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Skiers in the Service of the Second Republic: The Alpine Battalion during the Spanish Civil War

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During the Second Republic proletarian sport developed in Castile, with a prominent socialist and communist influence and a clear international scope. This working-class sport brought physical activity closer to the popular sectors through the first worker sports associations such as *Salud y Cultura* (S&C) that gave way to various athletic, alpine or football associations. The use of mountains by university circles for sporting, educational or leisure purposes favored its expansion to other social sectors, as well as the diversification of its practice. Although the Spanish Civil War (SCW) marked the end of the previous years' expansion of sports in Spain, leftist social and political organizations understood the SCW as a class-based conflict with sport as a distinctive key element of the working-class militias. They managed to create militiamen battalions, some of them closely related to sport. Around the Guadarrama range (Madrid) two mountain battalions appeared at the end of summer 1936: the Youth Alpine Battalion (socialist) and the Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment (communist). Both merged in December 1936 and operated under the name of Alpine Battalion until the end of the war. Despite political tensions, it was a very united battalion with sport, culture and political analysis being the hallmarks of the Alpine Battalion, the epitome of leftist politically heterogeneous sporting battalions during the SCW.

Keywords: Alpine Battalion; Spanish Civil War; skiers; workers' sport; Second Republic.

Sport in Wartime

Sport in modern warfare is an under-attended sports history research topic. Sport came for the first time to play a major role in armies for social control and training during World War I (WW1).¹ Betting, athletic challenges and sports competitions between regiments were common during the conflict.² The participation of professional or amateur sportsmen in battle is also noteworthy. During WW1 a large number of sportspeople volunteered, many unknown amateurs and others renowned professional players of different disciplines.³

In many cases they formed specific units or battalions of athletes. Scholars have focused mainly on footballers during WW1, especially in the British army.⁴ Battalions of different sports were formed, many on the initiative of sports institutions and teams. In the British army this was the case with rugby.⁵ There were also general sports battalions.⁶ We find examples of specific battalions or sportsmen involved in other armies like Australian, Canadian or Irish.⁷

Skiing has been particularly relevant to the war being of clear military utility. The French army has formed specialized battalions (*Chasseurs Alpins*) since the 19th century, and also the Russian army. During WW1 there were units of Austrian, German, Italian and French skiers and mountaineers. Over the years of the Second World War (WW2) skiing was important in the Soviet, Norwegian and Finnish armies. The German army created the first mountain units in Bavaria by 1915. But it would be in 1938 when two more mountain divisions were set up with soldier-skiers including well-trained and experienced Austrian soldiers.⁸ During the WW2 Germany created ten mountain divisions plus one dedicated skier division. Italy had had mountain units since the last third of the 19th century distributed eventually into a total of eight alpine regiments.⁹ Six alpine divisions were created in WW2, in addition to an exclusive battalion of skiers, the *Battaglione Sciatori 'Monte Cervino'*.¹⁰ In the US army, the *10th Mountain Division* was of great importance during WW2.¹¹

Sports battalions in Spain¹² started much later. Spain did not fight in WW1 but, from the early 20th century, the importance of physical exercise in the army and its military use reached some development. Along the first decades, manuals for military cycling, military gymnastics and physical education appeared.¹³ Before the civil war, cycling units had already been introduced in the Spanish army, such as the *Batallón Ciclista* created in 1931.¹⁴ During the SCW pro-Franco side used sport as a political tool while trying to gain international acceptance through diplomacy, getting international recognition of sporting institutions created by the rebels (Spanish Football Federation and Spanish National Olympic Committee).¹⁵ At the Republican side, thanks to the development of associative and workers' sports during the 1920s and 1930s, sports battalions held some prominence during the SCW. The most important ones were in Madrid: the *Batallón Deportivo*,

probably the most relevant of them, created by the seizure of the CFF in Madrid;¹⁶ the *Batallón Ciclista Enrique Malatesta*, consisted of volunteers from the Velo-Club Portillo in Madrid.¹⁷ In Valencia the *Batallón Ciclista* was created in August 1937.¹⁸ In Barcelona the Alpine Militias started in August 1936.¹⁹ Or in Murcia the 96th Mixed Brigade, called the *Brigada de los Toreros* (Bullfighters' Brigade).²⁰ It is also noteworthy to highlight the efforts of the FCDO which created the *Compañía FCDO del Batallón Joven Guardia* in Madrid and the *Batallón Cultura y Deporte* in Bilbao.²¹ Finally, some other small examples during the SCW are the *Grupo Deportivo* of the 1st Battalion inside the Engels Column,²² or the 2nd Battalion of the *Regimiento Pirenaico* no. 1 in Catalonia.²³ The *Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama* is the centre of this research.

