under the broader category of ideological motivation. The fourth category only applied to the European volunteers, especially from France and the eastern nations which had been the battlegrounds of the Great War and were likely to be the site of a coming conflict. Jackson's categories quickly reduce to ideology and adventurism. His analysis set out these categories, but did not examine the prominence of each.

The general literature on the International Brigades does not provide much scope for the analysis of the motivations of the volunteers in the Brigades. Some works are content simply to list the political affiliations of the volunteers, giving no proportions. Others emphasize the role of the Comintern, and yet do not examine the rank-and-file to test their conclusions for all levels of volunteers. Jackson's book provides the best analysis of motives, but again, it does not delve deeply enough into how prominent each motive was in the Brigades. Furthermore, they are very broad-based, and do not focus in on the motivations of any particular group of volunteers, such as those who came from

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[5] Jackson, *Fallen Sparrows: The International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1994, p.41-52.

Canada.

One book which examines the North American volunteers is John Gerassi's 1986 book, *The Premature Anti-Fascists*. Gerassi subtitled his book "An Oral History". To craft this oral history, Gerassi sent out three hundred questionnaires to American and Canadian survivors of the Spanish Civil War. He received 210 answers out of the three hundred, from which he selected about a hundred for personal interviews. His book is the distillation of these interviews and questionnaires, organized thematically. One chapter is entitled "Why They Went". This chapter, as in the rest of the book, proceeds from anecdote to anecdote. These accounts all provide ideologically-based reasons for volunteering for Spain. Based on this series of anecdotes, it appears that the vast majority of the Americans and Canadians would have been ideologically motivated in their decision to volunteer. Since Gerassi sent his questionnaires out in 1979, the information within his book would be coloured by forty years of memory. He paid attention to which selections he chose, taking those which provided a coherent picture of life in the Brigades, as well as the specific idiosyncrasies of that particular volunteer, but the question of the accuracy of the memories is not completely removed. There is also a question of how representative is this sample of 210 out of 4500 to

5000 North American volunteers.

An examination of the literature surrounding the Canadian volunteers in the Spanish Civil War needs to include the classic work on the subject, *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion* by Victor Hoar, an American, and a professor of English Literature. His book, originally completed in 1969, was re-released in a second edition under the name Victor Howard in 1986. This book chronicled the events of the Spanish Civil War through the eyes of the Canadians who were a part of it. It also briefly examined the events which led an estimated 1239 Canadians to volunteer for the International Brigades. Hoar does not set out together in one chapter several statements of why the men volunteered; instead, his book is peppered throughout with such statements, either personal descriptions of why an individual volunteered, or else one person's opinion on the level of commitment of his fellow unit members. These sources portrayed the volunteers as ideologically motivated, with a very few exceptions. His book was the first on the Canadian volunteers, regardless of their battalion, and was the first to make use of some of the material gathered by the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.

Since Hoar's book was published, there has been a handful of other books and articles which have focussed on

the Canadians in the Spanish Civil War. The next major work was completed in 1989, by a former volunteer, William C. Beeching. His book, *Canadian Volunteers, Spain 1936-1939,* was written to fulfil the role of official history of the Battalion. The process for this book was originally begun in 1939, but was abandoned during the Second World War. Beeching, like Hoar, traced the events of the International Brigades, focussing on the 1448 known Canadian volunteers, in whatever their duties while in Spain. He relied quite extensively on direct quotations from primary material, and summarized and linked the quotations, providing at the same time a larger framework for these citations. This framework was in keeping with the official view of the International Brigades produced through Comintern propaganda during the war.

In 1992, an M.A. student at the University of New Brunswick, Martin Lobigs, produced a comprehensive thesis on the attitudes of Canadians toward the volunteers of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, and the Canadians in other battalions. His thesis, *Canadian Responses to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, 1936-9,* in part built on the work by Mary Biggar Peck, who explored the responses of the media to the men of the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion. In one part of his examination of his subject, Lobigs looked at the reasons for

volunteering. He relied on a series of RCMP reports and eyewitness accounts of both general and personal attitudes to craft a picture of ideologically motivated volunteers. He was also careful to present some evidence for the opposite argument. There were a couple of volunteers who were very vocal in their criticisms of the way in which the communists were running the Brigades. These volunteers were not communists themselves, but were strongly anti-fascist, regardless of political affiliation.

Archivist Myron Momryk has produced three articles and papers on volunteers from the Canadians who fought in the Spanish Civil War. His most recent work, "Canadian Volunteers in the International Brigades 1936-39: A Profile", was presented at the 1993 annual conference of the Canadian Historical Association. It built on his earlier article, which only focussed on the Ukrainian volunteers. The focus of his research has been in compiling the biographical data on the volunteers to provide a profile of the "typical" Canadian volunteer. While working on this task, he has shed some light on one of the discrepancies in the previous literature. The actual number of Canadian volunteers is unknown, but there have been several counts made. Victor Hoar gave 1239 volunteers, based on a report by Jack Taylor, who was the commissar of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion late in the war. William Beeching's book included an honour

roll of 1448 names of Canadian volunteers. Momryk himself found references to 1674 volunteers in the documents, although some of these names only appeared once. His estimate therefore stood at 1566 Canadians who fought in the Spanish Civil war. His focus in this paper was on the statistics, as he tried to build a profile of the volunteers. He did not devote much time to an examination of the motives of the volunteers.

The most recent work on the Canadian volunteers is *A Gallant Cause*, written by Mark Zuehlke in 1996. His purpose for this book was to let the volunteers tell their story through him. The method he took was to write what he called "literary non-fiction," where he crafted a narrative based upon the accounts left by the people involved. He left little room for his own opinions and interpretation. The narrative of the book took the form of a series of stories about the participants, organized thematically according to a basic chronology of events, so that some simultaneous events in different parts of Spain are described in different chapters. His book gives the overall impression that the volunteers were ideologically motivated; however, he never specifically delves into an examination of their motives. Such an examination would contradict the book's purpose. Instead, Zuehlke mentions in appropriate spots in the

narrative the motives for volunteering and staying in Spain, as expressed by the volunteers.

All of the works focussing specifically on the Canadian volunteers suggest that the volunteers were ideologically motivated, yet none of them undertake a detailed examination of the level of ideological commitment of the Canadians. The trend in the literature is to cite a few examples of general statements, made by some of the volunteers, concerning the sincerity and beliefs of themselves or of their fellows. Taking for granted the accuracy of these statements, the authors then extrapolate from them the level of commitment of the Canadians who fought in Spain. While this technique is sufficient for the purposes of their works, a comprehensive examination of the level of commitment of the Canadian volunteers must go beyond such statements.

Europe during the late 1920s and into the 1930s was fragmenting along ideological lines. At one end of the continent was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with its left-wing government which was also fostering revolutionary movements in other countries. At the other end of the continent were the stable liberal democracies of France and Britain. In Italy, from the mid-1920s, and Germany after 1933, there were strong, radically-reactionary governments in the middle of the continent. The governments of Germany and Italy promoted the idea of the strength of the

nation and of the nationality. All of Europe was polarizing along these lines; right-wing and left-wing groups were being created in every country. Attempts were made by some, notably the Catholic Church, to halt or slow this polarization, but these attempts failed.[6]

By 1935, the tension in Europe had greatly increased. The Soviet Union had withdrawn from its previous policy of working against the governments of Europe and against the socialist parties in foreign countries. Instead, it embarked on a policy of co-operation, the Popular Front. The Popular Front involved co-operation not only with the other socialists, but even with some of the more left-leaning liberals, in an attempt to halt the swing of politics to the right. To create this coalition, the Soviet Union and the Communist International (the Comintern), its agent in other countries, toned down the rhetoric which called for revolution in other countries. The Popular Front saw the reactionary, right-wing forces as the enemy, and began to label them all under the single umbrella of "fascism".

This ideological polarization of politics was the environment in which the Spanish Civil War began. The competition among these different political ideologies was

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[6] cf. Kent, "The Vatican and the Spanish Civil War", *European History Quarterly*, Vol 16 (1986), 441-64, for a discussion of some of the attempts of the Vatican to mediate between both sides of this polarization of politics.

played out in the government of the Spanish Second Republic. There were three distinct phases to the Republic. When it was first constituted in 1931, the Republic was governed by left-leaning moderates, assisted by some moderate socialists. This government instituted a number of social reforms, in an effort to win the working-classes away from the more radical elements in Spanish society.

The second phase began in 1933, when elections brought a major victory to the right-wing parties. This government then began to roll back the reforms of the previous government. There was some labour unrest under the policies of this government, as well as declarations of autonomy by some of the provinces. These attempts at sovereignty were suppressed.

In 1936, the final phase began. The February elections brought the Popular Front coalition to power. It immediately set out to re-do what had been undone by the previous conservative government. More civil unrest followed, and the government was not able to accomplish much of its programme. Events came to a head in July, when several generals revolted in Morocco. Thus was born the Spanish Civil War.

The sides in the war were lined up according to these competing groups of ideologies. On the Republican side were all of the parties of the Popular Front and all of those who supported the Spanish Republic. It consisted of liberals,

social democrats, socialists, communists, anarchists and Trotskyists, and a few Catalan and Basque separatists. The Nationalists were a right-wing coalition of much of the military, especially the officers; the Carlists, who were a group of monarchists; the landowners; some elements of the Spanish hierarchy of the Catholic Church; and the Falange, a Spanish Fascist group. In spite of the portrayal of the Nationalists by the Republicans as fascist, the Falange made up only a small part of the Nationalist coalition.[7]

Soon after the military revolted, the Republican forces made an appeal abroad. They first appealed to democratic Europe and to the United States, with very limited success. The European powers were hesitant to become involved in Spain, lest the civil war expand into another general European war. Even the League of Nations only recommended mediation of the Spanish conflict.[8] They only received support from France, who sent small amounts of equipment. More important, however, was France's decision to allow foreign volunteers to migrate through it to assist the Republicans. With such limited response in western Europe to

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[7] The label "fascist" was given added weight by the support of the Nazi German and Italian Fascist forces. Since this thesis relies on Loyalist documents, there will be times when "fascist" is used to denote the Nationalists.

[8] Halstead, "Spanish Foreign Policy, 1936-1978", in Cortada, (ed.) *Spain in the Twentieth Century World.* Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980. p.54-9.

its cry for help, Spain approached the Soviet Union for assistance. Stalin immediately began shipping large quantities of supplies and instructors. With the help from the Soviet Union came the resources of the Comintern, which had sections in most western countries. The Comintern began a recruitment drive to provide volunteers for the Republican effort. Such volunteers came from Britain, France, the United States, the Soviet Union, Canada, Germany, Italy, and other European nations. Most of these countries refused official support of the Republic, and some, such as Canada, even forbade their citizens from travelling to Spain; however, the Comintern was able to drum up enough proletarian feeling to provide unofficial support for the Republican effort. The majority of these foreign volunteers were organized into the International Brigades, which were dominated by the Comintern.

The Nationalist forces, led by Francisco Franco, were also given international support. Nazi Germany and fascist Italy sent men and materials to support Franco's forces. When the revolt began, the Nationalists began a push toward Madrid. They believed that the capture of Madrid would end the war quickly. They originally met with successes; however, the Republicans in Madrid put up a much greater struggle than the Nationalists expected. The Republican forces there were aided in part by the presence of the first

battalions of the International Brigades. The battle for Madrid lasted for many months, with no end in sight. Attention focussed elsewhere.

Another Nationalist army swept through the north of the country, starting in Galicia, next to the Atlantic, and gradually made its way eastward. It by-passed some enclaves of Republican support, such as the Basques, but these areas were eventually defeated. It continued to push eastward, into the Aragon province. Here, again, the International Brigades were used to slow the advance, especially in the Ebro river valley. It was in the attempt to take the town of Fuentes de Ebro that the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, also called the Mac-Paps, first saw action.

By mid-1938, the Nationalists had pushed the Republicans back through Aragon, and had reached the Mediterranean in places. One final offensive by the Republicans, late in the summer, failed. As the lines were being dug in September, the International Brigades were withdrawn. The Spanish government had decided that they might be able to receive greater support internationally if they were fighting their war by themselves.

After the withdrawal of the International Brigades, Franco turned his attention to Catalonia. There was not much will left among the Republicans, and resistance crumbled under the advancing Nationalists. He turned back to Madrid

after Barcelona fell on 26 January 1939. Internal struggles in the Republican government rose against Négrin and the Communists, and Négrin was replaced as Prime Minister. His successor wanted to negotiate a peace settlement, but finally surrendered unconditionally on 31 March 1939.[9]

The International Brigades were a diverse group of people. They came from all over Europe and North America, recruited by the Comintern through the communist organizations within the various countries. At first the battalions were created from the volunteers who were in Albacete, the gathering-point of the foreign volunteers, regardless of country of origin. After a short period of time, they were re-organized along linguistic and national lines. Each Brigade was created for a language group or for a geographical place of origin. There was a Brigade for those of eastern European origin, XIII Brigade. XV Brigade was primarily for those volunteers who spoke English. It consisted of the British Battalion, the Lincoln Battalion, the Washington Battalion, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, and the Dimitrov Battalion, which was later transferred to XIII Brigade. The Lincolns and Washingtons merged after one particularly bloody battle in the defence of Madrid.

While these battalions were supposedly made up of the

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[9] Halstead, "Spanish Foreign Policy, 1936-78", 152-4.

volunteers from one country, each one was a conglomeration of volunteers from all over. So while the Mac-Paps were in name Canadian, many other nationalities were represented. The Canadians were not even in the majority; it was, in fact, mostly American. It was called the Canadian battalion, however, since most of the Canadians who fought in Spain fought with the Mac-Paps. Most of the rest of the Canadians were in the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, with a few others in the British Battalion. Those who did not fight with XV Brigade were usually in XIII Brigade, and were Canadians of eastern European origin, usually Ukrainian.

Examining the level of ideological commitment of the Canadian volunteers requires a deeper consideration of the question itself. The question of how committed they were to the Republican cause is actually a two-part question. The first part asks whether these volunteers were committed to the cause before they arrived in Spain; the second asks whether they remained or became committed once they were in the front lines, dodging enemy bullets. The parts of this question also have subordinate questions. Answering them answers the larger question. One of these questions looks for elements in the backgrounds of the volunteers which may have pre-disposed them to causes of the political left. A second examines the nature of the ideological culture of the Brigades. Related to this question is one about how accepted

that culture was among the Canadian volunteers. There is the possibility that acceptance of it was merely lip-service to avoid trouble with superior officers. The final question focuses on the level of commitment of the Canadians, as assessed by the officials within the Brigade hierarchy. These subordinate questions correspond to the chapters of this thesis.

The first of the main chapters will examine a database on the volunteers to discover what elements in a volunteer's background may have pre-disposed him to left-wing causes, and later to volunteer for Spain. It will consider, among other factors, nationality, age, occupation, and when they may have joined the Communist Party of Canada. The next two chapters focus on the culture of the Brigades. The first of these examines the culture as found in the literature which the volunteers left behind. This body of literature included the songs, articles and poetry from the various unit publications. This chapter will also begin the evaluation of the acceptance of this culture, through an analysis of the letters and diaries of the volunteers. The second chapter on the culture of the Brigades will look at how this culture was translated into actions. It also seeks, where possible, alternative explanations for this behaviour to test the level of commitment of the volunteers to this ideological culture. This search for alternatives will include a discussion of

what might have lowered morale among the volunteers. The final chapter will examine the official view of the level of commitment of the Canadian volunteers. This view was expressed through reports filed by the Commissariat of War of the International Brigades. Before examining this view, the role of the commissars needs to be defined and evaluated to establish their credentials for evaluating the volunteers.

IDEOLOGY AND THE CANADIANS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-9.
Chapter II: Those Who Went.

Political ideology is not simply created within a person's mind. The experiences in a person's background shape his outlook on life, and craft the basis of an ideology from his thoughts. Exposure to the ideas of others will hone this ideology. Elements such as the volunteers' nationality, and their experiences either in their home countries or as minorities in Canada; their age; their profession; and where they lived in Canada all contributed to their political beliefs. These elements also brought the volunteers into contact with left-wing, and even radical left-wing ideas, and many joined left-wing political parties and organizations. The Canadians who volunteered for Spain had been pre-disposed to accept this type of belief by their past experiences. A look at the backgrounds of these men will shed some light on what sort of men were willing to volunteer for a war on foreign soil, and what exposure they had to left-wing ideas.

The Canadian volunteers for the Spanish Civil War were generally not of English or French descent. Most of them were Eastern European, and many were first-generation Canadians. In Canada, they came primarily from the cities and working-class towns of Ontario, such as Timmins, Port Arthur, and Toronto, and from the western parts of Canada, especially Winnipeg and Vancouver. Most of them were

employed there, either in seasonal work in such natural resource jobs as farming, mining and logging, or else in factories and other general labour jobs. The large number of non-English volunteers, especially the eastern Europeans, is explained by the role which the Comintern played in creating the Canadian volunteer force for the International Brigades. There were many ethnic associations, such as the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA) and the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada (FSOC - shortened to FOC in the early 1920s), which were affiliated with the CPC, and from which the Comintern recruited its volunteers. The Canadian volunteers were also generally older than most soldiers. A few had previous military experience, either from World War I or else from some of the civil wars in their home countries. All of these factors merged together to make the volunteers more aware of the plight of their fellow workers. When they heard that the left-leaning coalition in Spain was under attack by reactionary forces, they felt that it was their duty as workers and as socialists to join their Spanish brothers in their struggle.

To determine the influence of the backgrounds of the Canadians on their decision to volunteer, it is necessary to look at the demographics of the set of Canadian volunteers. Such an examination will show which groups were well represented among the volunteers, and then a look at these

groups in turn will shed some light on why members of these groups would be more apt to volunteer than would be the members of different groups. Victor Hoar did some preliminary work on the demographics of the Canadian volunteers, based on the more than 600 file cards collected by the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. These file cards contained the name, age, last Canadian address, the country of origin, the date of departure for Spain, and the fate of the volunteer named. Myron Momryk has also done extensive work in gleaning similar information from all the various documents on the Mac-Paps.[1]

In the mid-1990s, Comintern documents on the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion were released from Moscow; among this new wealth of material was data on 465 communist volunteers, similar to the data on the Friends of the Mac-Paps file cards. There was also more sporadic information on a further 706 volunteers of all affiliations. Since there is some duplication of volunteers among these three lists, there is actually information on only 1222 volunteers from these

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[1] Hoar, *Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, 31-6; Momryk, "Canadian Volunteers in the International Brigades, 1936-39: A Profile", unpublished paper at a CHA annual conference, 1993. Neither work provides more than a summary of the numbers for each category, nor provides the information for others to undertake a deeper analysis.

sources.[2] The data was compiled from a wide range of sources. The data on the 465 communist volunteers was in the form of a roster sheet, giving the vital statistics of each volunteer named, plus such information as their occupation, CPC affiliation, and the positions they held in the Party, and in the International Brigades. There were also the lists of assessments filled out by the political commissars, which listed the names of some of the returning volunteers, with the assessment of their performance in Spain and, in some cases, some further details on their assessment. These sources were considered in addition to the 600 file cards collected by the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, and all were compiled into a database.

