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### I. The First Soviet Tankers in Spain

Prior to the July uprising, the Spanish army possessed two tank regiments, both of which were composed of French-made Renault FT-17s dating from the First World War. Out of eighteen total machines, the government retained ten and the rebels eight. <sup>1</sup> Though numerically superior, the Republican regiment was rather weaker, with its armor in disrepair and its crews poorly trained; it was never to play a significant role in any campaign of the war. <sup>2</sup> The Nationalist tank regiment was the stronger of the two, and it was deployed immediately and to considerable effect. By any reckoning, the Republic's need for new tanks and armored vehicles was significant. <sup>3</sup>

On 12 October 1936, the first fifty Soviet tanks and forty armored cars arrived at Cartagena on the *Komsomol*. <sup>4</sup> Aboard the same supply vessel were fifty Soviet tankers and their commanding officer, Colonel S. M. Krivoshein. One should also note what was missing from the same shipment: trained mechanics, spare parts, and mobile maintenance equipment, an oversight that would seriously weaken the effectiveness of Soviet armor in the Spanish war. Nor was this the only lapse associated with the arrival of the Krivoshein group. Indeed, the integration of armor into the Loyalist war effort was poorly planned and chaotic from the start; neither Krivoshein nor the naval attaché Kuznetsov had been given orders concerning where to send the hardware and crew, and valuable time was lost as the commanders scrambled to displace the *Komsomol's* load. They eventually learned that the armor specialists were to serve as instructors for Republican tankers at a training center established in the spa village of Archena, some 90 kilometers from the port. <sup>5</sup> Unlike Soviet pilots, who were sent specifically to fly for the Republic, the tankers were not originally intended to see direct action in Spain. Within weeks, however, the impending rebel threat to the capital forced the government to scale back the training effort and hastily transfer some machines and men from the Krivoshein group directly to the central front around Madrid.

On 26 October, the first company was formed from fifteen tanks and a selection of Soviet tank instructors and specialists. The commanding officer was Captain Pavel Arman. <sup>6</sup> The most advanced Republican trainees were assigned to tank crews as gun loaders. On 29 October, one day after Shakht and Kholzunov led the first SB-2 bomber sorties over the capital, Arman's upstart company entered action in Seseña, some 15 kilometers from the approaches to Madrid. <sup>7</sup> From there, the tankers were to support the ground troops of Líster, the commander charged with initiating the Republic's counter-attack southwest of the capital.

The initiation of the T-26 tank in the Spanish war was, like that of the Soviet high-speed bombers, a dramatic if uneven performance—a triumph for Loyalist morale, but a tactical fiasco. For years, controversy and myth have surrounded the tank company's entrance into the war; given the large number of conflicting versions, it is probably impossible to accurately recreate the event. <sup>8</sup> The Pravda correspondent Mikhail Kol'tsov's account is perhaps the most enthralling, and, though dismissed by some as fictitious, has now been partly verified by recently declassified Russian after-action reports. <sup>9</sup> The Russian journalist drew particular attention to a detail ignored by most other commentators: the broadcasting

of the Republic's strategy on the eve of the battle. According to Kol'tsov, the night before the attack was to commence, Prime Minister Largo Caballero inexplicably read the battle orders aloud over Madrid radio. Virtually every detail save the initial location of the operation was revealed. The text of the battle plan was also sent to the press for insertion in the morning papers. Whether this unorthodox strategy was designed to demoralize the enemy or was indeed a tactical blunder by the prime minister remains open to speculation. In any event, the attack went on as scheduled.

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At six-thirty in the morning on 29 October, Arman's tank column entered the village of Seseña. According to Republican intelligence, the village remained a Loyalist town. As Arman rolled toward the central plaza, however, he found the road blocked by a group of soldiers manning an artillery gun. Calling out to them in French, the polyglot Arman asked that they clear the road and let his column pass. The reply was a question: "Italiano?" Arman quickly realized that the town had been occupied by the Nationalists. He ducked his head back into the vehicle and ordered his gunner to fire on the artillery unit. Thus began the Soviet tankers' participation in the war. [10](#)

The company made quick work of the town's occupiers, and soon advanced due west toward the next village, Esquivias. It was here that Soviet and Italian tanks squared off against one another for the first time in the war. The crew of one T-26, commanded by Semen K. Osadchii and his mechanic-driver I. Egorenko, became the first Soviets to successfully destroy a foreign tank, in this case an Italian Ansaldo. [11](#) Rapidly, Arman's group advanced some 20 kilometers forward. The unexpectedly bold action of the tanks, however, was not matched on the ground by the Republican infantry, much less supported in the air by the Loyalist air force, which never arrived. In what would become a common pattern throughout the war, there was little tactical coordination between the infantry, mechanized forces, and the fighter wing. [12](#) According to Krivoshein, the tanks sped into the fray at high speeds, leaving the infantry behind—indeed, forgetting them completely. Kol'tsov, however, in a manner consistent with classified after-action reports, blamed the Loyalist infantry for shrinking back at the sound of fire. [13](#)

Meanwhile, on their own and deep in enemy territory, Arman's group inflicted serious damage on rebel targets, but the tank crews became disoriented in the unfamiliar terrain. [14](#) Several of the hastily trained Spaniards lacked the basic skills required for the assignment, and their mistakes in the use of the motor transmissions, guns, and safety devices ended disastrously for entire crews. [15](#) Low on fuel, their ammunition depleted, and with no support behind them, the Soviet tanks scrambled to return to their initial position. In this manner, momentum was lost and the counter-attack collapsed.