From Democratization to Warmongering: The Transit of Working-Class Sports during the Spanish Second Republic

The sports expansion started between the 19th and 20th centuries in Spain had a strong emergence in the period of the Second Republic.²⁴ In a context determined by the advance of the fascist and Nazi regimes there was a transformation of sport conditioned by its consolidation as a mass phenomenon, the nascent leisure industry and the spread of sport activities in the media.²⁵ The democratic change endorsed by the polls represented a profound transformation in the sociopolitical system and influenced sport. Though short-lived (1931-1936), the republican journey meant a greater democratization and extension of sports practice despite the Spanish structural deficits. The entry of a new democratic political model with more guarantees of fundamental rights led to a favorable scenario for associationism which would result in a greater socialization in sectors with poor sports development such as the working class, women or the rural population.²⁶ Sport found a place for the postulates of European socialist and communist worker sport.

Proletarian sport in Europe, linked to communism, had undergone a shift in its political positions and tended towards alignment with socialist sports associations, in an officially 1935 emerged process of popular frontism facing the rise of Nazism.²⁷ This process resulted in the rapprochement between the RSI (Red Sport International) and the LSI (Labour and Socialist International).²⁸ Such influence became the backdrop for the

marked awakening of discourses alternative to bourgeois sport that would lead to the creation of countless popular sports associations structured in different ways and territories during the Spanish Second Republic.²⁹ Thus, two geographical and political sport poles stood out: proletarian sport in Castile, with a prominent socialist and communist influence, and popular sport in Catalonia, influenced by the Czech sokols.³⁰ The model developed in Castile arose from the network of socialist schools, influenced by the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (ILE), which would bring sport closer to the popular sectors through the first worker sports associations such as *Salud y Cultura* (1913) or the *Sociedad Deportiva Obrera* (1914) that would give way to various athletic, alpine or football associations, among others, very prominent during the Second Republic.³¹ By then this sports model reached its zenith with the creation of the *Federación Cultural Deportiva Obrera de Castilla la Nueva* in 1932, later known as *Federación Cultural Deportiva Obrera* (FCDO).³² This federation, together with other similar sports associations, even with no organic link between them, generated a whole movement of support for a sport alternative to the bourgeois, whose divisions between proletarian and popular would be blurred after 1936. The ultimate expression of this process was the unborn Barcelona Popular Olympiad in 1936 where all these proletarian and popular sports associations, and also professional players, actively collaborated.³³

From Mountaineers to Mountain Warriors

Political and sporting tensions were also felt in the mountains. The Castilian plateau, especially the range of Guadarrama, was the place chosen by the ILE for its first territory study societies (1886) that would entail the creation of the first maps and routes. It contributed to the use of this mountains by university circles or sectors of the ILE for sporting, educational or leisure purposes between 1901 and 1913 what would favor its expansion to other social sectors, as well as the diversification of its practice.³⁴ Societies such as *Los Doce Amigos de Peñalara*, the *Club Alpino Español* or the *Sociedad Deportiva Excursionista* would emerge from that expansion.³⁵ The different social classes and their ideologies were felt on the summits of the plateau and their sports practices, in a rivalry that gradually leaned towards progressive positions with the arrival of the Second Republic. Mountain sports associations increased significantly, spreading a conception of the

mountain as a good for collective enjoyment. One of the most outstanding mountain-linked working-class societies was the alpine section of S&C. This entity had the extension of hiking, athletics and culture among its priorities, organizing summer camps in the Guadarrama.³⁶ It also had a marked link with socialist and anti-fascist postulates and reached 10,000 members by the end of 1936.³⁷ 5,000 of them were based in Madrid and would be the basis for the creation of the Alpine Battalion.³⁸