Record keeping in the Spanish Civil War was not as meticulous as it could have been; as a result there is no single volunteer for whom there exists information for each possible category from the three sources. There are also several examples of contradictory information from the different sources, particularly in the categories of nationality, Canadian address or hometown, and fate of the

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[2] Data based on the file cards: NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol. 1, File 20; list of communists: NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 536, p.21-58; and Commissariat reports, NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 537, p.31-71 and File 539, p.24-99. The Commissariat reports also contained an assessment of the volunteers' performance in Spain, which will be dealt with in a later chapter.

volunteers. In instances where it was not possible to confirm one choice in a third source, the lesser known variable has been assumed to be correct. The larger towns and the broader, better-known nationalities were probably used for the sake of simplicity, or else in ignorance of more precise information. In the case of discrepancies in the fates of the volunteers, if there is no third-party confirmation, the question remains unsolved.

Many of the Canadian volunteers had no formal ties with a political organization. Those who had political ties were affiliated with those groups on the left side of Canada's political spectrum. Of the many groups to which these volunteers belonged, the vast majority of affiliated volunteers were members of the Communist Party of some nation or other. When the Communist Party of Canada was given the task of raising volunteers for Spain by the Comintern, it naturally relied on its subordinate organizations for volunteers, and so a large number of communists went to Spain.

One of the biggest debates surrounding the Canadian volunteers involved the number of volunteers who were members of a communist party. The only documentation available until recently did not contain the information necessary for generating hard numbers. As a result, historians had to rely on anecdotal evidence and outside estimates. These second-

hand guesses, however, varied greatly in their estimation. One RCMP report, dated 28 December 1937, suggested that at least half of the volunteers were members of the CPC, while an earlier report from Winnipeg estimated that only one out of ten was communist. A further RCMP report, from Montreal in March 1939, found that only forty per cent of the returning volunteers were communist. Hazen Sise, a worker with Norman Bethune's Blood Transfusion Unit, thought that it was unlikely that more than forty per cent of the volunteers were communist, even in the "reddest" units of the Brigades. Sam Carr, another contemporary and a leading communist in Montreal, estimated 400 communists out of 500 volunteers in an article in the *Toronto Star*, 31 May 1937. Carr later estimated about 1000 out of 1200 volunteers.[3] In his thesis, Martin Lobigs cited all of the above examples, and then figured that probably less than fifty per cent of the volunteers were communist. John Gerassi estimated that out of the 5000 combined American and Canadian volunteers, sixty per cent were communist, and another twenty-four per cent

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[3] quoted in Lobigs, *Canadian Responses to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, MA Thesis, 1992, p.76-9. Sise's estimation from a letter to "Aunt Elsie", 7 June 1937, NAC MG30 E173, vol. 1, File 4; Carr's statements from "Honour Eight Men Who Died Fighting in Loyalist Spain", *Toronto Star*, 31 May 1937, and *Daily Clarion*, 6 April 1938, p.3.

were sympathetic to the communist cause.[4] Archivist Myron Momryk relayed an estimation which found that twenty-five per cent of all Canadian volunteers were CPC members. He estimated that seventy per cent of those who returned to Canada were communist.[5] Historian Ivan Avakumovic found that there were 900 communists and at least 300 sympathizers among the Canadian volunteers.[6]

With the release of the Comintern's records of the Spanish Civil War, more concrete information on the number of communists among the Canadian volunteers has surfaced. The information gathered on 1222 volunteers identified 546 members of a Communist Party, or 44.7 per cent. Another seven were members of one of the left-wing ethnic associations and ethnic trade unions, while fourteen others belonged to the more general trade unions. Of the definite communists, only fifteen had joined the Spanish Communist Party. There were several reasons why a Canadian or Canadian immigrant would join the Spanish Communist Party during the war. Some were sympathetic to the communist cause while they

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[4] Gerassi, *Premature Anti-Fascists.* New York: Praeger Press, 1981, p.11.

[5] Momryk, "Canadian Volunteers in the International Brigades, 1936-39: A Profile", 10-11. Momryk's estimation from a private phone interview, January 1997.

[6] Avakumovic, *The Communist Party of Canada: A History.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd. 1975, p.129.

were in Canada; during the war, they became convinced of the rightness of the communist position, and joined the nearest party. Others may have found that life became easier if they joined the party ranks. Volunteers Robert Hamilton and Reid MacVicar both found that they suffered for not being party members.[7] It has also been suggested that some joined the CP in Spain to bolster its numbers, and therefore strengthen the party's position within the Popular Front government which was in power at that time.[8]

Some of the documentation on the communist volunteers gave the year in which they joined the Communist Party of Canada. Of the 546, there are 366 CPC members for whom such data is given, and 53 members of the Young Communist League (YCL). (see Table 2.1) It appears that most of the communist volunteers were fairly recent converts to the cause. Over half of them joined the party during or after 1935. Of most interest is the high number who joined in 1937. It is possible that the Spanish Civil War was treated as a measure of the commitment of new recruits: volunteering to go fight the fascists in Spain would be taken as a sign that a

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[7] Hamilton's account in NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap Collection, vol. 1, File 17; MacVicar's opinion is from "Disillusioned: Winnipeg Loyalist Volunteer Doubtful About Communism", *Winnipeg Free Press*, 23 February 1939, 3.

[8] Momryk, from a personal interview.

Table 2.1: Year Volunteers Joined the CPC or YCL

Year	CPC	Percent	Cumulative Percent	YCL	%	Cumulative %
1921	1	0.3	0.3	-	---	---
1922	3	0.8	1.1	-	---	---
1923	1	0.3	1.4	-	---	---
1924	2	0.5	1.9	-	---	---
1925	3	0.8	2.7	-	---	---
1927	2	0.5	3.2	1	1.9	1.9
1928	1	0.3	3.5	-	---	1.9
1929	6	1.6	5.1	2	3.8	5.7
1930	16	4.4	9.5	1	1.9	7.6
1931	22	6.0	15.5	3	5.7	13.3
1932	34	9.3	24.8	3	5.7	19.0
1933	37	10.1	34.9	8	15.1	34.1
1934	43	11.7	46.6	11	20.8	54.9
1935	61	16.7	63.3	9	17.0	71.9
1936	84	23.0	86.3	10	18.9	90.8
1937	49	13.4	99.7	5	9.4	100.0
1938	1	0.3	100.0	-	—	

newcomer to the party was sincere in his beliefs[9]. These communists also would have joined around the time of or after the creation of the Popular Front. Since revolutionary fervour in communist rhetoric was being toned down in favour of the promotion of anti-fascism, these new members would have been indoctrinated in the evils of fascism and in showing a greater willingness to work with other forces on the left. As the Spanish war developed and was portrayed as the forces of democracy and socialism against the fascist usurpers, these newer members would have been willing to volunteer for Spanish duty.

A substantial portion of the Canadian volunteers were

[9] This possibility was raised by Myron Momryk in a personal interview.

not identified as "Canadian" in the documents, in the sense of a Canadian-born, English-speaking citizen. While there were still quite a few of them among the volunteers, plus several new Canadians from the British Isles, an examination of the ethnic composition of 892 volunteers shows that many more were of eastern European, and more specifically, Slavic, descent. (see Table 2.2)

Table 2.2: Ethnicity of the Canadian Volunteers

Ethnicity	Number of Volunteers	Percentage
Canadian[10]	142	15.9
French-Canadian	30	3.4
British	137	15.4
West Slavic (Polish, Czech, Slovak)	144	16.9
East Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian)	114	12.8
South Slavic (Yugoslav, Bulgarian)	77	8.6
Finnish	86	9.6
Hungarian	66	7.4
Other North American	10	1.1
Other East European	23	2.6
West European	54	6.0
Jewish	7	0.8
Australian	2	0.2

Most of the major ethnic groups represented by the volunteers had a history of radical tendencies among their members. When these immigrants arrived in Canada, they found conditions there to be harder than they expected, especially

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[10] "Canadian" used to denote those of British descent who were at least second-generation citizens. "British" represents those from the British Isles who had emigrated to Canada.

when the Great Depression set in.

From these broad language groups, there were a few single nationalities which stood out from the rest in number of volunteers. In each of the three divisions of Slavs, there was one dominant group, while the others were minimally represented. The volunteers of the other ethnic groups, Slav or otherwise, each represented less than five per cent of the total. Table 2.3 lists the major ethnic group represented in the Canadian contingent.

Table 2.3: Major Ethnic Groups among the Canadian Volunteers

Ethnic Group	Number of Volunteers	Percentage
Canadian	142	15.9
British	137	15.4
Polish	96	10.8
Finnish	86	9.6
Ukrainian	80	9.0
Hungarian	66	7.4
Yugoslav	56	6.3

These two tables show that those of British descent, including Canadians, Americans, Newfoundlanders, and Australians, made up approximately one third of the volunteers. The Eastern European nationalities, meanwhile, comprised over half of the volunteers. Furthermore, the above seven main ethnic groups were represented in significantly different proportions than they were in Canadian society as a whole during that time. (see Table 2.4) This discrepancy between the proportion of different ethnic

groups among the volunteers and within Canadian society raises the question of whether there was something in the history of these ethnic groups which would make people of that nationality more open to some form of socialism.

Table 2.4: Comparison of Major Ethnic Groups and Canadian Census Reports

Ethnicity	Percentage of Volunteers	% 1931 Census	% 1941 Census
British[11]	32.6	51.2	49.3
Polish	10.8	1.5	1.5
Finnish	9.6	0.5	0.4
Ukrainian	9.0	2.3	2.8
Hungarian	7.4	0.5	0.5
Yugoslav	6.3	N/A	0.2

Another option would be that their experience in Canada as non-English, non-French immigrants may have made them so disposed. It is also possible that the higher proportion of eastern Europeans among the Canadian volunteers was a result of the greater ease of obtaining a passport and returning to Europe; immigrants only had to claim to be returning to their homeland. They thus had a better cover story than saying that they were visiting the Paris exposition. While it may have been easier for an immigrant to get the necessary papers for travelling to Europe, they were not necessarily less committed to the anti-fascist cause. This ease also does not explain the discrepancy between the number of eastern and

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[11] "British" in this table is used to denote those of English-speaking descent, regardless of country of origin. The census reports do not distinguish between British, Canadian, etc.

western Europeans who volunteered.

The histories of the different ethnic groups are quite diverse. Of the major nationalities represented by the Canadian volunteers, there were some which were historically dominated, while others enjoyed positions of privilege. The shifting borders of Eastern Europe played a large part in determining which ethnic groups were in power, and which were not.

Polish history provided a varied set of experiences for its nationals. Poland as even a semi-autonomous state had not existed since the late eighteenth century, and only became a nation-state after World War I. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the area which had been Poland was in three pieces, distributed among Prussia (later Germany), Austria-Hungary, and Russia. Treatment of the Polish people in these areas varied from place to place. In Russia they faced attempts to make them conform to the Russian culture. German *Kulturkampf* policies under Bismarck in the late nineteenth century also tried to make the Polish assimilate. It was in Galicia in Austria that the Poles had the most freedoms. They were given some political control over affairs in Galicia, provided that they remained loyal to Vienna. After the Great War, a new Polish state was created. In trying to integrate parts of three states into one, the

Polish people were faced with some hardships. Inflation was high and still climbing, and there were political crises and conflicts. The fledgling government saw emigration as a method for keeping the situation from getting completely out of control, and so looked favourably on people leaving for the New World.[12] Many of the Poles who came to Canada were simply seeking a better life.

Finland's modern political history began in 1809 with the Russian defeat of Sweden. Part of the Peace of Frederikshamn treaty which ended the war ceded Finland to Russia as a grand duchy, and made Alexander I the grand duke of Finland. Under this arrangement, Finland exercised a larger degree of autonomy than it had under Swedish rule. Near the end of the nineteenth century, Finnish national pride began to grow, getting organized in time to fight against the later Russian cultural policies. When Nicholas II came to power in 1894, he began to Russify his domain, thereby trying to restrict Finnish autonomy. Finland was not enamoured of this policy, and started to rebel. When the Russo-Japanese war broke out in 1905, the Finns staged a general strike, demanding constitutional reform. Nicholas

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[12] Avery and Fedorowicz, *Canada's Ethnic Groups no 4: The Poles in Canada*. Saint John: Keystone Printing and Lithography, Ltd., 1982, 4-11. and Gerus and Rea, *CEG no 10: The Ukrainians in Canada*, 1985, 4-5.

was forced to give in, and in 1906 Finland set up one of the most democratic assemblies at that time. All adults, women included, were enfranchised. The first elections, in 1907, brought to the Social Democratic Party the most seats, with 80 out of 200. This new-found level of autonomy did not last long. Nicholas II went back to his Russification policies after the war with Japan finished. Finland took another chance at self-government during the Russian Revolution. The Finns declared independence on 6 December 1917. Once independent, however, there was some disagreement over what type of regime to create. The majority of the socialists wanted to maintain close ties with the new Russian government and set up a Finnish Socialist Soviet Republic; some conservatives wanted to establish a Finnish monarchy. Civil War broke out between the two sides, with the more conservative forces winning out. As the new government was consolidating its power, many left-wing Finns fled the country; some made their way to Canada.[13] Finland therefore has a strong democratic and socialist tradition in its history, as well as a more conservative side. Since the left in 1917 wanted a soviet-style system, there had obviously

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[13] Lindstrom-Best, *Canada's Ethnic Groups no.8: The Finns in Canada*, 1985, 4-5. Some facts checked in Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, (5th ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. pp. 308, 397-8.

been a large Marxist-Leninist faction in Finland, many of whom emigrated.

The Ukrainian experience was similar to the Polish. In fact, many of the first waves of the two groups came from the same part of Austria, Galicia. The Ukrainians were also found in Russia. By the nineteenth century, the Ukrainians were largely rural peasants. In Russia, they began their trek to modernity in 1861, when serfdom was abolished. By the 1880s, the industrial revolution had begun in Russian Ukraine. The Austrian Ukrainians (often called Ruthenians) had a slightly better lot. Serfdom was abolished there during the 1848 revolutions, and peasants became politically active. In the second half of the century, the Ruthenians continued to gain political and cultural freedom, often in an attempt to remain equal with the Poles. This process was successful enough that by the turn of the century Galicia had become the centre of Ukrainian national consciousness. With a largely peasant population, the Ruthenians worked to improve their quality of life. In spite of the emancipation of the serfs in the middle of the century, there had been little immediate material improvement to the Ruthenians. To help improve their lot, the Austrian Ukrainians organized reading clubs to fight illiteracy. These clubs soon became an important part of Ukrainian culture, and were exported to Canada with Ukrainian settlers. As is often the case, as

literacy improved, so did political awareness. Ukrainians also tried co-operative farming and villages to raise their quality of life. Eventually, they began to filter out towards the New World, starting in the 1870s, and began arriving in Canada in 1891 in search of a better life.[14] Ukrainian history demonstrates a lean towards the populist left, as the peasants banded together to improve their standard of living.

Hungarians had enjoyed a position of privilege since the creation of the Dual Monarchy in 1867. The search for more political power reached its fulfilment with the creation of the independent Hungarian state after World War I; however, the Treaty of Trianon also left many Magyars stranded in non-Hungarian states such as Romania and Bulgaria. The post-war arrangement of political boundaries worsened some of the economic problems suffered by the peasantry. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had been an integrated economy, with distinct geographic divisions between the economic sectors rather than a diversified economy in each territory. Hungary had a largely agrarian economy. Before the war, agriculture was undergoing a labour crisis. Many of the farmers were small holders or dwarf holders. Subsequent generations threatened to divide the land up even further, to the point

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[14] Gerus and Rea, *CEG no 10: The Ukrainians in Canada*, 1985, 3-5.

where many had difficulty in managing to produce enough to supply their own needs. Farmers and their children began to sell their labour to the owners of larger tracts of land, to supplement their income. Very quickly, agricultural areas were overloaded with labourers; these labourers often had no other choice, since they lacked the necessary skills for industry. The loss of the protected markets of Austria-Hungary after the war exacerbated the problem, and delayed economic recovery. Many looked to the new world for relief, whether as a means for escaping altogether the hardships in Hungary, or else as a means of generating the capital necessary for increasing their standard of living. There were reports, good and bad, filtering back from those who had gone to North America before them. On top of the agricultural immigrants were some political refugees. Immediately following the war, Hungary tried several types of regimes. First, there was a republican government, which lasted for four months. Next came Béla Kun's communist government. This regime only lasted 133 days. When it fell, Kun tried to organize a social democracy, which failed within a week. The traditional elites toppled the social democracy, and within a few months power rested in the hands of Admiral Horthy, who established a nationalistic counter-revolutionary regime. Following this last take-over, many left-wing

Hungarians left for the New World.[15] Among the agriculturalists coming from Hungary seeking an improved standard of living were a few radical-left immigrants.

Aside from the historical background of the ethnic groups, their experience in Canada would also render them more open to liberal or socialist ideas. Many immigrants came to Canada with a promise of large tracts of farm land for a low price. While these were available at first, the Federal Government and the two national railroads which had been parcelling out the land slowed down this practice in the late 1920s. With the repeal of the Railway Agreement in 1930, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railway were no longer allowed to solicit agricultural immigrants by offering tracts of land at bargain prices. New agricultural immigrants had to find jobs on existing farms; these jobs were usually seasonal, only providing employment during the late summer and early autumn. Some immigrants eventually gave up trying to make a living on seasonal farm work, and instead joined the ranks of those seeking employment in industry or other natural resources. These immigrants migrated to the larger cities and towns such as Toronto and Winnipeg, or else headed for the mining and logging towns of northern Ontario, of British Columbia, and

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[15] Patrias, *Patriots and Proletarians*, 22-34.

of the Prairie provinces.

These immigrants had trouble assimilating into Canadian society. Many entered Canada with little knowledge of either English or French, and came from a different culture. It was more comfortable for them to be around others who spoke the same language, and so itinerant labourers often settled into the same neighbourhood. Ethnic ghettos such as the one in north Winnipeg, were created. In these areas, all the essentials could be found, and usually in a business where an immigrant's language was spoken. Several mutual support organizations also rose up from these areas. Some were organized by the local churches, while others were formed by people within that particular ethnic group. Some of these associations were quite radical, and a few, such as the FOC and ULFTA, had direct ties to the Communist Party of Canada (CPC).

Even those members of ethnic minorities who had descended from immigrants faced these problems. Since people of like nationality had often settled in the same area, they would have grown up surrounded by their parents' language. There would have been little need to learn English or French. If they left these settlements in search of employment, they also would have had some difficulty adjusting. There were attempts made to smooth the integration of the cultures and languages. Second and third generation citizens would

therefore have had an easier time integrating than a new immigrant, but they would still have faced difficulties.