The retreat notwithstanding, from any objective viewpoint the day belonged to the Loyalist side. Reports to the Defense Commissariat boasted that the rebel offensive had been checked and that Franco's advance on Madrid suffered its first setback. [16](#) The presence of the superior T-26 had clearly caused some consternation among the rebels, who would subsequently scramble to develop new tactics for confronting the Soviet armor. A detailed telegram sent from the central front to Voroshilov indicated that the Soviet tankers had scored a substantial, if inconclusive, victory. According to the report, Republican tank forces "destroyed two rebel tanks, thirteen artillery guns, two artillery batteries, two supply vehicles carrying infantry, and six legionary vehicles carrying officers." The tanks also "scattered or destroyed 600 infantrymen, three cavalry squadrons, and captured one artillery gun." [17](#) Arman himself was jubilant and not a little hyperbolic:

Regarding my people I cannot say anything bad. Without exception they are determined and bold men. There was not a single case where someone neglected to perform in some way during the battle. ... And when I did not send them all in,

but sent only part, he who was kept behind at base came to me and said, "Tell me what I did, that you didn't send me." This was the case in particular with tank commander comrade Lysenko, who received a serious injury and was swollen with burns. When I informed him of the possibility of sending him to a hospital in Madrid, and putting another man in his place, he came to me and said, "What did I do to you that you don't want to use me in the battle?" So as not to offend him, I gave up and sent him [into battle]. <sup>18</sup>

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Nonetheless, Republican losses in the first tank engagement were not insignificant: three tanks were destroyed and eight crew members (four Soviets and four Spaniards) were killed, with another six wounded. <sup>19</sup> Some alarm was occasioned by the ease with which the T-26s burned; all fatalities were caused by incendiary devices (ironically, "Molotov cocktails") tossed into the tanks, whose viewing devices were so poor that the crews often entered battle with the machine fully unbuttoned. <sup>20</sup> These Soviet dead were the first battle casualties of Operation X. <sup>21</sup> In terms of both men and machines, losses were 20 percent, certainly a hefty price for what Soviet advisors regarded as merely a good showing. Even the Soviet advisor Batov, who may have played a key role in planning the action, called the operation a "tactical disaster." <sup>22</sup> Worse was to come. As will be seen below, the loss rate in Republican tank units would rise even higher in later operations of the war.

After Seseña, all Loyalist tank formations operating on the Madrid front were brought together to form the Aranjuez Group, placed under the command of Krivoshein. This group initially included forty-eight tanks and nine armored cars, though the numbers diminished rapidly. <sup>23</sup> Throughout the first weeks of its deployment, a period which coincided with the most critical days of the defense of Madrid, Arman's tank company was the most active of the group, and doggedly continued to disrupt the rebels' advance on the capital. This company was soon widely regarded as the Republic's most effective stopgap defense. Arman credited much of the company's success to the high caliber of the Soviet tankers, many of whom were recent graduates of Soviet military academies. In a report to Uritskii on 17 November 1936, the commander wrote:

I am very thankful and content with the graduates that you have sent to me. They are impressing thousands. It is quite difficult to summarize. We are surprised by the exceptional hardiness of our graduates, who are capable of performing on extended excursions for periods of 3-3 1/2 hours, and several times a day.... <sup>24</sup>

In a mid-November cable to the Defense Commissariat, Arman gave his own account of the feats of his company during several days of heavy action and, while he claimed to have inflicted major setbacks on the enemy, he admitted that his company's own losses were punishing:

November 3rd... destroyed 7 artillery guns, 5 machine guns and 300 infantrymen. November 6th, on the central front destroyed 8 anti-tank guns, 1 artillery battery, 12 machine guns, 5 tanks, 300 infantrymen.... In all, up to November 16 [our] tanks have destroyed: 3 artillery batteries, 30 artillery guns, 22 machine guns, several machine gun positions, 10 vehicles with men and 10 tanks. We have scattered or destroyed 3 cavalry squadrons, as many as 1300 infantrymen, and captured and recovered 1 artillery gun. Our losses are 11 tanks and 9 crew members. <sup>25</sup>

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In fact, Defense Commissariat statistics compiled in 1938 show that, in the first month of Soviet tank participation, total losses were even greater than Arman's field report indicated.

From 26 October to 28 November 1936, eighty-seven Soviet tanks were engaged on the side of the Republic. In just under a month of action, sixteen tanks were destroyed and another thirty-six damaged. In all, fifty-two tanks, or 59.7 percent of the total sent, were out of action before the end of November [See Table V-8]. <sup>26</sup> Compounding the problems presented by enemy mines, anti-tank guns, and the pesky Molotov cocktail were myriad mechanical and technical problems that frequently led to breakdowns. These maintenance issues were worsened by a wholesale lack of spare parts, established repair facilities, trained mechanics, and even fuel. The following report of Manfred Stern (a.k.a. "Kleber"), recalling the mid-November battle at the Madrid suburb of Carabanchel, encapsulates the myriad obstacles confronting the Loyalist tank crews in their first weeks of operations.