The outbreak of the SCW in July 1936 divided the Spanish territory. Madrid was the target of insurgent troops from the outset because it was a potential key element to the conflict. The army of the north, led by General Mola, first tried to conquer the territory from Cuenca and Guadalajara (in the south of Madrid) to Gredos range. Franco's troops attacked Madrid from the north and established the main front lines in Somosierra, Guadarrama and Navacerrada at the central mountains around the capital. Forces loyal to the Republic fought back and forced Mola and his troops to give up their ambitions in August 1936.³⁹ Soon after, the insurgent troops reappeared led by Franco which gradually gained ground until they reached the capital city gates. Against all odds, and thanks to the *Junta de Defensa* (Committee for the Defence of Madrid), Madrid resisted the onslaught from 5 to 23 November, when Franco dropped his plan to directly take Madrid and turned his efforts to indirect ways to conquer the capital city.⁴⁰ A long trench war followed in Madrid. Initially, the resistance was made up of 30,000 people. That number increased to almost a million people, especially in the rear-guard. The trenches around the range of Guadarrama and Madrid remained almost unchanged during the entire war.⁴¹

Origins of the Alpine Battalion

At the beginning of October 1936, the Alpine group of S&C promoted the creation of a battalion of skiers with a call by the Unified Socialist Youth (USY) to which 150 skiers were expected to respond.⁴² This group, planned to provide its services in the Fuenfría area, was finally configured with two companies under the name of *Youth Alpine Battalion*.⁴³ Raimundo Calvo was the commander, being Miguel Condés and Jesús Velázquez the captains of the companies.⁴⁴ The enlistment office was placed at Lagasca st. no. 39 (Madrid), where those ski practitioners or members of the alpine group of S&C enrolled in

other battalions were requested to enlist.⁴⁵ Members of communist, socialist or other parties of the Popular Front were also encouraged to join or deliver ski equipment.⁴⁶ The battalion gained the support of the Spanish Alpine Club, which asked its members to donate equipment or to enroll.⁴⁷ This club had already made clear its political background and its affiliation to the worker, popular and anti-fascist sport before the SCW.⁴⁸ During October, a short period of training, supply and organization emphasized the popular character of the battalion with teamwork solutions to the lack of means and resources.⁴⁹ By the end of October, the battalion departed to the front after a S&C support event at the Pardiña cinema in Madrid.⁵⁰

At the end of September, another battalion with similar characteristics but clearly communist-rooted was established to operate around the Navacerrada area, also at the range of Guadarrama.⁵¹ It was called *Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment* and divided into two companies. The commander was Joaquín Rodríguez and the political commissar Teógenes Díaz, being Luis Balaguer and Santiago Aguado the captains of the companies.⁵² The enlistment offices were located in Madrid both at the 5th Regiment headquarters, Francos Rodríguez St. no. 5, and at the battalion office, Gaztambide St. no. 42, giving priority to those with experience in the mountains.⁵³ Although S&C had a significant presence in the Youth Alpine Battalion, it also played a decisive role in the formation of the Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment. Thus, the founder of the latter was the young 24-year-old mechanic Joaquín Rodríguez. A member of S&C and also a unionist of *El Baluarte* and later of the *Unión General de Trabajadores*, he received orders from the 5th Regiment to create this battalion due to his mountain skills.⁵⁴ Similarly to the Youth Alpine Battalion, this battalion had the acquiescence of S&C but also received the support of two mountaineering societies: the *Sociedad Peñalara* and the *Sociedad Deportiva Excursionista*.⁵⁵ The Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment received important training and material being a hit force as well as an aid in support of supply and liaison.⁵⁶

Despite their separated origins, by the end of 1936 both battalions merged during the process of reorganizing the Republican popular militias, operating under the name of Alpine Battalion.⁵⁷ The new battalion was integrated into the 31st Mixed Brigade of the Republican Army of the Central Region, 2nd Division. It included the two former

companies of both battalions plus a group of peasants from the near town of Valsáin, controlled by Franco.⁵⁸ The new battalion occupied some of the aristocratic villas at the surrounding mountain areas and turned them into makeshift shelters.⁵⁹ Navacerrada, Guadarrama, Cercedilla, Rascafría, Cotos or El Alto del León were the main stages of its military campaigns along the Castilian plateau.⁶⁰ Built on the regular practice of collective winter sports, the sense of unity was remarkable although they had some problems related to the political affiliation of the original battalions.⁶¹ The battalion maintained the original divisions by the different companies but they shared a feeling of working-class pride linked to the mountain since aristocrats needed mountaineers to teach them safe practices and routes.⁶² That is the reason why certain working sectors learned to ski before the war.⁶³ Technical issues were also relevant and the officials provided specific dress, behavior and military guidelines.⁶⁴