Table 2.5: Year of Immigration of Canadian Volunteers

Year	Number	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
pre-WWI	5	4.3	4.3
1918	1	0.9	5.2
1920	1	0.9	6.1
1921	1	0.9	7.0
1922	3	2.6	9.6
1923	5	4.9	14.5
1924	10	8.7	23.2
1925	2	1.7	24.9
1926	15	13.0	37.9
1927	17	14.8	52.7
1928	24	20.9	73.6
1929	11	9.6	83.2
1930	8	7.0	90.2
1931	2	1.7	91.9
1936	1	0.9	92.8
1937	7	6.1	98.9
unknown	1	0.9	100.0

The plight of the immigrant, as well as that of the members of the various ethnic groups, is important in understanding the background of some of the volunteers who went to Spain. Of the 1222 volunteers in this study, 115 were identified as immigrants. They came to the New World over a period of thirty years (see Table 2.5). Five arrived before World War I, starting in 1907; the bulk of them arrived in the 1920s, and into the early 1930s. The numbers began to drop off again in 1929, when the Federal Government began to restrict immigration, due to the onset of the Great Depression. At least a tenth of the Canadian volunteers

would have experienced the life of an immigrant. Not all of them were eastern European; some would have been from the British Isles, or from western Europe, and yet they would all have faced similar difficulties. Immigration policies of the time were geared towards bringing in people skilled in farming and natural resources. Ninety per cent of the immigrant volunteers were in Canada before the Great Depression, and many of them would have been among those who suffered its worst effects. They would therefore have been even more open to left-wing ideology, and would have been exposed to such thought by their fellow workers.

The vast majority of the volunteers were male. Out of the 1222 volunteers, one was female; Myron Momryk found four women out of the whole group of over 1500 volunteers from Canada. There is information on the marital status of 446 of the volunteers. Of these, 89.5 (399) per cent were single. Another 9.6 per cent (43) were married; three volunteers were widowed and one was divorced. The exact proportion of single men may actually be slightly smaller than these numbers indicate. A few of the immigrant labourers in Canada were considered single, while in reality they had a wife and children in their home country; others would have separated from their wife in Canada, to be eligible for work relief benefits from the federal government. It is to be expected, however, that a much higher proportion of volunteers were

single than were married or divorced. They would have fewer ties, and would therefore find it easier to withdraw from Canadian society and make the voyage to Spain. There would also be less worry for a single man about the fate of his dependent family while he was in Spain. Those groups organizing the Canadian volunteers would also prefer to recruit single men; there would be less of a burden on those groups which helped support the families of married volunteers. More money could therefore be diverted to the war effort, to send either more men, or else more care packages for those already in Spain.

The Canadian volunteers were older than might be expected of a group of men heading off to fight a war. Over half of them were at least thirty years of age. (see Table 2.6) The elevated age of the volunteers came in part from the focus by the Comintern on recruiting volunteers who had previous military experience.

Table 2.6: Age of the Canadian Volunteers

Age Bracket	Number	Percent	Cumulative Percent
under 20	5	1.3	1.3
20-24	59	15.5	16.8
25-29	75	19.7	36.5
30-34	107	28.1	64.6
35-39	96	25.2	89.8
40-44	26	6.8	96.6
45 and over	13	3.4	100.0

In the late 1930s, those who had military experience were either those who had fought in the Great War twenty years

earlier, or else those immigrants who had fought in the civil wars in their homelands in the turmoil of the early 1920s. Volunteers with previous military experience would have been at least in their late 20s by the beginning of the Spanish Civil War.

The existence of immigrants who had fought in their home country among the Canadian volunteers for Spain also partly explains the ethnic composition of the Canadian contingent to Spain. Most of the nations which faced civil conflict immediately following World War I were in Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the Great War, many new states were created there, and the remains of the older ones tried new forms of governments. These new governments were not very stable, and many began to collapse in favour of regimes closer to the fringes of the political spectrum. It was in these collapses that some of the later volunteers picked up their military experience.

There is information among the data on the 1222 volunteers concerning the occupation of these people while in Canada. While the number of jobs represented are quite varied and diverse, they break into seven categories of work. This information exists for 480 of the volunteers (see Table 2.7). Over half (53.8%) of the volunteers fell into the Industry and Natural Resources categories. Natural Resources comprised those employed in farming, mining, logging, and

mill work. Industry and general labour consisted of factory and maintenance jobs, as well as unskilled and semi-skilled labour such as welders and hospital orderlies.

Table 2.7: Occupation of the Canadian Volunteers

Occupation Group	Number	Percentage
Professional/Academic	30	6.3
Sales/Service	33	6.9
Food Industry	23	4.8
Natural Resources	103	21.5
Industry/General Labour	155	32.3
Construction	50	10.4
Transportation/Communication	86	17.9

These two sectors of the economy would have faced the worst effects of the Great Depression. They would have already been open to left-wing ideas, through the various trade union movements which were active in the inter-war period. When the Great Depression hit, these people would have faced mass unemployment, and may have had to suffer through the work relief camps in British Columbia. Although efforts were made by the authorities to restrict the access of socialists and trade unionists to these camps, they were unsuccessful. Socialism would have been quite appealing to men under such conditions. People in the work camps faced harsh conditions. In 1935, a large group of them left the camps, gathered in Vancouver, and headed east to bring their grievances before Parliament. This voyage was called the On-to-Ottawa Trek. It was stopped in Winnipeg by the authorities, who allowed the leaders to continue on to

Ottawa, without the added pressure on Members of Parliament which the mass following of the Trek would have generated. While the Trek did not create much change in Canadian labour policy, it had allowed the men to organize and protest. Some of the participants of the Trek later volunteered for Spain. They saw their actions in Spain as a continuation of the Trek; they saw that their fellow workers in Spain suffered under similar conditions to themselves, if not worse ones. There was hope that a victory in Spain could then be brought back to Canada to improve the workers' situation.

One last important piece of information provided by the data on these 1222 volunteers was the last location in Canada from which they came, or where their families were located. Although 774 provided a location for their home, fifty-seven identified a foreign country as their family's home. The remaining 717 came from almost every province.

Table 2.8: Breakdown of Volunteers by Province

Province	Number of Volunteers	Percentage
British Columbia	150	21.2
Alberta	65	9.1
Saskatchewan	33	4.6
Manitoba	79	11.0
Ontario	307	42.7
Quebec	75	10.5
Nova Scotia	6	0.8
New Brunswick	2	0.3

Ontario and British Columbia were the centres of resource and industry. Workers who were seeking employment

would naturally gravitate to those provinces, and away from smaller, less economically stable provinces such as the Maritime provinces. The lack of volunteers from Quebec can be explained by the dominance of the Catholic Church there. The Church was one of the targets of the Loyalists, especially in the early days of the war. The Catholics in Quebec, therefore, would not have been very sympathetic to the Republican cause, and would have worked to dissuade people from joining. There was also an active right-wing movement there.

In Ontario, almost half, 142, came from Toronto. The rest came from either the industrial south or the mining and logging towns of the north. Cities like Hamilton and Windsor, and the towns surrounding them, were well represented.

Table 2.9: Volunteers from Ontario

City	Number of Volunteers
Toronto	142
Port Arthur/Fort William	57
Hamilton	21
Windsor	16
Sudbury	12
Timmins	8
Kirkland Lake	6
Guelph	4
Kenora	3
Midland	2
Kapuskasing	2
Delhi	2
Other (1 vol/town)	33

More volunteers came from the north of the province than from the south, excepting Toronto. The Port Arthur/Fort William area sent fifty-seven volunteers. Ontario, along with Quebec and British Columbia, were the more densely-populated provinces. Ontario also had a large resource and industrial base, which drew unemployed labourers. These labourers often then gave a location in Ontario as their last address in Canada before going to Spain.

In British Columbia, the story was similar. There were 129 volunteers from the Vancouver area, and five from New Westminster, three from Victoria, and two from Nanaimo. The remaining eleven came from some of the small towns, one volunteer from each. It is not surprising that there were so many who came from BC. It was in that province that many of the relief camps were set up; these camps were to provide work and relief for the unemployed, and were usually in terrible condition.

Patterns proved similar in other provinces. The larger industrial centres provided the most volunteers, with the mining, industrial and logging towns having a good representation as well. In Manitoba, seventy-four of seventy-nine came from Winnipeg; three more came from The Pas. Edmonton (20), Calgary (12), Lethbridge (8), and Drumheller (5) saw the most volunteers for Alberta. The majority of volunteers from Quebec came from Montreal, with

sixty-nine volunteers. Four others came from Val D'Or, while two came from Rimouski. The volunteers from Saskatchewan came from Regina and Saskatoon, with twelve and five respectively. Two more came from the Crone Valley, while the remaining fourteen came one each from small towns around the province.

Most of the small towns from which the volunteers came were resource towns. Of the eighty-three volunteers who worked in natural resources of some form or other, and whose hometown is known, thirty were the only volunteer of the 1222 known to come from that town. Cities generally had few people from the natural resource industries. Toronto had four (6.15 per cent) out of sixty-five, compared with twenty-two who came from jobs in industry, or 33.85 per cent. Montreal only had two (6.25 per cent) join the International Brigades from a resource job, out of thirty-two who left that city. The exceptions to the big cities which sent small numbers of resource workers were Winnipeg, which sent eight of thirty-four (23.53 per cent) and Vancouver, from which came twenty-five volunteers, or 36.23 per cent of its sixty-nine volunteers. It is not surprising that these two cities sent a higher proportion of volunteers who had been employed in natural resources. Vancouver was the gathering point of many of those who then moved into the bush for a few months' work. Out of the eighty-seven volunteers from British

Columbia whose profession was known, 39.1 per cent (34) of them had been employed in natural resources.

Some of the smaller cities, however, had a larger proportion of resource volunteers than most of the larger cities. Port Arthur/Fort William, in northern Ontario, sent five volunteers out of twenty-two in total, for 22.73 per cent. Half (two out of four) of the volunteers from Timmins, also in northern Ontario, came from the resource industry; and both volunteers from Val D'Or, Quebec were so employed. In this part of northern Ontario, there was substantial amounts of mining, logging, and lumbering. These towns and small cities were built around these industries.

The major industrial cities were Toronto, Hamilton, Calgary, Montreal, The Pas, and Sudbury. Furthermore, several of the cities which were high in jobs in natural resources were also high in industry jobs. Among these were Kirkland Lake, Timmins, Port Arthur/Fort William, all in northern Ontario, as well as Vancouver and Winnipeg. The people from these northern Ontario towns were usually split evenly among resources and industry: Kirkland Lake sent two from each, as did Timmins; Port Arthur/Fort William, on the other hand, had 59.09 per cent of its volunteers come from industry-related jobs. Winnipeg was more closely split between industry and resource jobs, with ten volunteers, or 29.41 per cent, having been employed in industry, and eight

(23.53) employed in resources. Vancouver, on the other hand, was more balanced towards the resource sector, but with a large industry component as well. It sent twenty-five (36.23 per cent) from the resource sector, compared to sixteen (23.19 per cent) from industry.

Many of the volunteers who came from these areas were eastern European. Northern Ontario especially was a favourite place for them. Of the fifty-four Finnish volunteers with a known Canadian point of origin, at least thirty-one came from the towns of Port Arthur, Timmins, and Kirkland Lake.

Table 2.10: Canadian Homes of Finnish Volunteers

Town	Number of Finnish	Percent of Finnish
Port Arthur	28	51.85
Vancouver	8	14.81
Toronto	7	12.96
Sudbury	4	7.40
Timmins	2	3.70
Steves Mountain	1	1.85
Montreal	1	1.85
Kirkland Lake	1	1.85
Creighton Mine	1	1.85

The Finnish volunteers from Port Arthur also represent about sixty per cent of the forty-eight volunteers from that town, whose nationality is known, and slightly over half of the fifty-three volunteers in total from there. Sixteen volunteers of the various Slavic nationalities were also from Port Arthur, and one more from its sister city, Fort William.

These four groups made up 91.7 per cent of the volunteers from Port Arthur whose nationality was identified. The remaining four were American, Scandinavian, Lithuanian, and Romanian.

The Slavs were more spread out than were the Finns. Those who were in Port Arthur represent only about eleven per cent of the total number of Slavs whose Canadian address was known. Fifty were from Toronto, representing almost one-half of the volunteers from that city with an identified ethnicity, and over thirty per cent of the Slavs. Twenty-four of them were from Winnipeg, or forty per cent of the volunteers with a known ethnicity from the capital of Manitoba.

The volunteers who were members of ethnic minorities were largely employed in resource and industry. They came from northern Ontario and British Columbia, where these jobs, as well as the relief camps for the single-unemployed men, were located. There were also large numbers of minority volunteers from the ethnic ghettos of the Prairie cities such as Winnipeg. In these ghettos, the work relief camps, and the industrial and resource-based cities, there were representatives of the more radical elements of Canadian society. Every logging camp, factory, and mine, and many of the farming areas, had at least one trade union represented. There were even minority-specific unions, such as the Polish

Workers' Club. Many of these unions were affiliated with the Communist Party of Canada, which attracted many of these workers. They would have had a lot of exposure to the left-wing ideologies by the time of the outbreak of war in Spain.

The analysis of all of this data shows that the volunteers often had similar backgrounds. Many were either immigrants themselves, or else they were from a family of immigrants. These immigrant groups often contained radical elements. Added to these radicals in the neighbourhood were the experiences of the volunteers themselves. The majority of them were involved in unskilled and semi-skilled labour, either in natural resources such as farming or mining, or else in the industrial sector. They would have been exposed to trade-unionism, as well as other left-wing ideologies. They were also among those who faced the worst of the Great Depression. Many became chronically unemployed, and migrated to the larger cities in search of work. Others made their way to the work relief camps in British Columbia; however, they soon realized that these camps were not much better than being unemployed. In these camps, they would have been exposed again to left-wing thought; some, by this time, were involved in promoting it. By the mid 1930s, these men had become familiar enough with leftist ideology that they found themselves quite willing to volunteer for a war against fascism, which they saw as the enemy of the working class.

Their backgrounds had pre-disposed them to left-wing ideology. They were thus able to accept and adapt to the dominant thinking of the International Brigades once they were exposed to its unique culture.

IDEOLOGY AND THE CANADIANS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-39.
Chapter III The Paper Trail

The Canadian volunteers left behind a large amount of literature. These scraps of writing were produced by volunteers from all ranks and tasks, and reflect the events and opinions of the Brigades and volunteers. First, there were the public writings, which consisted of the poetry, songs and articles written for the various unit publications. Second, there were the private letters and diaries of the volunteers. The public literature reflected the dominant culture of the International Brigades. It expressed the major themes of that culture, reflecting the strongly-held beliefs of the volunteers, and reinforcing those elements of the culture which needed some strengthening. This literature set out what beliefs and behaviour were expected of the volunteers; it also provided distraction and lifted the morale of the men in the front lines. The more private messages from the volunteers gave an indication of how sincere the volunteers were in their beliefs. This literature shows how well they accepted the culture of the Brigades, and how well they adapted to it.

Outward acceptance of an ideological culture may be merely superficial lip-service. Volunteer Robert Hamilton has suggested that there were other incentives than sincere belief for appearing to accept the dominant culture of the Brigades. This culture was influenced by the Comintern.

Hamilton found that communists were given preferential treatment. Their mail and packages would reach them or their intended destinations; mail to and from non-communists was sometimes lost or delayed, according to Hamilton. The communists were often given choice posts, regardless of their actual qualifications for those jobs. Non-communists, on the other hand, were sometimes skipped over for jobs within their field of expertise.[1] These practices may have encouraged a volunteer to join the communists and appear to accept the dominant culture; however, such an artificial acceptance would not be present in personal correspondence to a volunteer's family and friends, especially if the intended recipient had little sympathy for the communists or the International Brigades.

The public writing on the volunteers illustrates the elements of the Brigade culture. These elements include class solidarity and international brotherhood, the portrayal of fascism as the enemy of the worker, optimism about the future of society and of the individuals involved in the War, and a belief in the importance of self-discipline in a People's Army. The written works of the volunteers returned time and again to these themes.

The ideas of class solidarity and international

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[1] Robert Hamilton account, in NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 1, File 7, p.19-21.

brotherhood are interlinked. This idea has its roots in Marxism. It is the notion that all the members of the proletariat, the working class, face the same type of hardship to differing degrees, regardless of their country or job. The fate of all the members of the proletariat are intertwined, and it was only through uniting together to act as one that their lives would be made better. If the workers in one part of the world were severely repressed, it was believed that this repression might spread to other countries. Members of left-wing parties in the 1930s therefore believed that such repression must be stopped where it was, before it moved to other countries. They also felt the need to help their brethren in the working-classes of foreign countries.

Related to the idea of class solidarity was the portrayal of fascism as the enemy of the worker. It was argued that fascism was the antithesis to socialism. Their respective paramilitary groups often struggled with each other in the inter-war period. For a while, the communists focussed more on the social democrats than on the fascists, in a belief that the fascists would speed up the workers' revolution. Fascism itself was seen as one of the final stages of capitalism, which was the source of the worker's repression. As the 1930s progressed, however, the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy began to crack down on

communists and socialists both. With the creation of the Popular Front in 1935, the Comintern officially began to portray fascism as the enemy of the worker. Indeed, anti-fascism was the only real meeting ground for this coalition of left-wing parties. The communists also had to downplay their revolutionary rhetoric. They realized that they needed help from the other left-wing forces to fight fascism, and so they became more social democratic, at least on the surface.

While Franco was technically not a fascist, nor were most of his Spanish supporters, the existence of a fascist element, the Falange, among his supporters was used by the press to label the whole uprising as a third fascist take-over. Added weight to this argument came from the fact that the only countries to recognize diplomatically, and later support, Franco's government were Germany and Italy. The diplomatic situation surrounding the Spanish Civil War seemed to lend credence to the idea that fascism was a final form of capitalism; all of the Western capitalist democracies had signed the Non-Intervention Agreement. This pact implied support for the Nationalists, since the democracies held to their neutrality, allowing no material into Loyalist Spain. On the other hand, Germany and Italy, also signatories of the pact, shipped men, equipment and supplies to Franco's forces. The western democracies were aware of this breach of the pact, but still did nothing.

Much of the literature left by the volunteers reflected a belief in a brighter future. They believed that Spain was the definitive spot to make a stand against fascism. A Republican victory there would number the days of fascism everywhere. It would serve as proof of what the workers could achieve, and would encourage left-wing movements elsewhere. It was hoped that the lessons learned in Spain would be taken back to the volunteers' respective countries. In spite of the Comintern's efforts to tone down the revolutionary rhetoric of its members, one of the elements of Brigade culture was a belief in the broader significance of Republican victory. The volunteers believed that such a victory would spill over into other countries, and perhaps create a genuine workers' state.