In one such battle, units of my sector were supposed to storm the Garabitas Hill. We had been given about two-dozen tanks. The time was set for the assault. The infantry was ready and the tanks did not come and did not come. Finally, the tanks arrived. The infantry, having moved forward once without tanks and having achieved nothing, did not want to go a second time, even with the tanks. An uncoordinated attack resulted where some went and others did not. ... And then the tanks stopped in front of the enemy trenches and did not move forward or backward. *It turned out the tanks had gone into battle without filling up with fuel.* The enemy antitank guns dealt with the immobile tanks as they liked. <sup>27</sup>

In retrospect, it appears that, in its haste to dispatch the armor to the Loyalists, the Kremlin had managed to provide neither the basic needs of tank support nor proper coordination with the allied wings of the Loyalist defensive forces. <sup>28</sup>

**Table V-8**  
**Reported Soviet Tank Losses in Major Spanish Operations, October 1936-August 1937, according to RGVA/Ribalkin** <sup>29</sup>

<b>Active Soviet Pilots</b>					
	<b>Operation duration (days)/ Tank participation (days)</b>	<b>No. of tanks in operation</b>	<b>Tanks destroyed/%</b>	<b>Tanks damaged/%</b>	<b>Total tank losses/%</b>
Madrid Oct. 26-Nov. 28 1936	34/28	87	16/18.3%	36/41.4%	52/59.7 %
Jarama Feb. 5-Feb 27 1936	27/17	47	14/29.8%	20/42.6%	34/72.4%
Guadalajara March 9-March 22 1937	14/6	72	7/9.7%	21/29.2%	28/38.9%
Casa del Campo May 5-May 12 1937	8/5	84	10/11.9%	13/15.5%	13/15.5%
Brunete July 6-July 28 1937	23/21	132	21/15.9%	26/19.7 %	47/35.5%

Total	106/77	—	68	116	184
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## II. The 1st Armored Brigade

In early December 1936, many of the surviving Soviet members of the Aranjuez Group returned to the USSR. In a detrimental practice that characterized the whole of Operation X, even the now-seasoned tank commander Arman was recalled, never to return to Spain. Somewhat earlier, on 26 November, a fresh tank contingent had arrived at Cartagena aboard the *Chicherin*. Reinforcements included 56 T-26 tanks and 155 tank specialists under the command of D. G. Pavlov and staff chief A. A. Shukhardin. <sup>30</sup> The personnel had been drawn largely from a Byelorussian academy for mechanized warfare. As with Krivoshein's group, the new force was immediately transferred to the Archena tank base.

At Archena, the new Soviet men and machines formed the 1st Armored Brigade (*1.a Brigada Blindada*). This brigade was split into two battalions, one under the command of Major M. P. Petrov, the other under Captain V. I. Baranov. Although Spanish trainees had not performed especially well in the October and November battles around Madrid, the Kremlin had once again sent too few Soviet tankers to fully man the new brigade. Consequently, in the new formations, 60 percent of the crews and commanders were Soviet, while the remaining 40 percent were either Spanish or international trainees. <sup>31</sup> The new tank brigade was complemented by a Republican motorcycle company and a transport battalion consisting of ninety vehicles. <sup>32</sup>

The second week of the new year saw the Petrov and Baranov battalions enter action for the first time between the villages of Las Rosas and Majadahonda, northwest of Madrid. The Russian tanks, directed by Pavlov himself, were able to achieve some success in coordinating their assault with the 12th and 14th International Brigade infantry, although this advantage was offset by a conspicuous lack of artillery and air support. By day's end, however, the infantry failed to keep up with the armor, and the Seseña experience was repeated, though at a far greater cost, thanks to the recent arrival of efficient German and Italian anti-tank guns. <sup>33</sup>

The brigade's showing at the battle of Jarama (6-27 February 1937) continued the earlier negative trend, with a few notable exceptions. Although the Nationalist forces enjoyed numerical superiority in the engagement—seventy tanks to the Republic's forty-seven—the issue of quantity was of negligible importance, given that the T-26 was so much superior to the German and Italian models possessed by the rebels. <sup>34</sup> During several attacks, the Soviet tanks at Jarama were able to better coordinate their movements with the infantry. This tactical integration proved successful, and in an engagement on 14 February the combined Loyalist forces routed several Nationalist companies, claiming some thousand killed or wounded. <sup>35</sup> Yet, if some Soviet military analysts considered Jarama an improvement in terms of tactics, no one could deny the heavy price: of the forty-seven Soviet tanks which participated in the engagement, thirty-four, or 72.4 percent, were damaged or destroyed [see Table V-8], most of these at the hands of the superior German-made 37-mm gun.

The tank brigade's tactical lessons of Jarama were exploited in the war's next major engagement, the battle of Guadalajara (8-22 March 1937), which coincided with the third major shipment of Soviet tanks. On 6 March, sixty T-26s arrived aboard the *Cabo Santo Tome*, and two days later another forty on the *Darro*. Despite this major reinforcement of armor, Guadalajara would be more of a victory for Russian air power than the mechanized forces. <sup>36</sup> During two weeks of fighting, the Republican tank brigade operated in close concert with the infantry and artillery. Small groups of three to five tanks were attached to

each infantry brigade, and this effective combination helped decide the outcome, soon known as a disaster for the Italian Expeditionary Corps. <sup>37</sup> For the Russian brigade, however, it was a Pyrrhic victory. Of the seventy-two Soviet tanks that participated, twenty-eight, or 38.9 percent, were damaged or destroyed, hardly a dramatic improvement over the losses sustained earlier.