Long periods of inactivity between the military operations were common.⁶⁵ During this time the Alpine Battalion participated in various educational activities, whether political, cultural or sports-type. Sport and physical activity were consistently present in the daily life of the battalion to celebrate the arrival of new recruits, to honor the older members, to maintain the discipline of the troops, or to improve general physical condition and specific military tactics.⁶⁶ Officials were firmly determined to provide a model and become a benchmark for physical development throughout the Republican Army.⁶⁷ Sporting activities led them to participate in a sports exhibition organized by the *Unión de Muchachas* and the FCDO as a tribute to the Army of the Central Region including athletics, swimming or basketball events.⁶⁸ It also participated in a rugby championship which eventually won at the Chamartín stadium in Madrid.⁶⁹

The political and cultural activities of the battalion, according to the Political Commissar Teógenes Díaz, consisted of conferences, films exhibition, puppet theater or reading sessions, since there was a library with more than 500 books at the garrison.⁷⁰ Cultural activities sometimes also became writing works such as the poem 'Serranía' by one of the soldiers that was published in the press;⁷¹ or leisure and social events such as the weddings of Alejandro Gutiérrez and Luis Medina officiated by Commander Joaquín Rodríguez.⁷² The political dimension was particularly relevant, as the articles in *La Voz del*

Combatiente by the Commissar Díaz indicated. He placed the political formation of the army as an essential element for victory in terms of collective reflection and debate, an issue that in his words differentiated the Republican soldiers from the Franco's army.⁷³ The conception that political education mattered came from the own experience of the battalion, which had to deal with the attempts of some combatants to use it as a way to desert and join the enemy.⁷⁴ There were also undisciplined attitudes that led to internal purges.⁷⁵ This idea of the need for education (literacy, debates, courses...) was recurrent during the life of the battalion.⁷⁶ The highest expression of that was the creation of *Cumbres*, the expression means of the Alpine Battalion. It appeared in June 1937 edited by the *Unión Poligráfica (Consejo Obrero de Madrid)*.⁷⁷ Ten issues were published along 1937 and 1938 addressing different military, international, cultural, sports, humor, politics, hygiene and discipline topics.⁷⁸

Structure, Members and Activity of the Alpine Battalion⁷⁹

The Alpine Battalion was structured in up to seven companies and the total number of soldiers was around 900.⁸⁰ Not only people linked to mountain sports participated among its ranks but also skaters and other sportsmen.⁸¹ Some efforts were even made to create a cycling section as part of the battalion.⁸² Companies were divided into sections, standing out rifle skiers, machine gunners, the horse-drawn group, as well as the management and medical sections, although the structure was evolving throughout the war.⁸³ According to the information from the dozens of judicial proceedings after the war, a list of the main battalion figures may be attempted. The battalion, with just five companies, was called Alpine Battalion from the merger of the Youth Alpine Battalion and the Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment (December 1, 1936) until June 1937. The chief commander was Raimundo Calvo and the political commissar Teógenes Díaz. The captains of the five companies were: Luis Balaguer (1st), Santiago Aguado (2nd), Miguel Condés (3rd), Jesús Velázquez (4th) and Alejandro Gutiérrez (5th).⁸⁴ By June 18, 1937, the name was changed to Mountain Battalion although it would be known as Alpine Battalion until the end.⁸⁵ It eventually grew up to seven companies. On August 31, 1937, Raimundo Calvo was relieved as chief commander by Alejandro Gutiérrez, former captain of the 5th company, who was also relieved on October 1, 1938, by Jesús Velázquez, former captain of the 4th

company.⁸⁶ Captains were also changing along the years of the war.⁸⁷ There was a general political commissar for the battalion. USY and Communist battalions pioneered the appointment of political commissars.⁸⁸ This important position was taken by four different commissars throughout the war: Teógenes Díaz until August 31, 1937; Alberto Palmer until October 1, 1938; José Luis Prado until January 24, 1939; and Pablo Aparicio until the end of the war.⁸⁹ Each of the seven companies had a second assistant commissar.