One other major theme in the writing of the volunteers was the notion of self-discipline. The volunteers were required to police themselves to ensure that they acted appropriately. It was necessary for them to impose discipline on themselves; if they did not, it would have to come from their officers and the commissars. The volunteers had to remember that with the greater freedom granted by Communism and Socialism came responsibility. This freedom meant that a volunteer had to take responsibility for his own action. A top-down approach to discipline would run counter to the notions of class solidarity and the

brotherhood of the workers. Imposing discipline from above would have set up a hierarchy within the army. The officers in a People's Army were supposed to be considered as first among equals. If the common soldier did not live up to his responsibility of self-discipline, then he would be creating a barrier between himself and the officers in charge of his unit. It would be as if the officers belonged to a separate caste.

Volunteers in Spain needed to be inducted into their culture. Upon their arrival, new volunteers were given training. This training was begun at Figueras in the north, and was continued in Albacete, International Brigade headquarters, and in the surrounding towns where individual battalions mustered. Some of this training was military, where men learned some drill and some weapons skills. More of the training was political education. For some volunteers, this education began in France, where the non-communist volunteers had political classes during the day. Some songs were a part of this training. The *Internationale* was one song which volunteers were expected to know; there were several accounts of spontaneous singing of this song by the volunteers. Another physical sign which was quickly learned was the raised-fist salute of the Popular Front. The public literature written by and directed at the volunteers

was often aimed at reinforcing some aspects of the culture which needed strengthening.

Many soldiers wrote and re-wrote songs and poems to provide diversion during lulls in the fighting. This poetry would then be circulated among the men, either in written form or passed along orally. Some of the songs recounted the experiences of the front, and became popular among the men at the front. One such song was "The Valley of Jarama", a humourous yet cynical song. The first stanza sets its tone:

> There's a valley in Spain called Jarama,
> That's a place that we all know so well,
> For 'tis there that we wasted our manhood,
> And most of our old age as well.[2]

Most of the surviving songs and poems, however, reflect more of the reasons for fighting in a war not their own.

Of these more ideological poems and songs, some were abstract, showing a belief in the triumph of the working class: "Marching feet/ Heads held high/ Young voices, old voices/ Raised in song/ Blood-red flags/ Symbols of Liberty/ Born aloft/ Bravely flying". This poem, "Demonstration" by Frank Goodwin, then continued discussing the forces of privilege stacked against the worker, trying to keep him down, and finished "and yet.../ The workers march/ The flags

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[2] Lyrics by Alex McDade, quoted in Commissariat of War, *Book of the XV Brigade*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Frank Graham, 1975. p.97. The song is set to the tune "Red River Valley".

still fly".[3] This poem expresses the belief that the working class would not fall, no matter what the odds stacked against them.

Other songs and poems seem more focussed on reminding the volunteers of why they are fighting, and whipping them into greater action. An untitled song set to the tune "Vagabond King", with an unknown author, asks:

> Men of steel and Iron
> Won't you help to crush the tyrant
> For the sake of liberty?
> Men of might and muscle
> Won't you help us hustle
> For the sake of liberty?
>
> Forward forward Crush the Parasite
> Onward onward and we're sure to win the fight
> Consolidate your Ranks and
> Beat the ruling class and
> Set the whole world free[4]

Another such poem is "Fight", written anonymously. It began with the call "Let's fight for loyalist Spain/ Fight 'til the Fascists cringe". It asked those who read it to think of what they've seen in Spain, "Think of Franco's hordes/...Think of those Spaniards who suffer/ The people we'll defend always", and then to use what they remembered to spur themselves on to fight more efficiently.[5] These two

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[3] Frank Goodwin, "Demonstration", in NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p.164.

[4] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p.72.

[5] ibid, 88.

poems suggest that the rightness of the Republican cause meant that the Loyalists would win the battle in the end. They had come to fight for freedom against the forces of oppression, and they would eventually prevail. Spain was simply the first step, the line where the volunteers said "Enough". They, however, would not stop at the Pyrenees. Rather, they would carry the seeds of the demise of oppression with them when they left Spain. It was true that fighting in Spain would "set the whole world free".

Jim McLean, from Hamilton, also wrote a couple of poems which called the volunteers to action in the fight against fascism. One, "Arise! Ye worker", begins with an appeal:

> Arise! Ye worker from your sleep
> And do not dream of things to be
> Fight ye, for your freedom
> Fight ye, for humanity.

McLean did not think it possible to rest until the war was over and fascism defeated. Only then would they find "a happy land/ With peace, freedom for all/ Won by the worker's hand."[6] His other poem, "Another Day", placed the Spanish Civil War in an international context. He expressed the opinion that the whole world had a stake in the outcome of the conflict, and therefore should assist the Spanish people.

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[6] ibid, 173.

> [...] It's the grunt of freedom, these guns roar
> With hits right into fascism's core.
> Seeking for victory, not for Spain alone
> But also for victory, for the folks back home.
>
> The folks back home must help in the fight
> To drive fascism out of sight.
> Do your duty by giving Spain your aid
> And in the future, ye will be repaid.[7]

While this seemed to be in part an appeal for people to circumvent the Non-Intervention Agreement, and perhaps to pressure their government to help Spain, there was also the belief that there would be tangible results in Canada - if the Loyalists won the Spanish Civil War. These two poems portrayed a very positive view of the war. The opinions expressed by McLean were very much concerned with the working class and their struggle against their oppressors. The last stanza of "Another Day" talked of a day to come, when the working class would overcome the capitalist class. The Spanish Civil War would then become one of the early scenes in this movement to the worker state.

The tone of the poetry and songs of the volunteers followed the revolutionary lines of the more radical elements of the Republican coalition and of the international volunteers. These poems were often found in the various publications of the different levels of Brigade organization. Some of them were posted on the bulletin boards maintained by

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[7] ibid, 185.

the Battalion and company commissariat. It was in such publications and on such boards that articles along the same lines appeared.[8]

These articles included testimonials, profiles of prominent members and officers, interviews, and editorials. They also all expressed strong anti-fascist and pro-worker feeling. Some, such as the testimonial entitled "Battles or Bottles?" were blatantly pro-communist. This testimony is the story of a shiftless man who had been given to drink in his early twenties. He quickly degenerated, becoming more and more alcoholic. He was eventually hospitalized. Upon his release, however, the desire for alcohol was still there. He rediscovered the Communist Party at that time, and became quite involved in it. He became so engrossed in Party work that he had little time for alcohol. The Party had given him a renewed sense of purpose, so that he did not need to rely so much on drink. He found that Spain provided even more incentive for remaining sober. He felt that work being done there was too great and important to risk undoing it all

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[8] There are excerpts from several such publications, either written by Canadians, or else from units with Canadian members, in NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266. Because these are excerpts, it is difficult to determine the exact number of sources from which these articles originally came; most, however, seem to have been from the local unit publications rather than the larger publications such as *Volunteer for Liberty*.

through drunkenness.[9] Here is one example of a volunteer's self-discipline. This man found the cause of Spain to be of utmost importance, and decided that it was more important than his own desires. He was able to overcome his weakness because of his beliefs in the Republican cause. Not everyone was able to maintain such a high standard of self-discipline.

Of all the elements of the Brigade culture, discipline was the one which was the most difficult to maintain. The experience of the Brigades at the front sometimes led volunteers to desperation. It was at such times that discipline would be most likely to break down. Self-discipline, therefore, was often reinforced in the culture of the Brigades. Significantly, at least two of the surviving editorials, and part of one interview, deal with this issue. In one article, entitled "*Disciplina*", A. Cabo discussed the situation within his (unidentified) battalion. Cabo argued that the English-speaking members of the battalion should make themselves responsible for their own and their comrades' behaviour. This self-policing would be beneficial in two ways; first, the volunteers would become better trained if they disciplined themselves and their fellows. Better training helps the whole cause by creating better soldiers, who then sustain fewer losses, and therefore are less of a

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[9] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p. 54ff.

drain on the working classes of the world. The second benefit of self-discipline is that they would set a good example for their Spanish colleagues. Cabo also believed that they should all be willing to accept constructive criticism from others, regardless of rank. Among the other duties which he outlined, Cabo included the obedience to all orders, not bringing up questions or problems until an appropriate time, and ensuring that no one got drunk. He finished his article with the call to "Let our slogan be 'All for one and One for all for *disciplina*'."[10] Discipline, then, had a three-fold purpose. It was to make the volunteers responsible for their own actions and for those of their fellow volunteers, by showing them how to act. Discipline also aided the Republican cause, by creating better soldiers, which would keep a high number of people available for fighting at any given time.

Another article on discipline is "Bob Cooney on Company Discipline". Cooney claimed that the main difference between discipline in a bourgeois army and discipline within their army was that in a bourgeois army, it was imposed from above, while in their army, it was more self-discipline. Previous members had set the level of discipline for them to try to uphold. The fascists at the time were portraying the

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[10] ibid, p.151-2.

Brigades as demoralized, willing to return home, weary, and confused. Cooney felt that they should be able to prove the lie to these statements.[11] He also provided a key underlying theme to the issue of discipline: in a people's army, discipline must come from within each person, and from within the ranks. If discipline was not self-imposed, and promoted by even those of equal or lesser ranks, then it must be imposed by a military hierarchy. If that were to happen, the International Brigades would really have amounted to nothing more than a bourgeois army in proletarian clothing. Self-discipline was a crucial distinction between the Republicans and the nationalists. Since it set the two apart, it was necessary to maintain a high degree of self-discipline.

The final statement on discipline was directed more at officers than at the common soldier. It was from an interview with a Comrade McCartney, who had gone through the Officers' Training School. He was offering new graduates from OTS advice on how to approach the members of the units to which they were assigned. He told them to seldom mention that they had graduated from the School. Rather, they were to encourage proper discipline by making the volunteers feel that the officers could be approached at any time, that they were friends and comrades. They were also to emphasize that

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[11] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p. 165-6.

discipline was essential to winning the war. Officers were to be willing to take the spirit of camaraderie developed at OTS and to apply it to their new company.[12] Again, discipline was only to be encouraged from above, not imposed. There was to be a real difference between the International Brigades and the forces opposing them, where discipline was concerned. Otherwise, the Civil War would have just been between two hierarchical bourgeois armies, and not one such army fighting against an army of the people. This interview also showed the degree to which class solidarity was a part of the Brigade culture; there seem to have been no rules preventing fraternization. Officers were to welcome interaction with the soldiers under their command. The differences in education, background, etc. were to be de-emphasized, so that an officer appeared to be nothing more than one of the men. He just happened to have some acquired knowledge for dealing with military matters, making him first among equals, with the emphasis on equality.

These articles on maintaining discipline suggest that although it was not always a great problem for the Brigades, it became one at times, and always had the potential to be one. The reasons for promoting self-discipline rather than

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[12] "Interview with Comrade McCartney", by Harold Horne. NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p. 172.

forcing strict regimentation were rooted in the idea of class solidarity; even the officers were to see themselves as first among equals, and not as any better than those under them. These articles also seem to be from later in the war, when morale was starting to break down a bit; however, dates on the sources are rare.

Another subject which seemed to arise during the same period is unity. One article by Karl Loewenberg, "Unity", was written to put an end to some of the complaints which Loewenberg had heard. He was getting tired of people griping about some of their care packages winding up in the hands of their Spanish comrades. Loewenberg made an appeal for greater unity in practice. While lofty rhetoric was important, it was more important to put that rhetoric into practice. One of the ways of practising the spirit of unity was to make a better effort at language training.[13] No battalion was ever homogeneous. There was always a mixture of nationalities, and a handful of Spaniards in each battalion. Language training was essential for at least a few in each battalion, and if more people knew how to communicate with the others in the battalion, then the battalion was better off. The volunteers were supposed to be all of the same class in life, and the Brigades themselves

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[13] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p. 120.

were to be classless. A worker was a worker, no matter his political belief or his nationality, and so everyone had his part to do to make sure that all of the volunteers felt equal, and to try to get along with his fellow workers. Language training was one means to achieve greater unity, and was perhaps one of the more important, due to the diversity of the volunteers in the various brigades.

These articles show a less than perfect picture of the International Brigades. There were minor discipline problems, and tension between the international volunteers and their Spanish comrades. The editors of a recruit company wall newspaper[14] added laziness or complacency to the list. They were following up on a meeting, where some of the volunteers in the barracks had made some interesting suggestions for improving the bulletin board. Since the meeting, very few contributions had been made. The editors asked a series of questions designed to shame the volunteers into contributing: "Where are the results of all the talk at Thursday's Political Meeting? Why have comrades not carried out some of the suggestions they made? You, comrade, who spoke at length on songs for the People out of the experiences of the people: Where is your contribution?..."

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[14] The wall newspaper was a sort of bulletin board which operated like a newspaper, with articles and editorials. It was on such publications that these articles appeared.

They continue with several similar questions.[15] This is an example of a place where there was some verbal acceptance of the International Brigade culture, while actions did not necessarily support it. There is no indication of whether anything may have happened in the time between the Thursday meeting and the editorial which would have prevented these men from submitting the material they had suggested. But clearly, it was not deemed sufficient simply to talk about such things. Rhetoric needed to be followed by action.

As morale dropped, it is only to be expected that performance would drop as well. That is why some of the poetry and songs of the volunteers were geared towards re-kindling the spirits of the men, by reminding them of the reasons why they had come to Spain. Some of the articles followed this theme as well. One addressed the right-wing argument that a democracy, especially a left-leaning democracy, could not win a war against fascism. The argument said that the democracy would lack the techniques and knowledge of warfare necessary to defeat their opponents. D. Parker, the author, claimed that the working class made up for their lack of skill and materials with an abundance of numbers, heroism, and revolutionary discipline. This

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[15] "From the Editors" of the Recruit Company Wall Newspaper, in NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p. 161.

combination had worked to stall the much-expected quick victory for Franco's forces, and to prolong the war. Since this abundance of heart, however, was not enough to do more than stall defeat, it was necessary to try to match the knowledge of the fascists; to this end, Parker was very supportive of the training facilities of the Republic. The proof of the success of their training was the Brunete offensive. Parker did not believe that such an action could have met with the level of success which it achieved. The current offensive in the Aragon region showed even more promise.[16] Parker could see the day when the Republic would carry the victory. Then, they would put the lie to this argument. This article expressed a bright hope for the future: the Republic would eventually win the war. To achieve this victory, it was necessary that the Republicans discipline themselves. Discipline is once again portrayed as key to a victory over the fascist enemy. In this case discipline was applied to training. The Internationals needed better training for their volunteers in order to learn to fight the fascists more effectively.

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[16] D. Parker, "We Can Beat the Enemy at His Own Game" NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266, p. 123-5. In an interesting note, neither offensive achieved its intended goal. Both times, the Loyalists came close to success, but had to halt their advance due to well-entrenched superior enemy forces, and heavy Republican losses.

Other articles presented an ideal to try to approach. J. A. Dames, a Canadian serving in the Lincolns as section political leader, expressed what he felt made a good loyalist soldier, in a document fittingly called "A Good Loyalist Soldier". His list had ten parts, each of which included at least two criteria for proper behaviour for Republican soldiers. Among the suggested behaviour were ways to deal with problems arising in the unit. "6/...He never fights with his comrades or civilians and he is very kind to them, in an organized way he takes everything to bed settled with his political commissar," and "7/ He never criticizes or makes suggestions what ever he sees going wrong except through the political commissariat of his unit, or higher commission." A lot of emphasis was placed by Dames on the role of the commissar in keeping the soldiers ideologically sound. The individual soldiers also had some responsibility for their own actions, insofar as to make sure that the commissar was present at discussions, or at least informed of what had transpired. "2/ He never talks politics with his comrades because of the different political party views unless the political commissar of his unit is present" and "9/ He stops and reports any propaganda or sabotage made by any civilian or comrade private or an officer or broken down demoralized comrades against our government of the republic." More generally, a soldier was to keep himself abreast of the

news, "2/...He reads our news, and if he cannot read, he is anxious to know". He was also to be willing to volunteer, to keep peace with the local Spaniards, and to follow orders and make sure they were carried out by his fellows. He was allowed to question orders through the proper channels, usually the commissar.[17] These criteria were all ways in which a volunteer might ensure that his behaviour and attitudes were acceptable. As a section political leader, Dames was concerned with instilling proper self-discipline in his men. Since the Commissar could not be everywhere, the men were responsible for their own actions. It would, therefore, take a clear idea of the purpose of the Brigades to keep a soldier's mind on his duties and not let it wander elsewhere.

The public writing of the volunteers point out elements of the culture of the Brigades. That culture was not perfectly executed; there were a few problems. Aside from these minor lapses of discipline, and small amounts of tension and complacency, these bits of writing show that the rhetoric of the left was prevalent in the culture of the Brigades. The authors of the articles also believed that appeals to the ideas of the left were sufficient to produce better behaviour. Their arguments appear to be reminders of

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[17] J.A. Dames, "A Good Loyalist Soldier", Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 2, file 266.

espoused beliefs, rather than new instructions. They kept returning to the issues of discipline, of the vilification of fascism, of class solidarity and international brotherhood, and of the need for self-discipline.

Private writing has a greater possibility of showing the personal ideology of the author. While some of what was written in letters might have been included to account for the possibility that the letters would be opened and read by those in charge in Spain, for the most part they seem genuine. Some of the letters home were written to friends and neighbours who were at best indifferent to the dominant ideology expressed by the author. For instance, Thomas Beckett, from Toronto, writes to his neighbour, Audrey:

> You must no doubt know why I am here. It is because I am what you did not want me to be, a Communist. You also no doubt know what I am doing here. Considering what is going on in Spain at the present time, you will probably think me wrong, or foolish, or wicked, for doing such a thing.[18]

Beckett believed that if Canadians had faced a situation similar to that faced by Spain, they would have revolted long before then. He felt that, even if he was apolitical, he would still have found it necessary to do something to assist in the struggle. His experience taught him that it was only through communism that peace, happiness, and freedom could be

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[18] NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 2, File 7. letter dated 17 January 1937.

obtained. He paid the price for his beliefs. His entry in the file card collection of the Friends of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion lists him as missing in action from the Jarama front, sometime in February 1937.[19] Since the sentiments expressed in this letter were not shared by the woman to whom it was addressed, Beckett must have believed what he wrote. For him, fascism and oppression were definitely the enemy, and he believed that what happened to workers in other countries concerned him.

Another such letter went from Roxino Martineau, an engineer from Montreal, to E. Trepannier, a shopkeeper in Montreal. Trepannier was not communist, nor sympathetic to the communist cause. Martineau knew Trepannier's sympathies, and reminded the shopkeeper of how he had, in many past discussions, often wondered about the mental state of Martineau, for the beliefs he held. Martineau assured him that he was sincere in his communism; his presence in Spain should prove that. Martineau believed he was assisting in the end of a regime which only maintained its power through the fear and servility of the populace, through ignorance and superstition. The end of this regime was necessary to end the war which it was causing. The end of war and human exploitation was important to Martineau, and that was why a

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[19] NAC MG30 E173, Mackenzie-Papineau collection, vol.1, File 20.

self-avowed pacifist volunteered to bear arms on foreign soil.[20] Martineau underwent the ultimate test of his belief in the anti-fascist cause; this pacifist was among those who were killed in action. He travelled to a foreign country because he believed that the plight of workers in faraway Spain mattered to workers in Canada. The fascist regime which was trying to take over Spain had to be stopped. Once the Loyalists had won, then a death-blow would have been dealt to fascism everywhere and its end would help to end trouble for workers everywhere.