In the next two major engagements, Republican tanks registered similar losses. At Casa de Campo (5-12 May, 1937), 23 of 84 active tanks, or 27.4 percent, were damaged or destroyed. At Brunete (6-28 July, 1937), total losses were 47 of 132 tanks, or 35.5 percent [see Table V-8]. <sup>38</sup> The Loyalists remained incapable of neutralizing the rebels' anti-tank guns; according to Zaloga's research, a single German battery was credited with crippling a dozen tanks. <sup>39</sup> A report to the Defense Commissariat after Brunete indicated that, since the beginning of the war, the Soviet Union had sent 306 tanks and 60 armored vehicles to the Republic. By 1 September 1937, 80 tanks and 10 armored vehicles had been destroyed, and another 17 tanks required repairs. In all, 209 tanks remained active: 123 on the Madrid front, 63 on the Aragon front, and 23 on the southern front. <sup>40</sup> As we shall see, however, in the coming battles of Fuentes del Ebro and Teruel the fortunes of Republican tank units would take a decisive turn for the worse.

### III. The BT-5: A New Soviet Tank in the Spanish War

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In the summer of 1937, a new Soviet tank arrived in Spain: the BT-5 fast tank, a twenty-ton machine capable of traveling at 40 kilometers per hour, equipped with 60-mm armor, three machine-guns, and a 45-mm anti-tank cannon identical to that on the T-26. Unlike the T-26, the BT-5 fast tank was not designed for infantry support, but instead was intended as an independent, deep maneuver vehicle. The first and only shipment of fifty BT-5s arrived at Cartagena aboard the *Cabo San Agustín* on 10 August. After some delay in deployment, these units were incorporated into the new International Tank Regiment, commanded by Colonel S. I. Kondrat'ev. <sup>41</sup>

Though considered the premier vehicle in the Red Army's new mechanized arsenal, various conditions in Spain militated against the BT-5's success. To begin, by mid-1937 few experienced Russian tankers were available to man the crews that would operate the fast tanks. According to Krivoshein, foreign Communists and Spanish graduates of the training programs operated in the USSR and at Archena gradually took over many aspects of tank operations. The post of driver-mechanic was generally filled by a foreign Communist who had been trained in the Soviet military academies. Often these crewmen were of Bulgarian, Czech, German, or Austrian origin. <sup>42</sup> Spaniards, who had less experience with Soviet armor, usually served in the multi-national crew only as gun loaders. <sup>43</sup> Thus many crews were composed of a Russian commander, an Eastern European technician, and a Spanish loader. The language barriers between these crew members, coupled with their disparate levels of expertise, frequently led to confusion, accidents, or worse. <sup>44</sup> In his September 1937 report to the Defense Commissariat, Shtern asserted that this new crew composition was highly problematic. In both the air force and tank units, he argued, the increased numbers of Spaniards operating machines had led to more accidents:

Spanish tankers and pilots frequently display the highest models of bravery, but this bravery is often careless, and it leads to increased losses, both among people and equipment. <sup>45</sup>

Part of the problem had to do with the nature of the training on the ground in Republican Spain. To conserve fuel and minimize wear and tear on the equipment, local recruits were

drilled in stationary tanks, with no opportunity to acquire even a simulated sense of battle. [46](#)

On 13 October 1937, Kondrat'ev's regiment saw its first action at Fuentes de Ebro, 30 km southeast of Zaragoza, where the rebels held a strongly reinforced position. The autumn attempt by the BT-5s to secure this Aragonese pueblo resulted in the greatest military disaster to befall Soviet tank and crews in the civil war. [47](#) The battle plan included a coordinated attack with the 35th Division, which included the 11th and 15th International Brigades. The entire operation was planned at the last moment, with no advance reconnaissance or consultation with the tank commanders. Most surprising, the battle orders required that the infantry ride aboard the tanks, something that had never before been practiced, much less suggested. When the assault began, the tanks moved in swiftly—too swiftly it seems, since many of the infantry were jostled from their perches and lost on the way. On the edge of town, many BT-5s got stuck in the mud, making them easy targets for enemy gun batteries. After the crews finally exhausted their ammunition, they retreated en masse, though without order. According to Zaloga's research, nineteen of forty-eight tanks were lost in the battle, several more damaged, and a third of the crews killed or wounded. [48](#) Subsequent reports to Voroshilov found several causes for the failure. First, Republican intelligence had underestimated the rebels' strength; and second, the infantry had once again failed to integrate its actions with the mechanized advance. [49](#)

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The next and last major engagement to test the mettle of Kondrat'ev's men and machines was at Teruel. On 15 December 1937, the Republicans began the offensive, whose objective was the capture of the mountain town, 100 km south of Zaragoza in the Aragonese hinterlands. The tank regiment had been greatly reinforced, and was now composed of two T-26 tank companies, the remaining BT-5 fast tanks, three armored car companies (ten machines apiece), and a battalion of armored trucks. In all, the Republic fielded just over a hundred tanks and armored cars, the largest mechanized force the government army had gathered for any single operation. [50](#) It should be noted, however, that comparatively few of the crews operating in late 1937 were Russian. A report issued after the Fuentes de Ebro operation indicated that only approximately eighty Soviet tankers remained, all of those operating the BT-5. [51](#)

Coordination at Teruel between the infantry and armor was planned in great detail. Both tank and infantry units had clear instructions to support one another, and concerted attempts were made toward that end. In the event, however, weaknesses were not long in revealing themselves, and on many occasions the tanks left the foot soldiers behind. On 17 December, for example, one company captain, I. Gubanov, attempted five separate times to launch an attack, but on no occasion did the infantry follow. [52](#) Quite often, the tanks found themselves alone on the offensive, seeking out and destroying rebel troops, armor, and artillery positions. The conditions of the mission were the most extreme of any operation of the war, with much of the battle fought in temperatures falling to -20 Celsius, and in mountainous terrain or narrow village streets. According to Vetrov, the landscape was poorly suited to the high-speed, heavy BT-5, designed for lightning strikes across wide expanses. [53](#) Yet the Loyalist armor proved remarkably resilient, and racked up a series of small victories. On 24 December, for example, Republican units forced the rebels to fall back from their positions. Kondrat'ev reported to Voroshilov that