Other volunteers wrote to family and friends who were more sympathetic to the Loyalist cause. For instance, Samuel Abramson gave an account to a friend of a letter he had written home to his parents. He told his friend "I wrote that I came to Spain and gave up many things back home because I believe in the justice of our cause. I still believe in the justice of that cause and would rather never come home than do anything to harm it." He believed his parents would understand his motives; he described his father as a liberal, and a member of the railwaymen's union - "Not very left, but enough."[21] Abramson had been a Zionist prior

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[20] NAC MG30 E173, Mackenzie-Papineau collection, vol 1, File 17. letter dated 20 May 1938.

[21] Samuel H. Abramson, letter to a friend. Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 541, p.12 of file, 2 of letter.

to volunteering for the Spanish Civil War; subsequent events prompted him to join the Communist Party while in Catalonia. His above statements suggest that his conversion was genuine, although it may not have been as thorough as the party may have wished. An evaluation of him portrayed him as willing to defend the party line, yet also somewhat egotistical and so in need of observation and supervision.[22]

Anslie Burke provided another example of such a letter in his correspondence with his mother of 24 March 1938, in the middle of the Retreats along the Ebro River, when the Loyalist forces retreated several hundred kilometres from Belchite in the Aragon to Mora de Ebro, near the coast of the Mediterranean. On 24 March, the Mac-Paps were stationed just west of Batea, about two-thirds of the distance to Mora de Ebro. Burke expressed a hope of retaking the land that had been lost in the days previous. He also found that the retreats strengthened everyone's resolve to fight fascism. Unity between the factions and the different units and ethnic groups was at an all-time high.[23] While Burke may have coloured his assessment to put his mother at ease, there may be some truth to his claims of greater resolve and unity. A

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[22] Statements about his conversion from Zionism to communism are from his letter; his assessment is from the Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 541, p. 2-14.

[23] NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 2, File 17.

couple of months after the Retreats, the Loyalist forces launched their counter-offensive in the Ebro valley. They managed to quickly take several kilometres of territory before they got bogged down just outside of Gandesa. Even in the middle of the defeat suffered by the International Brigades up to that point in time, Burke held on to the notion that the working class was going to prevail in the future against their fascist enemies. Part of this hope came from observing an even greater amount of brotherhood and unity in the Brigades. If greater unity could be achieved through adversity, then there was still hope for the International Brigades.

Hazen Sise, a member of Dr. Bethune's blood transfusion unit, devoted parts of a letter to his Aunt Elsie, dated 7 June 1937, to general discussions about the volunteers. He told her that belief in the justice of the cause was the main force behind the international volunteers. To him, the idea that they were mercenaries was unproven. "Few of these men came here for adventure and none for the fantastic rates of pay they were stupidly alleged to have been offered. I think they actually get about seven Pesetas per day - worth about twenty cents on the international exchange." He also believed that there were not as many communists in Spain as had been reported. He estimated that less than forty percent were communist, even in the most radical units. It was

necessary for Canadians to participate in this war, since there had been a rise of anti-democratic movements in Canada, and especially Quebec. Fascism therefore needed to be fought wherever it appeared; a victory in one area would bolster the efforts elsewhere.[24] Sise's letter touched again on many of the common themes of the Brigade culture. He accepted the ideas of class solidarity and international brotherhood; hence, the link between Spain and Canada.

While there were other letters which focussed more on the day-to-day affairs of the Brigades, these letters are indicative of the other major type of letter sent home. In them, the authors demonstrated a clear understanding of the reasons why they went to Spain. These reasons show that the authors accepted the dominant culture of the International Brigades. They went over to fight fascism, which they saw as the enemy of all workers. They also believed that what affected the workers in one part of the world affected them as well. Since the Popular Front portrayed Nazism and Fascism as two examples of the same phenomenon, this enemy of the worker seemed to be spreading. It had taken over two countries already, and was in the process of capturing a third. Furthermore, there were traces of fascist movements everywhere, even in Canada. A victory for the people in one

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[24] Hazen Sise, in NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 1, File 4.

country would then encourage those keeping fascism at bay elsewhere. It was to help all workers in general, and the Spaniards in particular, that these letter writers went to Spain to fight.

Along with the letters to friends and family, some volunteers kept diaries, or wrote memoirs after the war. Sandor Voros kept a diary/notebook, in which he recorded some of the events he witnessed. It also contained some notes on artillery calculations, since Voros was assigned to the Anglo-American artillery battery. One event in which Voros participated was one of the celebrations of the first anniversary of the International Brigades, in the Autumn of 1938. The speaker, Dr. Minkhoff, used the battle of Belchite as an example of the strength of the feelings of unity between the International Brigades and the Spanish Militia, as well as those feelings among the socialists, the communists, and the anarchists. They were all a part of the same organization, and had all been given the task of fighting fascism.[25] There is a certain amount of irony inherent in the timing of his statements: they followed, by a few months, the uprising of the anarchists and the Trotskyists in Barcelona in May 1937. Minkhoff seems to have forgotten this severe lack of unity which caused a brief

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[25] Voros, Sandor, in Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 2, file 199.

second civil war to break out in Spain. Voros does not mention the uprising either, although he arrived in Spain soon after it happened.

The memoirs, generally written after the war, contain a few passages showing the attitudes of either the author or of others in their unit. Jules Pavio gave the following statement in his reminiscences:

> I wondered, as we neared the front, how many of these brave lads would perhaps never return from this bloody engagement. Volunteer fighters for an ideal of democracy, men who hated fascism enough to die on the battle field fighting it.[26]

This statement shows the opinion which Pavio held of his fellow comrades. He found that they hated fascism enough that they were willing to die fighting against it. Another volunteer, Wilfred West, was quoted giving his reasons for going to Spain. He reported that they "were about the same as the rest of my comrades. I figured that fascism had to be stopped and it looked as though it was only people like us who cared enough to do something about it." He also greatly admired the Spanish people for standing up to their oppressors. He could not see himself acting any other way than going to fight.[27] Pavio and West were both strong anti-

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[26] NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 1, File 9, p.13.

[27] West, quoted in Edward Cecil Smith's draft history, in NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 1, File 14, p.1.

fascists. They felt that they and those around them had to do something to stop fascism. Of the various elements of Brigade culture, its anti-fascism seemed to be the most popular and widespread. Often, the reasons given for hating fascism were related to ideas of class solidarity and sympathy for the plight of all workers of the world.

Even those with no formal political ties when they arrived in Spain expressed similar feelings. John Malko, for instance, was a Canadian immigrant from Austria, although he had fought in Poland for the Russians. When he heard of the Spanish Civil War, he went to Spain to lend his artillery expertise, gained in Poland and in the Austrian Army in the First World War. In the summary of an interview with him, his interviewer wrote that he "was not a member of any political party or working class organizations, nevertheless, he was an anti-fascist [and] understood what was taking place in Spain."[28]

Another interview transcript described Hugh McGregor as a "stalwart anti-fascist". McGregor had no political party affiliation, although he was active in the Project Workers' Union in Vancouver, and had participated in the 1932 and 1934 Relief camp walkouts. John Hoshooley said he "did not belong to any organization or party before going to Spain,

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[28] NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 1, File 16.

but was always a sympathizer." He felt that his duty as a democrat was to travel to Spain to help its people fight for their rights.[29] These few are simply examples of the sorts of sentiments expressed by the volunteers, regardless of party affiliation. Again, anti-fascism and concern for the plight of all workers are expressed by these volunteers.

While the presence of statements of a more ideological nature within the writing of the volunteers points towards a high level of belief in the Republican cause, their lack does not show the opposite. Some examples are more concerned with recounting the events of which the author's unit was a part than with promoting or explaining the policies of Brigade headquarters or explaining why they came to Spain. These letters and articles may have been written to lighten the mood of the soldiers, many of whom spent long months in the front lines. Others may have been sent to people who would not understand the ideological convictions of the author, or the author may have explained his beliefs in an earlier letter.

This whole body of literature set out a large part of the culture of the International Brigades. This culture drew heavily on the ideology of the left, especially communism. It called for class solidarity and international brotherhood,

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[29] McGregor's interview and Hoshooley's memoirs are from NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 1, File 16.

promised a brighter future, encouraged proper behaviour, and portrayed fascism as the enemy of the worker. The writing which the volunteers left behind shows that these beliefs were well accepted. They knew what beliefs were expected of them, and worked within that belief system. Time and again, the works they left behind illustrated the themes listed above. Even the letters and diaries and interviews expressed these same themes. The letters, especially, showed that acceptance of the culture was real, and not just token declarations designed to keep the peace. For the less literary-minded, indoctrination into the International Brigades included the acceptance and adoption of this culture. Many would have been pre-disposed to it through their background experiences. Generally, those who went on in the Communist Party, either as some form of leader during the war, or as a member afterwards, were the volunteers who immersed themselves in this culture. Those who were at odds with some elements within that culture, or with the communist structure within the Brigades were the volunteers who either had left the party, or else had never joined in the first place. It is possible, however, that a few volunteers had joined the Communist Party while in Spain in order to make their experience there easier, as Robert Hamilton suggested. The ultimate test for the acceptance of the culture by the volunteers was one which was inherent in Karl Loewenberg's

article on unity. He believed that, while rhetoric was important, it was more important to back up that rhetoric with action. One's words must be reflected in one's behaviour.

IDEOLOGY AND THE CANADIANS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-9.
Chapter IV: Behaviour

Belief in an ideology, and an acceptance of a culture built upon it, can be manifested in different ways, depending on the depth and nature of that belief. It might be a purely intellectual belief, where ideologically correct opinions are held and expressed, but with few examples of actions which back up their expressed beliefs. People who held such a belief could produce a large volume of poetry, songs, articles, and discussions, all of which would be full of the correct ideological rhetoric, and yet still lack the actions to back up that abstract rhetoric. A deeper belief will find expression not only in words, but in behaviour as well. Actions, therefore, are a measure of the level of the ideological commitment to the Republican cause held by the Canadians.

In the accounts of the volunteers of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, there are several instances of actions undertaken by individuals or small groups. Many of these actions can be linked to the beliefs of the individuals involved, and are therefore reflective of their ideological point-of-view and the extent to which they have adopted the dominant culture of the International Brigades. These accounts are not simply limited to positive actions, where the individual or group made some heroic effort or took a stand on some issue. There are several examples of

desertions and general disruptiveness which may be related to the lack of ideological commitment of the individual to the cause of the International Brigades; however, a lack of ideological commitment is not the only potential factor involved in such cases. Some volunteers, who were otherwise very committed to the Republican cause, deserted from the front. If these volunteers deserted, there must have been factors other than a lack of ideology behind their action. Their desertions were caused by morale problems within the Brigades. Examining the causes of low morale will explain the desertions which were not motivated by a lack of belief or commitment. The nature of the more positive behaviour, in contrast, leaves little room for explanations other than ideology.

There were many positive accounts of actions taken by individuals which show an ideological basis. One such anecdote involves Ronald Liversedge, who had just been recently promoted to Lieutenant and placed in command of No. One Company, Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion. After only a few days in this post, Liversedge resigned his commission and returned to the general ranks. The reason he gave was that he did not agree with Robert Merriman, Chief of Staff of XVth Brigade, and his idea of proper conduct for the officers. Merriman insisted that they eat in the officers' mess, and not with the rank-and-file soldiers. Liversedge thought this

sort of behaviour was inappropriate for a people's army; Merriman thought Liversedge was too democratic. Liversedge also did not issue orders, but rather worked to enlist the co-operation of those under his command.[1] This type of behaviour was especially unacceptable since it happened after the POUM and anarchist uprising in Barcelona in May 1937; Liversedge's actions were similar to the officers of the anarchist militias.

Liversedge's feeling was not that uncommon; an American, Ben Goldstein, felt the same way. After attending the officers' school for a short while, Goldstein withdrew, saying it "was too much like a bourgeois army, not like a people's army."[2] The communists were trying to rein in some of the more radical elements in the Brigades. The suppression of the POUM, the Spanish Trotskyist party, was a large step in this task. Throughout the early part of the war, there was tension between the communists on one hand, and the Trotskyists and the CNT and FAI, the Spanish anarchist trade union and organization, on the other. The

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[1] Hoar, *The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, 114; and Zuehlke, *A Gallant Cause: Canadians in the Spanish Civil War*. Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1996, p.157. Zuehlke's account says that, when given the choice of acting like an officer or returning to the ranks, Liversedge told Merriman that he never wanted to be an officer; Merriman promptly demoted him to the lowest grade.

[2] Hoar, *Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, 116.

main point of difference between these two groups was the place of revolution in the Civil War. The POUM and the CNT-FAI believed that the revolution and the war were inseparable. To win the war and set up a liberal democracy was no victory at all. They tried to establish a workers' government in Catalonia. The communists, on the other hand, felt that the important goal was to win the war first. Once the fascists were defeated, the people's revolution could begin, but not before that time.

The tension between these two beliefs reached its height in early May 1937. The CNT had control of the Telephone Exchange building in Barcelona. On 3 May, some representatives of the government in Valencia visited the Telephone Exchange. Some shots were fired, and the Civil Guards were called. Fighting spread to the streets, with the CNT and the POUM fighting against the Civil Guards and the communists. Sporadic fighting continued for four days. On 7 May, government Assault Guards entered Barcelona, and restored order. Historian Hugh Thomas reported 400 deaths and 1000 wounded during this second civil war.[3] During the next few months, the Communist Party forced Prime Minister

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[3] Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*. New York: Harper & Row, 1961. p.429. cf. Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*. London: Seeker and Warburg, 1984. p.129-59; and Carr, *Modern Spain, 1875-1980*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980. p.142-4.

Largo Caballero to resign. They blamed the Barcelona uprising on the POUM, and began to suppress that party.

The members of the International Brigades who were more radical than the Brigade leadership after the Barcelona uprising seemed to be more content in the rank-and-file. They did not attempt to become officers, while, at the same time, they did not begrudge the power which the officers exercised.

William Beeching's official history of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion provides another positive example of the way commitment could be reflected in action. He cites a verbatim account given by Frank Ryan about the Battle of the Jarama River Valley. Ryan was wandering the road between Madrid and Valencia following a retreat; the soldiers he found there were demoralized and would have broken and run away at the sight of a fascist attack. Thus the road to Madrid lay virtually undefended. Ryan, however, was of the opinion that if the volunteers could be motivated, they might be able to drive back the fascists. He gathered up those he found and headed off to flank the Nationalists; others whom they met along the way joined his band. He came across Jock Cunningham, a Canadian, who was also organizing some demoralized soldiers. They combined their forces, with both of them leading the way. The soldiers still had not completely recovered mentally from their earlier defeat and

retreat, and so Ryan started them singing the *Internationale*. This song revitalized the men; more joined them, including a band of Frenchmen and Belgians. With only an hour and a half of daylight remaining, this makeshift battalion attacked the fascist positions, still singing. As darkness fell, Ryan realized that they were still advancing, and by the time the fighting stopped, these revitalized troops had regained the ground they had lost earlier that day. This group never broke again or fled before the enemy during the Jarama Valley battle, and their re-captured positions did not fall.[4] The *Internationale* had become a useful rallying cry, restoring the morale of the men. This account provides one example of the direct influence of the culture of the International Brigades on the actions of the men.

Eye-witnesses sometimes added an ideological significance to the death of their comrades. Jack Hoshooley told the story of the death of his friend Jacob Locke during the Belchite offensive. Locke was leading his section in an attack, when he was shot in the stomach, dying instantly. Hoshooley claimed that "Jacob died as he lived, fighting for the cause of the working-class of the world."[5] P e t e r

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[4] Frank Ryan, in Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers, Spain 1936-39*. Winnipeg: Hignall Printing Ltd, 1989. p.39-41.

[5] From a written account sent by Hoshooley to Beeching, quoted verbatim in Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers*, 68.

Nielson, a lieutenant in charge of Number One Company, Lincoln-Washington Battalion, witnessed the death of Jim Wolf, another Canadian. Wolf also died at Belchite, at about the same time as Jacob Locke. Wolf was not able to speak after being shot, but Nielson editorialized the look in his eyes; Wolf's look said "I lived - and I die for a better life for my class, and have no regrets."[6] This comment provides greater insight into the beliefs of Nielson than those of Wolf. Nielson was a Danish immigrant who came to Canada in 1916, then travelled around the United States and Canada, working as a logger and labourer. During this time, he became a unionist. In 1933, he became a member of the CPC.

These editorial comments show that Nielson and Hoshooley both believed in the principle of class solidarity. They also believed that the ideas espoused by the Brigades were widely held by their fellow volunteers. For them to suggest that their friends had such thoughts at the time of their deaths, suggests that these two volunteers believed such sentiment to be widespread. If Nielson and Hoshooley were the only people who had regularly expressed such beliefs, and were the only ones who acted upon them, it would have been harder for them to ascribe such beliefs to their friends'

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[6] NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 1, File 16. From an interview of Peter Nielson by Bill Brennan. Biographical comments on Nielson are from the same interview.

dying moments.

Canadian prisoners of war distinguished themselves as more ideologically motivated than other international volunteers. One report by R. Dickie for the Party committee in a Nationalist POW camp found the Canadians to be the most stable communists there. Unfortunately, this strength worked slightly against the Canadians, since prisoners at that time were being counselled by the Comintern to downplay their communist ties. They were instead to say simply that they were in Spain to fight for democracy and against fascism.[7] There were demoralized Canadians in the prisons, but their behaviour seems to have been eclipsed by the more stalwart prisoners. The extent to which the more dedicated prisoners overshadowed the more demoralized Canadians can be shown by a comparative analysis of a number of conflicting accounts, including Dickie's report, two letters from Basque prisoners, and another report on the Communist Party life of Canadians in a Nationalist prison, which listed twenty-eight names. Of these twenty-eight, twelve were said to have been good anti-fascists, and either good party members, or at least had the potential to be such. Eleven were said to be anti-party elements, or else completely unreliable. Some of these were

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[7] Report by R. Dickie, distributed 10 May 1939. Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 546.

also informers while in prison. Another five were listed as demoralized, but were not considered lost causes yet. These characterizations bore no relation to whether or not the mentioned prisoner was a member of the CPC. There were thirteen CPC members, nine who were not members, two who had been, but were no longer, and four whose party status was unknown or else unspecified. Included in this twenty-eight was Robert Dickie, the author of the previous report. Dickie was listed as a reliable member, who acted as a good Party member throughout his stay.[8]

The two letters from the Basque prisoners were written upon the occasion of the Canadians being sent home near the end of the war. The Basque prisoners were informing the Canadians that their sacrifices and spirit were appreciated and would not be forgotten. They hoped the Canadians would carry with them the memory of the Basque prisoners in return. The Basques were going to use the letter which the Canadians had sent to bolster their spirits while under fascist rule.[9] This letter from the Canadians seems to have been written by those prisoners who were more ideologically sound while in Franco's prisons. This fact, along with the individual

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[8] report in NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 540, p 1-16.