...the tankers have destroyed at Teruel no fewer than 1000 fascist troops. The enemy has put up fierce resistance, but ... our powerful tank cannons have relentlessly forced these brutes out of the trenches, dug-outs and especially the stone houses. [54](#)

As Zaloga points out, what was most remarkable at Teruel was that the Russian armor

continued to function as well as it did, since, as we have seen, proper repair facilities and spare parts were practically non-existent, no new tanks had arrived since the previous summer, and the conditions of battle were the worst of any in the entire war. In the end, the campaign concluded with loss levels slightly better than earlier battle averages. Of the 104 tanks that had participated, only 24 were lost. <sup>55</sup>

In due time, the Teruel offensive became simply one more Republican advance that could not be sustained. By February 1938, the Republic had relinquished all the territory it had taken during the previous month. As the Loyalist troops fell back from their positions, Nationalist momentum increased. By 15 April 1938, Franco had reached the coast and the Republic was split in two. Teruel would be the last battle where Soviet tankers would play a prominent role. <sup>56</sup> From then on, tank crews were almost entirely composed of Spaniards or other foreign volunteers, though most of even the latter would be withdrawn by the summer of 1938. <sup>57</sup> Indeed, as early as October 1937 a field report to Voroshilov asserted that, apart from the Soviet tankers already in Spain, no additional cadres—with the exception of tank advisors—needed to be sent. <sup>58</sup> Few new tanks were sent either, probably no more than the twenty-five T-26s that arrived aboard the *Gravelines* on 13 March 1938. Though Russian-made armor and a handful of advisors continued to play a role in the war up until the end, for all intents and purposes the Soviet mechanized contribution to the Loyalists ended in late 1937.

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What may be said in conclusion regarding Soviet tankers and tanks in the Spanish Civil War? The recently published memoir of Harry Fisher, an International Brigade volunteer, offers this brief snapshot, admittedly specific to the Brunete operation:

On the road back there was a great deal of activity with our troops going in both directions: some wounded were being carried on stretchers, others were walking to the ambulances; other troops were going the opposite direction toward the front. A line of tanks, returning from the front, rolled past me. They were small and surprisingly tinny-looking Russian tanks. The tankists, obviously Russians, were standing with bloodied heads poking out of their turrets. <sup>59</sup>

To this observer, Russian armor was unimposing: its operators bruised and beaten, its movement in defeat away from the front, unlike the refreshed infantry headed into battle. A generalization, perhaps, but one that this survey bears out. Overall, in the Iberian theater the tank never realized the potential that Red Army planners had envisioned. The perennial problem of integrating mechanized armor into the infantry's advance was never overcome in Spain; for some observers, this shortcoming cast real doubt on the effectiveness of armored warfare.

But criticisms of the performance of the Russian tank crews and their machines are partially mitigated by the specific conditions imposed on the Soviets in their operations in support of the Republic. In terms of tank deployment, the greatest hindrance to victory was insufficient quantity and a continual lack of maintenance support. While the Republicans and Nationalists received roughly the same number of tanks and armored vehicles from abroad, steady losses by the Loyalist side severely limited the government's ability to wage mechanized warfare.

Moreover, it appears that the Soviets made an enormous error in believing that hastily trained Spanish crews could take the place of experienced tankers. Moscow dispatched just 351 tankers to fight for the Republic—scarcely more than one man per tank. <sup>60</sup> The German and Italian dictators, meanwhile, sent Franco over 80,000 troops and advisors, a not insignificant number of whom were skilled in mechanized warfare. <sup>61</sup> This vast quantitative difference in tank specialists forced the Republic to fill out vehicle crews with

foreign volunteers or Spaniards, a practice that weakened their overall performance. The Soviets would have had to contribute at least three times as many machines and six times as many men for the Republic to compete with the rebels equally in armored warfare. Making matters worse was the shortage not only of spare parts, but also of trained mechanics and other support staff to service the vehicles.

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Of course, all of these issues may be classed together under the general category of basic deficiencies. It goes without saying that the Soviet armor contribution would have been stronger had Moscow supplied far more men, machines, and parts. But it can also be argued that the multiple barriers faced by the Kremlin in financing, planning, manufacturing, transport, and training did not permit a broader or more efficient deployment of armor in the Iberian theater. In this facet of its involvement with the Republic, as in most others, the Kremlin was in over its head, barely able to shape events, much less direct or control them. Nonetheless, the overall value of the Soviet tank contribution should not be understated. By most accounts, Soviet tankers served the Republic bravely, and their presence, like that of the Soviet pilots, provided the Republican army with both practical and moral support. <sup>62</sup> In a few battles they proved the difference, if not between victory and defeat, then between defeat and disaster. A final note on the Soviet contingent: in all, fifty-three Soviet tankers were lost in the war—thirty-four killed and nineteen declared missing in action. <sup>63</sup> At 15 percent, this loss rate was the highest of any personnel group of Operation X.

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### Notes:

**Note 1:** These are Howson's numbers, which differ slightly from those of Candil (see next note). The discrepancies, however, are quite minor and will not be debated here. For a comparison, see Gerald Howson, *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Murray, 1998), 30. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** On the early division of Spain's armor, see Javier de Mazarrasa, *Los carros de combate en la Guerra de España, 1936-1939* (Valladolid: Quirón, 1998), 9-35; and Antonio J. Candil, "Aid Mission to Republicans: Tested Doctrine and Equipment," *Armor* (Mar.-Apr. 1999): 31-32. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** Field reports on Republican armor strength are scattered throughout the Soviet military archive; a large number of copies have been deposited in the Yale collection or with the archive of the CCPCE in Madrid. For a survey of Republican tank capabilities at the beginning of the war, see RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 24, l. 101. Many of these documents were also collected and published in internal Red Army publications, including A. Samarin, *Bor'ba za Madrid* (Moscow: Gos. voennoe izdat., 1940). [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** The date of the arrival of the first Soviet tanks is discussed above in Chapter Ten. See also M. T. Meshcheriakov, *Ispanskaia respublika i Komintern: Natsional;no-revoliutsionnaia voina ispanskogo naroda i politika kommunisticheskogo internatsionala, 1936-1939 gg.* (Moscow: Mysl', 1981), 52. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** The training center at Archena and the activities of Soviet tank instructors are discussed in Chapter Thirteen. [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** V. A. Tolmachaev, "Sovetskii Soiuz i Ispaniia: Opyt i uroki internatsional'noi pomoshchi (1936-1939)," Ph.D. diss. (Leningrad, 1991), 124. Arman, a Latvian and the son of Lenin's sometime lover, Inessa Arman, went on to command a Soviet tank division in World War II. He was killed in combat on the Volyn front in August 1943. [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** RGVA, f. 31811, op. 4, del. 28, ll. 104-110. [Back.](#)

**Note 8:** The arrival of Soviet tanks in Spain has received considerable attention in the literature, and the various accounts are highly inconsistent. The best detailed summary, incorporating declassified Soviet after-action reports, is Steven J. Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations in the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12:3 (Sept. 1999): 134-62. See also Mikhail Kol'tsov, *Diario de la guerra española* (Madrid: Akal, 1978), 172-81; G. Shmelev, *Voina v Ispanii. Obzor voennykh deistvii* (Moscow: Gos. voennoe izdat., 1938), 16; A. A. Vetrov, *Voluntary svobody* (Moscow: Voennoe izdat., 1972), 43-44; A. A. Shukhardin, "Tankovaia brigada zashchishchaet Madrid," in *My internatsionalisty: Vospominaniia sovetskikh dobrovol'tsev-uchastnikov natsional'no-revoliutsionnoi voiny v Ispanii*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Izdat. Politicheskoi literatury, 1986), 60-61; Armando Llera, "Armas rusas en la guerra civil," *Historia* 16 75 (July 1982): 17-21; Geoffrey Cox, *Defence of Madrid* (London: Gollancz, 1937), 221; Salvador de Madariaga, *Spain* (New York: Praeger, 1943), 383; and Arnold Toynbee and V. M. Boulter, *Survey of International Affairs, 1937* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), vol. I: 58. It was not until the mid-1960s that official Soviet publications acknowledged the appearance on the Madrid front of a Soviet tank crew. See Dolores Ibárruri, et al., *Guerra y Revolución en España 1936-1939*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Progreso, 1966-71), vol. II: 186; and P. Batov, "En las filas de los voluntarios de la libertad," in *Bajo la bandera de la España republicana* (Moscow: Progreso, 1967), 223-26. [Back.](#)

**Note 9:** José Luis Infiesta Pérez, who after Steven J. Zaloga may be the most authoritative expert on the battle, calls the Kol'tsov account "fantasioso." See "La unidad italiana de carros-artillería, los T-26 soviético y la batalla de Seseña," *Revista de Historia Militar* 46:89 (2000): 167. On the other hand, a Nationalist survivor of the engagement affirms the basic reliability of the Russian journalist, declaring, "el relato se desarrolla cercano de la verdad." See Andres Sanchez Perez, "Aparición de los carros rusos en nuestra Guerra de Liberación," *Ejercito* 404 (Sept. 1973): 68. The Soviet reports from the field, which must be approached with some caution, are available at the Russian State Military Archives Collection, Record Group 1670, Yale University, Sterling Memorial Library (Yale RSMAC). See especially Arman's coverage of the Seseña battle, *Boevaia rabota respublikanskikh tankov v Ispanii (doklad major t. Arman)*, RSMAC, Box. 14. [Back.](#)

**Note 10:** Kol'tsov, *Diario de la guerra española*, 175-76. [Back.](#)

**Note 11:** Tolmachaev, "Sovetskii Soiuz i Ispaniia," 124. See also Armando Llera, "Armas Rusas," 18-21. Osadchii was gravely injured the same day. He died of his wounds on 7 November in the hospital installed at the Palace Hotel in Madrid; the same day, incidentally, that the Soviet diplomatic entourage left that building to follow the Madrid government to Valencia. Later, Osadchii posthumously received the title *Hero of the Soviet Union*. [Back.](#)

**Note 12:** A. Samarin, *Bor'ba za Madrid*, 34. [Back.](#)

**Note 13:** Kol'tsov, *Diario de la guerra española*, 179. [Back.](#)

**Note 14:** S. M. Krivoshein, "Tankisty-dobrovol'tsy v boaiikh za Madrid," in *Pod znamenem ispanskoi respubliki: Vospominaniia sovetskikh dobrovol'tsev-uchastnikov natsional'no-revoliutsionnoi voiny v Ispanii, 1936-1939* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 451-54. [Back.](#)