[9] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 540, p. 17-8.

entries for the Canadian prisoners indicate that those Canadians who were demoralized and harboured anti-party sentiments had little influence on the overall experience or on their fellow prisoners. The Canadians were the most stable prisoners, according to Dickie, even though almost half of the Canadians in this prison were demoralized or worse, and less than half of them were members of the CPC. The overall contribution of the Canadians to life within the prison was positive, in spite of the proportion of ideologically sound soldiers to demoralized ones.

A lack of ideological commitment to the culture of the International Brigades, and the adoption of a competing ideology can be found as the motive for the more disruptive elements among the Canadian volunteers. One notable example is the story of Ernest Edward Bigwood (alias Ernie Edwards). Bigwood had been part of the unemployed movement in British Columbia prior to volunteering, but had been expelled from the Communist Party of Canada for "disruptive activities and friendship with anti-Party elements." He also had strong Trotskyist tendencies. He was caught once for desertion from the Aragon front, for which he was imprisoned for three or four months. He eventually met up with and joined the Mac-Paps.

When the Battalion was in Ripoll following the failed Ebro offensive, Bigwood and some other Canadians tried to

incite the volunteers to rebel against the leadership of the International Brigades. To accomplish this feat, Bigwood and his followers spread rumours about how much better were the conditions in other Brigades; specifically, they put forward the idea that the XIVth Brigade was getting more free cigarettes than was the XVth. They also organized a pretend battalion meeting to incite the other battalion members to rebel or protest. Bigwood was shrewd enough to keep to the background of this meeting, but still ended up getting arrested.

After the arrest, Bigwood admitted to having made contact with anarchists and local disruptive elements. At least one of his cohorts, John Heaney, had openly expressed a desire to join the FAI, the Spanish anarchist organization. Heaney had also been a runner for the meeting, and one of its spokesmen. Many of the conspirators had deserted from the front; one, Francis Parsons, deserted from his first action, after joining the Battalion at Batea during the retreats. Parsons was expelled from the Party following his second desertion.[10] Of the names listed in the reports, one was considered as possibly not being a part of the group. John McGrandle claimed he had been informing Jack Taylor of some

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[10] Accounts from 3 separate reports, in Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, Files 534, p. 40-6; File 537, p.16-26; and File 543. Reports in files 534 and 543 dated 15 December 1938.

deserters. Two others had uncertain connections to the group. John Grainger wore a pin of the FAI, and promoted arguments similar to those of the group. The other, James Southgate, had been a member of the CPC in Hamilton, and had been expelled and then re-instated. He felt he had the right to hold some of the opinions of the group, but had not associated openly with any of the others except John Grainger.

All of the above offenders had been isolated, but Edward Cecil Smith, the commander of the Mac-Paps, felt that further measures were necessary to complete their isolation and prevent this incident from repeating itself. After the war was over for the Canadian volunteers, all members and suspected members of this group of disrupters were returned to Canada. The CPC was notified of their Trotskyist and anarchist tendencies, to ensure that they did not re-join the party. While in Spain, the charge of Trotskyism became almost a general charge applied to those who were enemies of Communism, regardless of actual Trotskyist beliefs. In the case of these disrupters, however, it seems likely that they were Trotskyists; several also harboured anarchistic tendencies and ideas. Also, until the fallout of the Barcelona uprising, the Trotskyist POUM and the anarchistic CNT and FAI worked closely together.

Desertion was another type of action which might have

been ideologically motivated; however, unlike disruption, there were other factors involved as well. The level of morale was more likely to be a factor in desertion than in more disruptive activities. Many people deserted at one time or another, and for several different reasons. There were desertions due to a lack of ideological commitment to the Brigades, there were desertions of ideologically sound volunteers who suffered from battle-shock and low morale, and there were a few unintended desertions.

Some attempts at desertion were caused by a lack of commitment to the dominant ideological culture of the Brigades. One incident took place just prior to the assault on Fuentes de Ebro in October 1938. At least six people from XV Brigade were caught, and were brought to trial, after they had stolen an ambulance and had headed for the French border. The theft compounded their crime, since it was the Mac-Paps' only ambulance; several men died in the battle which began shortly thereafter because they could not be evacuated to where they could receive proper medical aid. The trial dealt with twelve deserters.[11] The outcome of the trial shows that

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[11] Accounts in Hoar, *Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, 142-3; Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, New York: The Citadel Press, 1967, p.310-1; and Zuehlke, *A Gallant Cause*, 166-8 all give 6 deserters in the Ambulance. The original trial report in NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, p.81-2 lists 12 deserters, but does not distinguish who was involved in the theft and who was not.

the fate of deserters depended on their record at the front and their ideological stance.

The report of the trial, dated 9 October 1937, gave an example of the types of punishments and the reasons behind them. Four of the men deserted because they lacked the conviction to remain at the front. Henry Shapiro, Robert Eisenberg, and Richard deWitt Brown were considered the ringleaders of the ambulance caper. Of these, Shapiro and Eisenberg lied while on the stand. Shapiro had seen no action on the front, as he had only been in Spain for two months. It was also determined that he had decided on the escape route. Eisenberg had been in Spain for fifteen days longer than Shapiro, and had also seen no action on the front. They were both in the Mac-Paps, and had just arrived at the front with the Battalion. It was discovered that they had lied on the stand, and neither had expressed any anti-fascist sentiment. These two men were shot. DeWitt Brown received one year in prison. He had been more sincere at the trial than Shapiro and Eisenberg. As a member of the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, he had also seen action at the front, and requested a chance to redeem himself. Two others were imprisoned for the duration of the war. One of these, Nelson Fishelson, had only been in Spain for three months, without facing any action. He was unwilling to help the proceedings. The other, Murray Krangle, was a member of the

British Battalion. He had arrived in Spain in February, but had deserted once previously.[12] The remaining seven had deserted for other reasons.

Another attempt at desertion appeared to have other roots than a lack of ideological commitment; however, the players involved were sympathetic to competing ideologies, and so their desertion was actually grounded in their shaky belief in the Republican cause. John Heaney, who was later to become one of Ernest Bigwood's cohorts in the attempted uprising in Ripoll at the end of the war, had tried to desert the previous Spring. He took with him another young Mac-Pap named Andy Haas. They were arrested in Figueras on 10 April 1938, while trying to escape to France. They had left the front on 3-4 April, leaving the Battalion near Falcet. They headed to Barcelona, and from there to Figueras, from where they planned to set out for the French border. Heaney harboured anarchist sympathies. After their arrest and trial, they were sent to Barcelona to be imprisoned. They escaped, and headed once again for the border. They were caught again at Massanet on 17 April.

The statements Haas and Heaney gave after their arrest provide a good indication of the other reasons than a lack of

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[12] Report 9 October 1937, Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, p.81ff. The account of the ambulance theft is given in Voros' diary, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 199.

commitment for why men deserted the front lines. Heaney said that he had left the lines because he had received no leave. He had been in Spain since 3 September 1937, and had been fighting at Fuentes de Ebro in October, when the Mac-Paps joined the action. His nerves were gone, and he wanted away from the lines, and so he left. They had just come through the worst defeat to that point suffered by the International Brigades: the Retreats. Haas' statement said that he had left for Barcelona, desperately needing a rest from the lines. Upon arriving at Barcelona, they heard that the Internationals were heading for the border, and so he headed that way as well. Although Haas doubted at first that he would make it, he found that "each day away from the brigade made me feel a lot better as my nerves were pretty well shot from three months fighting, running and poor sleep."[13] Fatigue, and long spans of time in the lines at the front were the reasons they gave for their desertion. These two volunteers were not as ideologically committed to the cause as were others; however, the other reasons they listed were also common, even for those whose ideology was sound.

There were several examples of volunteers whose record was generally unimpeachable, who nonetheless deserted. A

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[13] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 534, p.24. Report of their later desertion in same file, p.27.

lack of ideological commitment was not the cause of their desertion. Some, like Hugh Garner, went on to promote the Brigades. Garner deserted his post twice. The first time, he was in a position behind the front lines. Fearing he was not giving the anti-fascist effort all he could give, he left his post, and made his way to the lines. The shock of the front lines unnerved him, and he deserted his new company in the front lines. He was eventually picked up in Madrid and returned to Canada, where the young writer supported the International Brigades with words. The Canadian volunteers who knew of Garner's desertion felt little animosity toward him. They had all experienced life in the front lines, and knew how unnerving it could be.[14] His desertion was not ideologically based, but rather psychological. His commitment to the Republican cause was not in question. His willingness to support the International Brigades, and his attempts to raise support for them upon his return to Canada showed that he remained committed to their efforts. There would have to be another explanation for his decision to leave his post at the front without permission.

The main reason why ideologically sound volunteers deserted was that they became demoralized. Low morale was considered a cause or a catalyst for desertions. The

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[14] Zuehlke, *A Gallant Cause*, 167.

experiences of the men in the Brigades while fighting some of the battles would have broken some of them down to the point where they had to escape the front for a while. The Spanish Civil War was a bloody war, especially for the Loyalists and the International Brigades. Republican battalions would often be reduced to less than half of their original strength after only a few days of battle. The two American battalions, the Lincoln and the Washington, were merged as the result of one such battle. They started the Brunete offensive on 6 July 1937 with 300 Lincolns and 500 Washingtons. After their failed attempt on 13 July to take Mosquito Ridge, the two battalions were merged into the Lincoln-Washington Battalion, with a combined strength of 350 soldiers.[15] The entire XV Brigade suffered in the Battle of Brunete (see Table 4.1). A report of 11 August 1937 gave the strengths of the battalions in the Brigade before and after the offensive. The Brigade began the offensive with 2144 men, and came away with 891 ready for action. Of the remainder, 293 were dead, 735 were wounded, and 167 were missing. At the time of the Brunete Offensive, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion had not yet been formed; however, there were several Canadians in the British and the two American Battalions. There were enough Canadians in

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[15] account by Jules Pavio for the History Commission, September 1938. In Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers*, 52.

these Battalions that they formed their own section in the Lincoln-Washingtons. Several Ukrainian expatriates who had come from Canada were serving in XIII Brigade, along with their former countrymen.

Table 4.1: Battalion Losses, XV Brigade, during Brunete Offensive[16]

Battalion	Before	After
Dimitroff	445	149
Franco-Belge	247	90
British	441	103
Lincoln-Washington	524	286
Spanish	450	243
Anti-Tanks	37	20
	2144	891

The XVth Brigade suffered the highest proportion of casualties while at Brunete, but the other brigades faced similar decreases (see Table 4.2). Obviously, after such a battle, morale would drop, particularly since the objective of the offensive was never reached.

Table 4.2: Brigade Losses at Brunete, for All Brigades[17]

Brigade	Before	After	Brigade	Before	After
XI	3555	2390	XIV	1645	1600
XII	2134	1658	XV	2144	885
XIII	1957	868	150th	1910	1640

The severe diminishment of battle-ready volunteers would have

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[16] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 1, File 4, p. 4. report by Luigi Gallo, International Brigade Inspector. Numbers have been copied directly from the original sources, and any errors of addition in the original were preserved.

[17] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 1, File 4, p.29.

taken its toll on the members of the International Brigades, especially since they faced many such battles. A report from a year later, dated 10 August 1938, listed the casualties suffered by XV Brigade. The casualties were divided up into groups according to rank.

Table 4.3: XV Brigade Losses, by Rank[18]

Rank	Dead	Wounded	Captured	MIA
Soldiers	68	517	24	83
Corporals and Sergeants	23	124	2	8
Officers	--	19	--	1
Commissars	1	25	--	--
TOTAL	92	685	26	92

Again, there were many losses. Most of these losses were to wounds, but some of the wounded were never fit for battle again. Others had minor wounds, and were able to return to active duty after a short period of convalescence.

The first battle in which the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion participated was also a bloody one. Ronald Liversedge gave an account of his experiences of this attempt to capture Fuentes de Ebro. The infantry were supposed to have protective cover to the town provided by tanks; however, the tanks drove toward the town at forty miles per hour, leaving the infantry exposed. When the fascists opened fire, there was little cover; men started to fall, dead or wounded. Liversedge estimated that his company's strength was reduced

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[18] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 1, File 4, p. 97.

by half within fifteen minutes of enemy fire.[19] While the numbers of Liversedge's estimate might not be completely accurate, it does convey the sense that losses were heavy, and quick.

The number of casualties from any offensive would gradually take their toll. Men were rushed to the front to reinforce existing battalions, usually before they had received much military training. Facing trained soldiers from three armies, the lack of military knowledge by the Loyalists meant that the new recruits were quick to fall under fire too, requiring even more reinforcements. From data on 854 Canadians, 36 per cent were either killed or missing in action, with another one percent listed as wounded. A further 1.9 per cent were listed as captured. Only 56 per cent were either listed as having returned to Canada, or had a location to which they returned in Canada given elsewhere in the documentation, while another 2.3 per cent returned to a country other than Canada.

Large losses sustained by the Loyalist forces meant that incoming Brigaders and new Spanish recruits were sent to reinforce existing units, rather than relieve them. The International Brigades therefore faced long periods in action at the front. For instance, XV Brigade stayed at the Jarama

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[19] Account in Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers*, 73.

front until mid-June 1937; the Lincoln Battalion was relieved on 13 June. The next chapter of the war, the Brunete offensive, began on 6 July 1937. XV Brigade was one of the units assigned to the offensive, and arrived there the day before the assault was to begin.[20]

There were other such instances of little amounts of rest between two campaigns in the war. When XV Brigade was sent to defend Teruel at the end of December 1937, there was then little rest until the remnants of the Brigade arrived in Mora de Ebro in early April 1938, following the Retreats. The only span of rest in that three or four months was between 19 February and 9 March.

Faced with such harsh conditions, even some of the most disciplined and ideologically committed soldiers in the International Brigades became battle-weary. Several took unscheduled leaves, deserting for a place behind the lines to escape the dreadful losses and long days at the front. Most of the reports of desertion were of this type of absence. One example is found in a morale report of 8 July 1937. A unit was placed in reserve after fighting at the Jarama River Valley front. After a very short time in reserve, the unit was ordered to join the Brunete offensive on the other side of Madrid. Some soldiers were opposed to this return to

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[20] Hoar, *Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, 78-90.

duty, and an American among them openly suggested they disobey the order.[21] The same report suggested that morale depended on the assignment of the unit: if it seemed likely that the unit would be called to action at a moment's notice, then morale dropped. Raymond Bell was another soldier who had deserted from the Brunete front, from battle strain. He was an average soldier while at the front, and eventually redeemed himself in action.[22]

The remaining seven people from the trial of those who deserted either in the ambulance caper, or else at the same battle, deserted for these reasons. They were quite remorseful, and six expressed a desire to redeem themselves. The remaining one, Otto Lemke, deserted for compassionate reasons; he wanted to visit a sick parent. All seven faced jail sentences of six months or less. Five of the seven had seen battle action on at least one front, the Quinto and Belchite part of the Aragon offensive. H. Plotnick, who received the lightest sentence, one month in prison, had fought in the Brunete and the Belchite offensives. He had cracked under the strain of battle.[23]

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[21] Morale report 8 July 1937, Comintern Papers, NAC, MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, p.63.

[22] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 542, p.76.

[23] Report 9 October 1937, Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, p.81ff. The account of the

One final possible reason why some ideologically-committed soldiers would desert was because of the confusion which surrounded some actions, especially the Retreats. There were several people who were separated from their units, and had to catch up to the Brigades. Some did desert, such as Heaney and Haas, while others were separated and became lost. Sometimes, those who were separated were thought to be deserting. In early March 1938, three members of XV Brigade, one a Canadian, were arrested on a French truck at the border into France. They claimed to have been at Belchite during the fascist breakthrough. They were trying to catch up with their battalion, but fell asleep after climbing aboard a truck which was headed for Figueras. They had heard that the Brigade was meeting there. The truck they hopped onto was destined for France.[24] There did not seem to be any real intention to desert.

Desertions, especially, can have explanations other than ideological ones. Some of the deserters were very accepting of the culture of the Brigades; they became unnerved when they were in the front lines, facing death and the enemy. High mortality rates among their companions, and huge spans

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ambulance theft is given in Voros' diary, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 199.

[24] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 534, p. 25.

of time at the front demoralized a few volunteers. They then left the lines for a break, whether they had permission to leave or not. There were a few examples where those involved were not true believers in the Republican cause, but they were in the minority of desertions. This latter group of desertions usually took place within a short time of the deserter arriving at the front, and sometimes even before they faced the Nationalists.

Disruptions were usually attempts to gain a political advantage, and were more politically motivated. The ideologies involved in such cases were ones which were at odds with the dominant ideological culture of the International Brigades; these disrupters were usually Trotskyists or anarchists.

The conditions in which the Brigades fought were quite harsh for some battles. Certain volunteers found this experience to be demoralizing, and it led to desertion or a certain amount of rebelliousness. For a few others, it seemed to have made them stronger, and gave them greater resolve in their fight. Anslie Burke, in a letter to his mother dated 24 March 1938, expressed the hope of retaking the land they had just lost in the Retreats. He found that the Retreats had strengthened everyone's resolve to fight. The men were encouraged to try their best to defeat fascism. He claimed that unity between the factions was at an all-time

high.[25] This was only one example of positive behaviour by the volunteers. Several others acted on beliefs which were more radical than those of their superiors. If a problem arose from these beliefs and actions, it was easily solved; it was often a question of the relationship between the officers and men. Those who complained were usually fledgling junior officers who were content to then return to the general ranks.

Most of the behaviour of the Canadians in the International Brigades reflected the culture of the Brigades. There are many instances where a volunteer's actions were in keeping with the dominant ideology. Of the behaviour which does not reflect this culture, only the disruptive behaviour of some volunteers was purely caused by a lack of commitment to the ideology and culture of the Brigades. Desertions were not necessarily political in nature, but more often reflected the demoralization of the volunteers. Many of the other problems in the Brigades, such as the one between Liversedge and his commander, Merriman, resulted from a volunteer taking some of the more radical elements of that culture more seriously than did their superiors. The Comintern at that time was still promoting the Popular Front ideal, and was down-playing its revolutionary beliefs. It tried to keep

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[25] NAC MG30 E173, Mac-Pap collection, vol 2, File 17.

hold of its more radical members, and yet the ideas of class solidarity and international brotherhood were central tenets of the culture of the Brigades. The evidence in the documents also suggests that of those who did not accept that culture, some volunteers rejected it based on their own ideology. These were the people who believed in competing ideologies, such as Trotskyism or anarchism.

IDEOLOGY AND THE CANADIANS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-39.
Chapter V: The Commissariat and Official Evaluations

The International Brigades were a diverse organization. They consisted of volunteers from many different countries representing several different political beliefs. With such a varied set of beliefs represented, it was necessary to have a group of people to oversee the Brigades, to ensure that volunteers and their actions adhered to the dominant ideological culture of the Brigades. This task was fulfilled by the Comintern. This organization also fulfilled a variety of other roles, from raising volunteers in their home countries and transporting them to Spain, to assigning them to units once they arrived, to overseeing the orders given to the Brigades. One Canadian volunteer, Reid MacVicar of Winnipeg, claimed that the Comintern's influence was great enough to cause resentment and minor rebelliousness among some of the non-communist Canadians. He himself resented the "New York Communists" who seemed to be in charge behind the lines. He found that they kept a strong hold on the reins of power, and he claimed that only communists were promoted to officer.[1]

MacVicar may have been right about the communists' hold on power; the Comintern worked to ensure that it maintained a presence in each unit of the Brigades. To accomplish this

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[1] "Disillusioned" *Winnipeg Free Press*, 23 February 1939, p.3.

task, it assigned to each battalion and company a political commissar. According to the Commissariat of War of the XV International Brigade, the Comintern patterned its commissars after those from the French Revolution. In describing these historical commissars, the Commissariat's *Book of the XV Brigade* stated that "...the members of the Paris Convention hit upon the expedient of sending to the Army units their own delegates - tried and trusted adherents of the Revolution...these Commissars guided the Army, established discipline, built up morale, spread education among the men and carried the revolution into the enemy's camp."[2] This description can be applied to the functions of the commissar in the Spanish Civil War. These commissars were responsible for the discipline, training, education, and morale of the men, and for sending propaganda into the enemy lines. They double-checked orders to ensure that they were sound, and that they were followed. Finally they were responsible for informing Brigade and Commissariat headquarters of the experiences of their units, as well as reporting on the discipline, training, education, morale, and performance of the men in their units.[3] Among these reports were categoric

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[2] Commissariat of War of XV Brigade. *Book of the XV Brigade*, 217.

[3] ibid, p. 217; also NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, pp. 32-6, 49; cf. also

assessments of the volunteers who were able to return to Canada when the International Brigades were repatriated beginning in the Autumn of 1938. This attempt at standardization of the volunteers provides the single best and most reliable measure of the level of commitment of the Canadian volunteers to the Republican cause. This report evaluated the level of commitment of individual volunteers while they were in Spain, based upon their actions and the statements they made. These assessments provide a picture whereby the Canadian volunteers are portrayed as being very committed to the dominant beliefs espoused by the Brigades. There were a few whose level of commitment left room for improvement, and some who were not suited for duty in Spain, due to their lack of commitment; however, these few volunteers were the exception, rather than the rule. These assessments form a part of the database on 1222 volunteers described in Chapter II, and can therefore be considered in relation to some of the other demographic information on the volunteers. This comparative analysis indicates that the eastern European volunteers were generally of a higher calibre in the strength of their beliefs than other ethnic groups, while the natural-born Canadians and Canadians from western Europe produced a higher percentage of volunteers at

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Hoar, *Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion*, p. 120ff.

both extremes of the level of commitment.

In the early days of the war, the commissar was selected from within the ranks of the unit by the men in the unit, although he still had to be a member of the Communist Party. At this point, the Brigade Commissariat was not sufficiently organized to make the appointments themselves. Eventually, though, the commissars were assigned from above, to ensure that they were politically reliable. The practice of assigning commissars went against the grain of some volunteers, especially non-communists. Many of them were expecting more democracy than they found in the ranks of the International Brigades.[4] This may also have been a source of Reid MacVicar's disillusionment, since he admitted he was rebellious because of the harsh discipline by the communists.[5]

Two of the tasks of the commissar were the discipline and the training of the troops. The unit commissar was responsible for making sure that all of the members of his unit knew how to use their weapons. Verle Johnson argued that they also organized classes in military tactics. Training was very important, but, especially as the war

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[4] Richardson, *Comintern Army*, 130-2; Richardson suggests that communists were already used to strict party discipline, and so had less of a problem with appointed commissars.

[5] "Disillusioned", *Winnipeg Free Press*, Thursday, 23 February 1939, p.3.

dragged on, there came greater need to discipline some of the volunteers. The shortage of men and materials often meant that volunteers spent large amounts of time in the line, and resolve began to waver. There were several instances of desertion, and each case brought with it a problem of how they were to treat those who decided to take a break from the front, or to "un-volunteer", since the soldiers of the Brigades were volunteers. Determining their fate fell under the purview of the Commissariat. In the case where half a dozen American and Canadian volunteers stole the ambulance following the action at Belchite during the Autumn of 1937, the Commissariat decided to let the men in the Battalions decide their fate. The commissars hoped to be able to sway them to a harsh punishment, even death. The report on this trial stated that every battalion and unit sent in resolutions calling for the death of the ambulance thieves and harsh punishments for the other deserters on trial at the same time. Sandor Voros confirmed this call for a harsh punishment in one diary entry. He recalled that all five companies of the Mac-Paps asked for the death of Shapiro and Eisenberg. This account clashes slightly with the research done by Mark Zuehlke. He found that, although the commissars and Brigade command favoured death, the majority of the men rejected it. Most of the accused were returned to their units, although Shapiro and Eisenberg disappeared amid

speculation that they had been transferred elsewhere. Zuehlke then speculated that the report containing twelve names, filed by XV Brigade commissar Dave Doran, was changed to make it appear that the men of the brigade supported the punishment.[6] A case of desertion such as this one, and its results, were also often used by the commissars to try to prevent such things from happening again. The punishments of the accused were widely circulated, so that all the volunteers knew what had happened to these twelve men.

Commissars ensured that those under their command were properly trained in both military and political affairs. They often linked the two together, arguing that proper military training was part of a soldier's duty to his comrades, to the Republican war effort, and to the working class. Franz Dahlem, the chief political commissar for the Germans in the International Brigades and a leading member of the Political Commissariat, described the relationship between things military and political as being "indissolubly connected...The fighting power...depended to a considerable extent on the political work."[7] The commissars actively promoted learning how to use and clean weapons. As James

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[6] from NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, p. 81-2 and File List 2, File 199, p.12 (Sandor Voros (Dorosh)) diaries. Also Zuehlke, *A Gallant Cause*, 167-8.

[7] Quoted in Richardson, *Comintern Army*, 120.

Dames, a section political leader in the Lincoln Battalion, said in his list of characteristics entitled "A Good Loyalist Soldier": "He takes good care of his equipment and clothing because he knows it is the sweat and toil of the workers".[8] As is shown in this one entry, attempts were made to link political and military training.

Making this link between politics and military efficiency, and publicizing the results of trials were only two ways which the commissars used to educate the volunteers, to promote discipline and to boost their morale. Education was the major focus of the Commissariat. It covered a broad spectrum of activities, from organizing talks among the men to establishing a local newsletter or bulletin board, and then soliciting articles, poetry, etc. for it. Dames, although writing more for the common soldier, gave some examples of the sort of functions provided by the unit commissar. His list outlined the uses and attitudes which a soldier should have for the commissar. For the soldiers to expect this sort of function, these tasks would have to be a part of the commissar's duties.

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[6] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266.

> 2/ He never talks politics with his comrades because of the different political party views unless the political commissar is present...
> 6/...He never fights with his comrades or civilians and he is very kind to them, in an organized way he takes everything to bed settled with his political commissar...
> 7/ He never criticizes or makes suggestions what ever he sees going wrong except through the political commissariat of his unit, or higher commission.[9]

According to this list, the commissar's role involved making sure the common soldier knew the party line on issues; the commissar also acted almost as a confessor, settling any uncertainties within a soldier's mind. The commissar was supposed to be the main voice for the soldiers. He was responsible for their political education, which is why he was to be present during any political discussions among the soldiers. Another report gave a different focus on the educational duties of the commissar: he was responsible for keeping a steady flow of propaganda, rhetoric, and news coming to the soldiers.[10] He did not lecture or teach, but instead he clarified the political nature of coming actions or of a given set of orders when such an opportunity arose, often setting those orders within the larger context.[11] One

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[9] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266.

[10] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, p. 32-6. Report on the work of the Political Commissariat, XV Brigade.

[11] Commissariat of War, XV Brigade, *Book of the XV Brigade*, 218; and Richardson, *Comintern Army*, 124.

instrument of this instruction was the news bulletin. Commissars ensured that copies of *Volunteer for Liberty*, the newspaper of the International Brigades, were available for the soldiers, and translated for those who spoke other languages. XV Brigade also had its own mimeographed newsletter, *Our Fight*, which was published in English and in Spanish.[12] They also organized political meetings and discussions for the soldiers.

Along with educating their own soldiers, commissars were also active in proselytizing. They sent propaganda across the lines to try to entice the Nationalist rank-and-file to defect to the Loyalists, or at least to demoralize them and try to get them to disobey their orders. George Orwell, who fought in the POUM militia in Catalonia in 1936-7, tells of soldiers being assigned to "shouting-duty". These men, often machine-gunners, were issued megaphones, and then proceeded to yell out working-class rhetoric and anti-fascist messages to try to convert the rank-and-file soldiers in the fascist lines. Some of these soldiers were already sympathetic to the left, and it was hoped that such rhetoric would convince them to switch sides.[13] In the Brigades, which were better organized than the militias, a whole section of the

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[12] Commissariat of War, *Book of the XV Brigade*, 220.

[13] Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 42-3.

commissariat was devoted to sending such messages across the lines. XV Brigade even had a sound-truck at its disposal for this purpose.[14]

The commissars were also concerned with the morale of their respective units. In one report, dated 16 April 1937, the commissar discussed at great length the fatigue suffered by the men in his battalion, caused by sixty-five consecutive days in the front lines.[15] To help bolster morale, the political commissar filled a number of minor functions and duties, which oversaw some of the fine details of running the unit. They made sure that the men were fed properly, were as comfortable as possible, and were sufficiently supplied. "He works indefatigably so that the men may have maximum comfort, leisure, rest and recuperation."[16] There is even an account of Saul Wellman, the second Mac-Pap commissar, coming to help in the burial of a prominent Canadian sniper, named Swederski, who was killed in mid-January 1938, during the defence of Teruel.[17]

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[14] Commissariat of War, XV Brigade. *Book of the XV Brigade*, 218-20.

[15] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, P.32-6. Report on the work of the Political Commissariat, XV Brigade.

[16] Commissariat of War, XV Brigade. *Book of the XV Brigade*, 218.

[17] from an account by Bill Matthews, in Beeching, *Canadian Volunteers*, 84-5.

In June 1937, another function of the commissars was emphasized, although it undoubtedly existed before then: they were to double-check the orders issued by the military commanders. All orders had to be co-signed by the commissar, who would be held as responsible for incorrect orders as the military leaders who gave the orders.[18] Dames also agreed with this duty. One of the points in his list is "5/ He obeys army orders and executes them quick and with out argument. He knows the political commissar will see that the orders are correct because according to his rank he is equal to army officer."[19] The Commissariat of War of XV Brigade wanted its members to work closely with the military as advisors, offering insight into both the men in the unit and into the politics behind an order. The commissar's understanding of a situation might have proven valuable in rectifying problems which might have arisen. The co-signing of orders was to be a sign of agreement between the military and the political arms of the war effort.[20] Unfortunately, the theory was not applied as well as it might have been.

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[18] NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 3, File 435, p.49. Minutes from a meeting of the commissars of XV Brigade, dated 8 June 1937.

[19] Dames, "A Good Loyalist Soldier", NAC MG10 K2, Comintern Papers, Fonds 545, File List 2, File 266.

[20] Commissariat of XV Brigade, *Book of the XV Brigade*, 218.

Richardson devotes an entire portion of his chapter on the commissars to chronicling the question of authority. The commissar was the *de jure* second in command, but his task of verifying orders gave him a veto over them, which effectively placed him above the unit commander.[21] This issue was never settled. Robert Hamilton, a Canadian working in a prison ward, described the power held by the commissar thus: "The commissar of the base got only a captain's pay, yet had more power than a major."[22] This statement suggests that the commissars held more power than their position would suggest. Indeed, if they could overturn orders given from above, on the basis that those orders were politically unsuitable, then they held considerable power.

The final task of the commissars was administrative. They wrote reports on all of the activities listed above, and submitted them to their superiors within the commissariat. From these reports, the Commissariat of War was in a unique position when it came time to evacuate the International Brigades from Spain. The Sub-Commission on Personnel and the Party Buro of the Canadian Battalion were able to examine the career of each of the surviving Canadian volunteers, and evaluate their individual political and military performance.

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[21] Richardson, *Comintern Army*, 121-3.

[22] NAC MG30 E173, Mackenzie-Papineau collection, Volume 1, File 7, p.10.

Since the commissars were concerned with the political health of the volunteers, they were in the best position to evaluate the strength of the belief of each volunteer. They sent lists of the volunteers returning to each district of the Communist Party of Canada, along with an assessment of their activities and beliefs in Spain. Some of these lists gave simply the name of the volunteer and his assessment, while others provided minor details concerning the reason for the assessment. Attached to the front of these reports was a covering letter, consisting of a few standard paragraphs, as well as a numeric breakdown of the lists into the assessment categories which they used. The cover letter also defined the terms used. These lists were to help the Canadian Communist Party find an appropriate niche for these volunteers within the party hierarchy. The lists provided the CPC with an idea of the sort of duty which the volunteers could be expected to perform upon their return to Canada, based on their military and political performance in Spain.

These assessments usually applied to both their political and their military performance; if the assessment of one volunteer only considered one category, it specified which. Non-communists were treated to a slightly watered-down set of political criteria, to reflect their lack of Marxist belief, but otherwise they were evaluated on the strength of their anti-fascist stance and their military

prowess.

While the number of categories for assessments varied from report to report, the categories were generally the same. They were: cadre, requires political instruction, good, fair, weak, and bad. These evaluations were also fleshed out by questionnaires which had been filled out either by the volunteer, or by someone who asked them the questions and wrote their answers down.

"Cadres" were the top communists; they would make excellent members of the Party hierarchy when they returned to Canada. They would be capable of handling the higher echelons, becoming national leaders, or even working in the Party press.[23] One soldier who received such a rating was Daniel (Dezo) Beke. He was described as following all the political positions, and seemed to have good morale.[24]

Those who "require political instruction" were not, as may be originally suspected, poor communists. On the contrary, they were those volunteers who were almost at peak performance. The required instruction was to be geared towards elevating the volunteer to the level of cadre.[25]

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[23] Definitions from Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, Files 537, p.77 and 539, p.20-3.

[24] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 542, pp.71-5.

[25] Definitions from Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, Files 537, p.77 and 539, p.20-3.

There is some confusion around this rating, as many volunteers were recommended for political training, no matter what their rating. It was frequently omitted, since it was given such a narrow definition for these assessments; also many volunteers were recommended for further instruction, regardless of their rating. This assessment category also generally disappears between the raw numbers provided in the report summaries, and the lists of names of the volunteers and their ratings which follow. A few of them, however, were given a "very good" rating instead.

Volunteers rated as "good" were also not that far away from becoming cadres. They were described as being able to hold a position of leadership at the local level, and maybe even at the regional level of the CPC. These volunteers would have no serious weaknesses, although further instruction would be beneficial, and maybe even necessary.[26] John Dudka was given a good rating. He believed that the Popular Front was the only way for the workers to unite against fascism. He was described as being well developed, a good worker, disciplined and steady, and a good party member.[27] There were no faults listed on his assessment

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[26] Definitions from Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, Files 537, p.77 and 539, p.20-3.

[27] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 546, pp.90-7.

sheet, and so he may have been evaluated by someone who used "good" as the highest rating. Clyde Crossley was also given a good rating. He was not a member of the CPC, and had not given any information about his ideological beliefs. He was described on his evaluation sheet as having good politics, and as being a good soldier. George Cunningham is another example of a good soldier. He had been a commissar in a British company. In spite of this position, he was recommended for further instruction. He had preferred fighting to taking political instruction.[28] These three men show the diversity of people covered under the "good" rating, from excellent communists to those who would make excellent communists if they could be converted, to average communists.

A "fair" assessment meant that a volunteer had made a positive contribution to the Republican cause, but had a flaw or weakness in his character which either affected his party performance, or else was slightly "harmful to [his] work in Spain." A fair soldier would make an average, and maybe even an above average member of the general party ranks.[29] The "fair" rating also represented a diverse group. At one end was Roy Conroy. He was not very brave, but had improved

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[28] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 545, pp. 97-101 (Crossley), 109 (Cunningham).

[29] Definitions from Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, Files 537, p.77 and 539, p.20-3.

somewhat by the end of the war; even still, he was weak under fire. He was also inclined to be opportunistic, and needed some help from the party.[30] Fred Butynee was supportive of the Popular Front. He felt it was representative of the people, and was necessary to overcome the current situation. The International Brigades had shown the world that the time to fight fascism was here. In spite of this loyalty, he would sometimes protest; he also was not very good in a crisis, and so was given a fair rating.[31] The other extreme was Frank Baily, who was described as afraid, and given to drink. He was found to be sincere, but was unsuited for the army. Education would help him.[32] One last example of a soldier rated as "fair" was Frank Bobby. Bobby believed that the Popular Front and the International Brigades were an excellent means of giving the Spanish people time to organize a resistance. His politics were considered simplistic, and so he was given a fair rating.[33]

A "weak" volunteer would have serious shortcomings which

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[30] Comintern papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 545, pp.39-48.

[31] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 543, p.164-8.

[32] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 542, p.6.

[33] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 543, pp.43-51.

affected his work in Spain, but not so serious as to be unsalvageable to the party with some effort. He would have required further political training to bring him closer to the party line, and then would have been able to work on mass-effort projects, under supervision. Given these conditions, a "weak" volunteer would still be useful to the CPC.[34]

A "bad" soldier, on the other hand, was considered unsalvageable. These soldiers were at best useless to the Republican cause, and at worst detrimental to it. The list of perceived flaws of this type include chronic drunkenness, Trotskyism, cowardice mixed with indiscipline, and disruptive tendencies. A bad rating usually implied a combination of these, combined with a negative assessment of their performance at the front or their contribution to the Republican effort behind the lines. Possible fascist spies were also included in this category. These volunteers were not to be allowed into the party, although they were not all to be considered political enemies.[35] That distinction was reserved for Trotskyists and fascists. Of the soldiers rated

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[34] Definitions from Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, Files 537, p.77 and 539, p.20-3.

[35] Definitions from the cover letters to two reports, found in Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, Files 537 (dated 11 February 1939), and 539 p.20-3 (dated 20 December 1938).

"bad", Ernest Bigwood was the most notorious, since he figured so prominently in a political disruption late in the war. That activity, combined with his Trotskyism and the effort he put into his anti-republican activities, ensured his bad rating. Edward Boivin was also given a bad rating. He had generally given a poor performance although he had improved by the end of the war. He was also anti-Spanish, and was generally considered to be backward.[36]

Six reports gave some numbers to these definitions. They vary in the number of soldiers they examine, from eight volunteers to over three hundred. One report of 8 September 1938 assessed 371 volunteers. The results are as follows: 4.6 per cent (17) were placed in the cadre/excellent category, 43.7 per cent (162) were listed as good, 33.2 per cent (123) were given a fair evaluation, 14.8 per cent were found to be bad, and 3.8 per cent (14) gave no information.[37] Removing the fourteen without information changes the percentages slightly. (See Table 5.1)

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[36] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 543, pp.9-20 (Bigwood), 56-63 (Boivin).