**Note 15:** *Ibid.*, 458-59. [Back.](#)

**Note 16:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 960, l. 267. [Back.](#)

**Note 17:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 870, l. 143. [Back.](#)

**Note 18:** CC PCE. Tesis y manuscritos. 19/9, no. 5, 33. The original is located at RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, l. 226. A copy can also be read at the Yale Archive: *Boevaia rabota*

*respublikanskikh tankov v Ispanii (doklad major t. Arman)*, RSMAC, Box. 14. [Back.](#)

**Note 19:** *Voina v Ispanii, vyp. 10. Tanki v oborone* (Moscow: Gos. voennoe izdat., 1938), 4; RGVA, f. 35082, op. 1, del. 19. l. 675. [Back.](#)

**Note 20:** Llera, "Armas Rusas," 21. [Back.](#)

**Note 21:** Tolmachaev, "Sovetskii Soiuz i Ispaniia," 124. [Back.](#)

**Note 22:** See P. Batov, "En las filas de los voluntaries," 226. [Back.](#)

**Note 23:** See Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 137. [Back.](#)

**Note 24:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 870, l. 30. [Back.](#)

**Note 25:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 870, ll. 143-144. [Back.](#)

**Note 26:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1057, l. 67. [Back.](#)

**Note 27:** 14 Dec. 1937 report of Manfred Stern ("Kleber") to the Comintern. RGASPI, f. 495, op. 74, del. 206, ll. 91-146. Reproduced in Mary Habeck and Ronald Radosh, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 314-15. Stern wrote this report more than one year after these events occurred, and it appears he mistakenly claims the battle's date as sometime in December 1936, when in fact this particular debacle involving Russian armor occurred on 12 November. For more details, see Hugh G. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 3rd ed. rev. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 467-69. [Back.](#)

**Note 28:** This is a judgment that may be partially mitigated by three caveats. First, let us recall that the Iberian experience was first real test of the Red Army's mechanized branch. Second, the logistical problems involved with transshipping put considerable limitations on what Moscow could quickly and easily send to the Loyalists. Third, the general chaos that characterized many operations, especially those in the late autumn of 1936, further diminished the chances of clear success. [Back.](#)

**Note 29:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1057, l. 67. This same document also indicates that, between the operations listed on Table V-8, an additional eleven Soviet tanks were damaged or destroyed. [Back.](#)

**Note 30:** TsAMO, f. 16, op. 3148, del. 5, l. 19. Cited in Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch' Sovetskogo Soiuza ispanskomu narodu v natsional'no-revoliutsionnoi voine 1936-1939," Ph.D. diss. (Institute of Military History, Moscow, 1992), 136; Tolmachaev, "Sovetskii Soiuz i Ispaniia," 126. The distinct tours of two different Soviet tankers named Pavlov has caused some confusion in the secondary literature. Bolloten mistakenly writes of the two Pavlovs as one and the same person, putting D. G. Pavlov in action in the defense of Madrid before his actual arrival; see Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Civil War: Revolution and Counterrevolution in Spain, 1936-1939*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 491. In fact, the first Pavlov—that is, S. G. Pavlov—arrived in Spain on 12 October 1936 aboard the *Komsomol*. His duties were those of a regular tank specialist and instructor. The second, D. G. Pavlov, was the celebrated commander of tank units in many key operations and, according to Ribalkin, the architect of Republican tank deployment at both Jarama and Guadalajara (see Ribalkin, "Voennaia pomoshch' ", 137). If the testimony of one Soviet eyewitness is to be believed, D. G. Pavlov was also one the bravest and hardest souls Moscow sent to Spain. For an extensive account of his exploits, see the article by A. A. Shukhardin in *My internatsionalisty*, 63-64. A captain at the start of the Spanish war, Pavlov escaped the Stalinist purges and eventually rose to the rank of general. In 1940, Stalin appointed him commander of the Soviet Union's Western Military District. During the months leading up to the German invasion, Pavlov repeatedly warned Stalin and

Molotov of the weakness of the Soviet frontier, but to little effect. After the Germans successfully encircled Smolensk in July 1941, taking 100,000 Russian prisoners, he was shot on orders from Stalin. [Back.](#)

**Note 31:** Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X": Sovetskaia voennaia pomoshch' respublikanskoi Ispanii (1936-1939)* (Moscow: "AIRO-XX", 2000), 70. [Back.](#)

**Note 32:** Tolmachaev, "Sovetskii Soiuz i Ispaniia," 126. [Back.](#)

**Note 33:** Russian tank activities at Majadahonda are not well documented. For brief summaries, see Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 140, and Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 480. [Back.](#)

**Note 34:** *Voina v Ispanii, vyp. 10. Tanki v oborone* (Moscow: Gos. voennoe izdat., 1938), 3; RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1057, l. 67. [Back.](#)

**Note 35:** The engagement was subsequently lauded by Red Army planners as a highly successful example of tank use with the infantry. For a discussion, see Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 160, n. 30. [Back.](#)

**Note 36:** The T-26's performance at Guadalajara was not totally unheralded; French observers, for example, found the T-26's tactical deployment worthy of emulation. See Roberto Nayberg, "Les conséquences de la bataille de Guadalajara (mars 1937) sur la doctrine française d'emploi des chars," *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* 165 (Jan. 1992): 23-32. [Back.](#)