[37] Comintern Papers, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 537. Report date 8 September 1939.

Table 5.1: Report of 8 September 1938

Category	Per Cent
Cadre	4.8
Good	45.4
Fair	34.5
Bad	15.4

Two reports were identified as being exclusive to communists. One report, dated 18 November 1938, evaluated 127 soldiers. Of these, 16.5 per cent (21) were cadres, 15.7 per cent (20) required further instruction or special treatment (rated as *buenes {Para atencion especial}*), 40.9 per cent (52) were listed as good, 19.7 per cent (25) as fair, 5.5 per cent (7) as weak, and 1.6 per cent (2) as bad. The other report, from about a month later, gave two cadres (5.7 per cent), twenty-six good soldiers (74.3 per cent), two fair ones (5.7 per cent), four weak soldiers (11.4 per cent), and one bad one (2.8 per cent), for a total of thirty-five.[38]

Two other reports focussed exclusively on non-communists. They both only rated the volunteers as good, fair or poor. One, dated 19 November 1938, gave 54.5 per cent of the soldiers (42) good ratings, 22.1 per cent (17) fair ratings, and 23.4 per cent (18) poor, for a total of seventy-seven volunteers in all. The other report, completed on 13 December 1938, examined seventeen volunteers, of whom

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[38] NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 537, p. 24-63. Report dates 18 November 1938 and 12 December 1938.

47.1 per cent (8) were good, 17.6 per cent (3) were fair, and 35.3 per cent (6) were bad.[39] A final report, dated 24 December 1938, looked at both communists and non-communists, separating them into two lists. Of the communists, there were three good soldiers, two fair ones, and one bad one. There were one each of fair and bad non-communists, for a total of six communists and two non-communists; there were eight over all, with 37.5 per cent each for good and fair, and 25.0 per cent bad for all eight.[40]

Table 5.2: Comparison of Percentages of Lists

Category	8Sept 1938	18Nov 1938	12Dec 1938	19Nov 1938	13Dec 1938	24Dec 1938
Cadre	4.8	16.5	5.7	---	---	---
Good[41]	---	15.7	---	---	---	---
Good	45.4	40.9	74.3	54.5	47.1	37.5
Fair	34.5	19.7	5.7	22.1	17.6	37.5
Weak	---	5.5	11.4	---	---	---
Bad	15.4	1.6	2.8	23.4	35.3	25.0

The percentages within these reports varied a little from one to the other. The variation is greater than can be explained by the elimination of some categories. There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy. Some of these reports appear to be more lenient than others. The leniency is especially noted in the cases of duplicated

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[39] ibid, 64-99. Reports of 19 November 1938 and 13 December 1938.

[40] NAC, MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, file 537, p.100-6. Report dated 24 December 1938.

[41] Good (requires political instruction)

names, although it may not have been intentional. There is one instance where a report was made, in the 24 December 1938 lists, where the bad rating was given for one person was explicitly to take precedence over an evaluation from the report of 19 November 1938, where the person in question was given a good rating. This volunteer was thought to have ties to the disruptive group led by Ernest Bigwood, and also had been seen wearing a pin of the FAI, the Spanish anarchist trade union. The existence of this group of trouble-makers was made known at their false political meeting of 13 December 1938, between these two reports. His suspected association with this meeting, and his anarchist sympathies made it necessary to change his evaluation. In contrast, there are other cases where a volunteer was given slightly different ratings in different reports, with no explanation about which ought to be considered the true rating.

Another possible reason for the discrepancy in percentages was the continual repatriation of the volunteers at this time. The process of leaving Spain for Canada was rather haphazard, as those whose passage home was secured were gathered and sent off. Those who remained behind were not necessarily representative of the group as a whole before some of them left. It is possible that, at some times, the group left behind was of a higher quality of politics than those who left, or vice versa. There were also more

volunteers being released from Franco's prisons, and others who were being found or who found their way to the areas where the Brigaders were collecting. These new arrivals would also change the complexion of the volunteers.

In the lists of names and comments about their evaluations attached to the numerical summaries, there were several names which were duplicated. Instead of giving assessments for 604 volunteers, (618 including the fourteen with no information) as simple arithmetic would suggest, there are evaluations for only 435 volunteers, once the repeated names have been reconciled.[42] Of these, seven were given either simply military evaluations, or else separated political and military assessments. Four were given good military ratings, with no statements as to their politics; two were fair politically, with good records at the front; and one was listed as weak politically, again with good military performance. Removing these divided ratings leaves assessments for 428 volunteers. (See Table 5.3) Nearly half (46.3 per cent) of the 428 volunteers were rated "good" or better. Over three-quarters (77.1 per cent) were "fair" or better.

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[42] There were no names attached to the report dated 8 September 1938; however, there was a list of approximately 400 names of mixed communist and non-communist volunteers, without a report summary on the cover, NAC MG10 K2, Fonds 545, File List 6, File 537, p.31-71. Report dated 8 March 1939.

Table 5.3: Assessments of the Total 428

Category	Percentage
Cadre	4.9
Very Good	1.4
Good	40.0
Fair	30.8
Weak	14.5
Bad	8.4

Recalling the above definitions of the ratings, these numbers show that, in the opinion of the commissars, three-quarters of the Canadians returning from Spain could be at least average members of the Communist Party of Canada, with perhaps a little education and effort. Also, half of them would be capable of leadership at some level, from local up to national. Very few of them were considered unsalvageable.

These ratings also provide a good measure of the level of commitment of the Canadian volunteers. Since the Comintern dominated the International Brigades, a volunteer's acceptability to the Communist Party of Canada would also indicate how committed he had been to the ideological culture of the Brigades. According to the above results, therefore, seventy-five per cent of the Canadian volunteers who returned to Canada at the end of the war were quite accepting of this culture. Forty-five per cent followed almost completely the cultural elements, both in action and in words, while five per cent were very committed to the cause. Those who were rated "weak" would have been those whose level of commitment

was insufficient to make them of much use to the Brigades in Spain, or to the CPC upon their return, although they could still be educated and brought into the Party. Those who were rated as "bad" were the Canadians who either volunteered for Spain more out of a sense of adventure, or else those who believed a competing ideology. If they were a Trotskyist or an anarchist, they would have volunteered for Spain because of a belief that fascism must be stopped; however, upon arrival in Spain, they would have begun to fight against the leadership of the Brigades and of the Republicans. This rebelliousness would have undermined the war effort, as the Republicans expended men, energy, and materials to fight rival factions within their ranks. The Barcelona uprising was the worst such incident, but many other anarchists and Trotskyists were killed by Republican forces, usually after they were found guilty of dissension. A "bad" rating, therefore, can also be a sign of a fervent belief in anti-fascism and in halting the oppression of the worker, but also a belief in the wrong methods to achieve those ends in the International Brigades.

Slightly over half of the volunteers who had been assessed were known to be communist. While they were found in each category, they were slightly more concentrated in the upper levels:

Table 5.4: Assessments of Known Communists

Category	Number	Percentage
Cadre	17	7.3
Very Good	3	1.3
Good	105	45.1
Fair	66	28.3
Weak	24	10.3
Bad	18	7.7
TOTAL	233	

Those who were members of the Communist Party were therefore generally found to be more committed to the anti-fascist cause, and were potentially more useful to the CPC upon their return to Canada.

Furthermore, fourteen of the fifteen known Canadian members of the Spanish Communist Party were assessed. Of them, two were Cadres, seven were rated as Good, two were given Fair ratings, one was Weak, and one received a bad rating. This suggests that most of those who joined the Spanish Communist Party were those who either became convinced of the justice of communism, or else were those who joined to bolster the numbers of the Communist Party in Spain, in order to strengthen its position in the Popular Front government.

A total of 323 volunteers have information provided for both their ethnicity and the rating assessed to them (see Table 5.5). While these numbers are quite close to the results of all of the volunteers who have been given a rating, the distribution of the ratings among the different

Table 5.5: Ratings of All Volunteers with Known Ethnicities

Category	Percentage
Militarily Good	0.93
Fair Politics/Good Military Record	0.31
Weak Politics/Good Military Record	0.31
Cadre	6.19
Very Good	1.86
Good	39.01
Fair	32.20
Weak	12.07
Bad	7.12

groups is more varied, with larger differences among the different groups (see Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: Comparison of Different Ethnic Groups' Ratings

Results given as percentage of Ethnic group, not of total.

Category	Eng.Can	Brit.	W.Slav	E.Slav	S.Slav	E.Euro	W.Euro
--/Good[43]	0.00	3.03	1.85	0.00	0.00	1.69	0.00
Fair/Good	0.00	3.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Weak/Good	2.08	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cadre	8.33	12.12	1.85	2.94	6.45	6.78	15.38
V. Good	2.08	3.03	0.00	4.41	0.00	1.69	0.00
Good	33.33	24.24	48.15	39.71	32.26	49.15	46.15
Fair	22.92	27.27	37.04	39.71	51.61	25.42	0.00
Weak	16.67	12.12	11.11	8.82	9.68	11.86	7.69
Bad	14.58	15.15	0.00	4.41	0.00	3.39	30.77

These results suggest that those who were of Western European or English-speaking descent were more widespread in the level of their commitment; some could become top communists in Canada, while many more were to not be let into the Party under any circumstances. Others were hardly suitable for

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[43] A rating before a slash designates political only; a rating after a slash indicates military only. No slash in the rating signifies a mixed rating, the most common type.

membership at all, and about half would have made good rank-and-file members, or else local leaders. Those from eastern Europe, including the Slavs, were capable local leaders and general party members. Since these assessments were based on their performance in Spain, this data shows that, in general, the Canadian volunteers of eastern European descent were more committed to the Loyalist cause, although only a few exhibited an extraordinary level of commitment. The volunteers of western European descent, including British citizens and natural-born Canadians, produced volunteers with a lesser degree of commitment to the anti-fascist cause. Those within this latter group who were dedicated to the anti-fascist cause were more committed than their eastern counterparts.

The volunteers from the Prairie provinces were among the best of those who came from Canada. The least committed among the volunteers came from British Columbia, and from Montreal in Quebec. There were 125 volunteers for whom information on both questions are known (127 including those for whom the ratings were divided into separate political and military categories) (see Table 5.7). All of the volunteers from Quebec whose rating is known were from Montreal. Part of the reason for the poor performance on the part of the BC volunteers can be explained by the fact that of those who received a bad rating and whose province of origin is known,

half came from Vancouver.

Table 5.7: Assessments of Volunteers, by Province (Percentage per province)

Category	BC	Ontario	Quebec	Prairies
Cadre	3.70	7.14	0.00	16.28
Very Good	0.00	2.38	0.00	2.33
Good	33.33	38.10	36.36	55.81
Fair	14.81	33.33	18.18	16.28
Weak	22.22	11.90	36.36	6.98
Bad	25.93	7.14	9.09	2.33

While Vancouver was a gathering point for many radicals, especially since it was a nexus for the work relief camps, experience in the camps may have disillusioned some volunteers with respect to the Communist Party. Some known disrupters in Spain, such as Ernest Bigwood, named Vancouver as their home.

The commissars in Spain filled important political functions. One of their tasks which was most useful in determining the level of commitment of the volunteers was the assessment of the volunteers to determine the party function they might be able to undertake upon their return to Canada. These assessments provide a quantifiable method of determining their belief in anti-fascism, and adherence to communist or other sympathetic ideas by the volunteers, based on their statements and actions while in Spain. The data shows that the Canadian volunteers were quite committed to left-wing ideas, and that they were very supportive of the anti-fascist cause in Spain. There were very few who were

uncommitted to the culture of the Brigades, and of these, several had their own ideological motivation for volunteering to fight in Spain.

The eastern Europeans were generally more apt to accept the dominant culture of the Brigades, especially its anti-fascism, class solidarity and international brotherhood. Their willingness to adopt such a culture came from the experiences of their homeland, which came through the culture of the immigrants in Canada, and from their experiences as an ethnic minority within Canada. The importation of experiences from their home countries into the culture of the immigrants meant that even second- and third-generation Canadians of eastern European descent shared in the collective memory of their parents and grandparents.

The western Europeans and the natural-born Canadian citizens were found on the extremes of the ideological spectrum. They produced better communists, and also more of the volunteers who were less committed to the Republican cause. The experiences of the Canadians and western Europeans in Canada were not such as to make them as sympathetic to the plight of the worker as their eastern European brothers. As a result, these volunteers did not share quite the same level of ideological commitment as did the eastern Europeans. While they produced more of the best committed, the average for the Canadians and western

Europeans was lower.

IDEOLOGY AND THE CANADIANS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR, 1936-9
Conclusion

In the International Brigades, there were approximately 1600 Canadians. Few of these volunteers had any previous connection with Spain, no matter how remote. If there were no formal ties with Spain for these volunteers, there would have to have been other reasons behind their decision to volunteer to fight in this war. The possibility of these soldiers volunteering for mercenary reasons was discounted by the meagre stipend given to these men, if they received any remuneration at all. The only possible reasons left for these Canadians to travel to Spain to fight for the Republicans were, therefore, ideology and adventurism.

The data provided by the commissars on the ratings of the Canadian volunteers, the written works which they left behind, and the accounts of their behaviour, both positive and negative, all support the same conclusion. The Canadian volunteers in the International Brigades joined the Republican forces in Spain because they believed in the justice of the cause. Their belief in anti-fascism and in the brotherhood of all the workers of the world led them to take the necessary steps to volunteer to come to the aid of their fellow workers in Spain, who were being oppressed by the fascists.

A few of the volunteers did not share the dominant ideology of the Brigades, communism, but they were

nonetheless motivated by a hatred of fascism. There were very few who made the trip to Spain from Canada to seek adventure. Those who did quickly found that the situation in Spain made their venture a worse risk than they had originally thought. The nature of the Civil War, and the recruitment processes of the Communist Party of Canada for the volunteer force were such that they were able to prevent most of those who sought adventure, and who did not share their anti-fascist belief, from making the voyage to Spain. Some of the volunteers had a basic knowledge of the political situation, and were anti-fascist, but did not have the required commitment to the cause. These volunteers found life in Spain to be quite hard, and returned disgruntled and disillusioned. They were, however, in the minority of the volunteers from Canada. The contributions of the better-motivated of the Canadian volunteers overshadowed that of these weaker volunteers. As a whole, therefore, the Canadian volunteers in Spain proved to be very ideologically motivated, and made a positive contribution to the Republican war effort.

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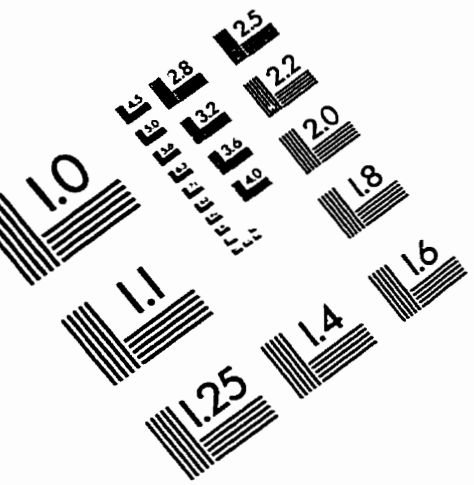
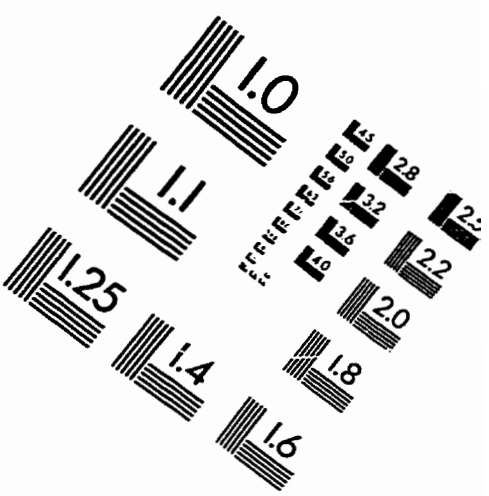
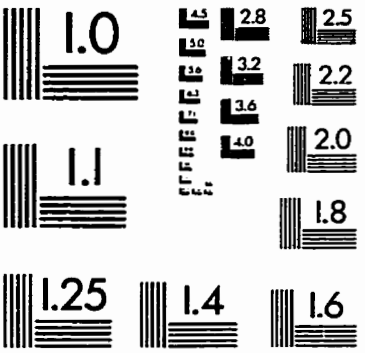
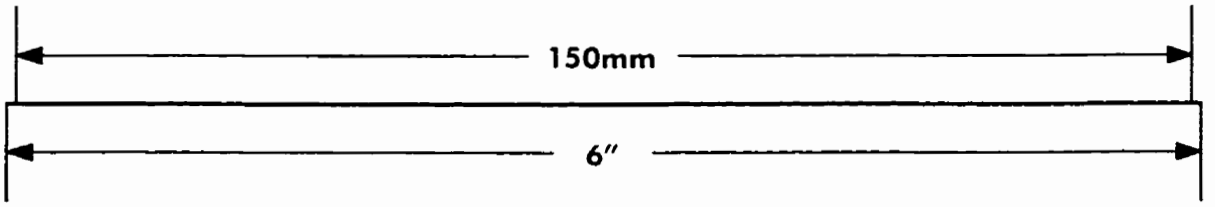
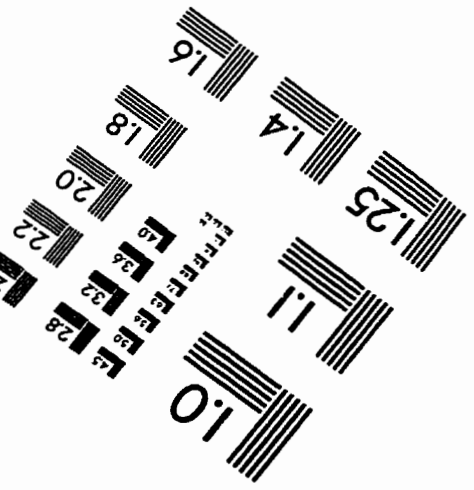
IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

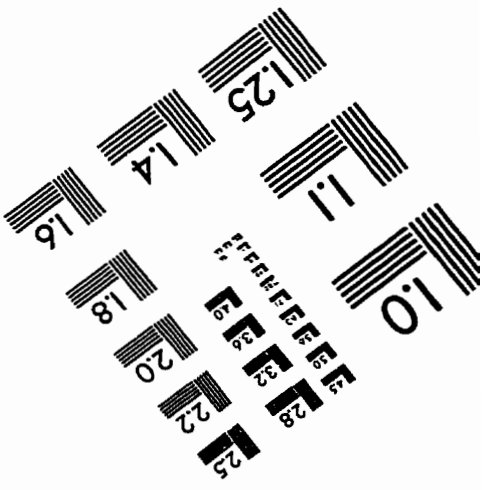












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