**Note 37:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 912, l. 157; f. 35082, op. 1, del.. 24, ll. 97-98. *Voina v Ispanii, vyp. I. Vazhneishie operatsii na Tsentral'nom fronte* (Moscow: Gos. voennoe izdat., 1937), 87. [Back.](#)

**Note 38:** Here, as elsewhere, discrepancies abound, even among Soviet sources. In the official history, *Guerra y Revolución*, the number of tanks listed at the start of the Brunete offensive is 129; see vol. III, 149. [Back.](#)

**Note 39:** Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 144. [Back.](#)

**Note 40:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1057, l. 63. [Back.](#)

**Note 41:** It should be noted that stringent precautionary measures were required for transshipping at this time. The voyage of the *Cabo San Agustin*, which left on 24 July, is described colorfully in A. A. Vetrov's "Bronevoi shchit respublikanskoi Ispanii," in *Problemy ispanskoi istorii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), 249-316. [Back.](#)

**Note 42:** S. M. Krivoshein, "Tankisty-dobrovolt'sy v boiakh za Madrid," in *Pod znamenem Ispanskoi respubliki*, 466. [Back.](#)

**Note 43:** M. V. Novikov, *SSSR, Komintern i grazhdanskaia voia v Ispanii 1936-1939*, 2 vols. (Iaroslav: Iaroslavskii gos. pedagogicheskii universitet, 1995) vol. II: 66. [Back.](#)

**Note 44:** Vetrov, *Voluntery svobody*, 262. [Back.](#)

**Note 45:** CC PCE. Tesis y manuscritos. 19/10, no.17, 176. The original report is located in RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 961, ll. 131-175. [Back.](#)

**Note 46:** The problems of training are discussed in the field report by one tank commander, Robert Gladnick. Yale RSMAC, Box 14. Cited in Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 161, n. 43. [Back.](#)

**Note 47:** The battle is well documented. Zaloga has combed through the Yale materials,

reading over one hundred pages of after-action testimonies from the Soviet participants. Elsewhere, the disaster at Fuentes de Ebro is treated in José Luis Infiesta Pérez, "La ofensiva sobre Fuentes de Ebro y el desastre de los carros BT-5," *Historia y Vida* 28:327 (June 1995): 70-79; Ian MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War: Personal Recollections of Scottish Volunteers in Republican Spain 1936-1939* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1986), 214-18; and Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 704-5. [Back.](#)

**Note 48:** Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 147. For another view of the battle, equally pessimistic, see Vetrov, *Voluntary svobody*, 57, 98. [Back.](#)

**Note 49:** TsAMO, f. 132, op. 2542, del. 192, l. 61; cited in Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 72. [Back.](#)

**Note 50:** Perhaps in an attempt to explain away the Republican victory, Francoist historians and propagandists exaggerated the number of tanks the Soviets threw into battle at Teruel. According to Enrique Esperabé Arteaga, the pro-Falangist Catholic rector of the University of Salamanca, 170 tanks were used, while the Nationalist chronicler of the war Manuel Aznar claims over 200. See Esperabé Arteaga, *La guerra de reconquista española que ha salvado a Europa y el criminal comunismo* (Madrid: San Martín, 1940), 193; Manuel Aznar, *Historia militar de España (1936-1939)* (Madrid: Idea, 1940), 554. [Back.](#)

**Note 51:** See the commissar report sent to Voroshilov on 22 October 1937. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1033, ll. 174-183. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 292. [Back.](#)

**Note 52:** Ribalkin, *Operatsiia "X,"* 72. [Back.](#)

**Note 53:** Vetrov, *Voluntary svobody*, 131. [Back.](#)

**Note 54:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1057, l. 63. [Back.](#)

**Note 55:** Zaloga, "Soviet Tank Operations," 148. [Back.](#)

**Note 56:** As a postscript to the Republic's retreat, one particular event bears mentioning. In March 1938, two BT-5 tankers, crew chief A. Razgulyev and his mechanic-driver M. Danilov, became the first Soviets to face the Germans' new machine, the T-1 tank, in battle. This episode, routine at the time, foresaw the great World War II tank battle of Kursk. See Vetrov, *Voluntary svobody*, 178-79. [Back.](#)

**Note 57:** That direct Soviet participation in tank crews was phased out by early 1938 has long been established. See especially the work of the pro-Loyalist British correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, Henry W. Buckley; *Life and Death of the Spanish Republic* (London: H. Hamilton, 1940), 412. Buckley had perhaps the longest direct experience in Spain of any foreign correspondent who covered the war. He was first assigned to the country in 1929 and remained for a decade, not leaving until the end of the war in April 1939. [Back.](#)

**Note 58:** Intelligence report to Voroshilov, 22 Oct. 1937. RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1033, ll. 174-183. Reproduced in Habeck and Radosh, *Spain Betrayed*, 479. [Back.](#)

**Note 59:** Harry Fisher, *Comrades: Tales of a Brigadista in the Spanish Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 63-64. [Back.](#)

**Note 60:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1143, l. 127. [Back.](#)

**Note 61:** John Coverdale's research indicates that 72,827 Italian troops served on Franco's side; see *Italian Intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 417. Thomas, who places 75,000 Italians in Spain, estimates Hitler's contribution at 17,000; see Thomas, *Spanish Civil War*, 985. [Back.](#)

**Note 62:** For a Western appraisal of Soviet tank crews' performance in Spain, see Raymond Carr, *The Spanish Tragedy: The Civil War in Perspective* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), 140. [Back.](#)

**Note 63:** RGVA, f. 33987, op. 3, del. 1143, l. 127; del. 1149, l. 305. [Back.](#)

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