Around 500 are identified out of the 900 total members of the battalion.⁹⁰ They fought along with the Thälmann Battalion until January 1937.⁹¹ A platoon of skilled Austrian skiers helped the Alpine Battalion during the first ski lessons for beginners and the first patrols in key areas. After the merger of the two original battalions, the communist commander of the Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment, Joaquín Rodríguez, was assigned to the Lister Brigade, so Raimundo Calvo, the socialist leader of the Youth Alpine Battalion was appointed chief commander of the Alpine Battalion.⁹² It gave rise to confrontations between socialist- and communist-rooted companies which refused to mingle and maintained separated companies throughout the war. The only discernable approach achievement was the agreement to exchange military positions every two weeks.⁹³ Military action remained low. The most important milestones are the following: in April 1937, the Alpine Battalion occupied the Reventón and Malagosto mountain passes. They fought along with the 31st Mixed Brigade at the battle of La Granja in May and June 1937. In March 1938 the battalion lost Reventón and Malagosto after a Francoist military operation from La Granja and they had to withdraw to Rascafría. The Alpine battalion occupied the hills of La Camorquilla and Navalpinganillo in response. No further military activity was found until the end of the war.

In March 1939, the coup d'état by Colonel Casado in Madrid announced the end of the war.⁹⁴ From March 5, disputes broke out between the Alpine Battalion communist and socialist members. The former wanted to continue fighting and the latter preferred to surrender. During the long days of March 1939, mistrust and suspicion split the remarkable unity of the members. Finally, on March 28, the last order was to withdraw.⁹⁵ They threw weapons and ammunition into the Eresma river. Some surrendered to the Francoist Army in

the town of Cercedilla and others just left Guadarrama and went back to Madrid. It was the end of the battalion.

Significance of the Alpine Battalion for the Working-Class Sport and Culture during the SCW

The mountain was clearly linked to the progressive circles in Castile during the first third of the twentieth century. Guadarrama was the setting for the first hikes organized by the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* which led to the creation of early mountain societies like *Los Doce Amigos de Peñalara*, the *Sociedad Deportiva Excursionista* or *Salud y Cultura*. These organizations advocated the enjoyment of nature and later promoted mountain sport for laborers and women during the Second Republic. Leftist political organizations, especially S&C, understood the SCW as a class-based conflict and workers' sport was the distinctive key element of the working class.

Based on this understanding, the organizations linked to the workers' sport started to create battalions made up of sportsmen to fight for the Republic. The Youth Alpine Battalion and the Alpine Battalion of the 5th Regiment were the leftist mountain groups' political response to the outbreak of the SCW. S&C focused on the creation of the first one and was clearly involved on the second. The Alpine or Mountain battalion, the merger of the two, was based on communist and socialist popular militia and grassroots support evolving towards a clear professionalization after the restructuring of the Republican Army in February 1937. The battalion was a hit force with surveillance duties at the Madrid mountain front. Direct confrontation interspersed with rest periods of military inactivity when cultural and sporting activities, the battalion hallmark, were developed.

They understood sport as a key element linked to hygiene and health but also to socialization and political engagement. Culture was the other essential component of the Alpine Battalion, giving priority to soldiers' literacy, arts and political analysis to improve understanding of the class struggle. We find evidence in the library of the battalion, the conferences organized and the war press, especially the expression means of the battalion, *Cumbres*, with literary products and sports, military tactics and political articles.

The Alpine Battalion was one of the most important and long-lived sport- and class-based battalions created after the outbreak of the SCW. It stands as the epitome of working-class Republican military units with a prominent and remarkable feature: the Alpine Battalion was made up of communist and socialist members who, despite continuing tensions, succeeded in forming a unified battalion almost to the end.

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 19. *Ibid.*, 285; Miguel Flores, Antonio Gascón and Fernando Martínez de Baños, *Guerra civil Aragón: El Pirineo* (Zaragoza: Delsan Libros, 2008).
 20. Javier Pérez, *La brigada de los toreros. Historia de la 96 Brigada Mixta del Ejército Popular* (Madrid: Almena, 2005).
 21. For the *Batallón Joven Guardia* see: Comité Nacional de la FCDO, 'En Valencia se ha constituido la Federación Cultural Deportiva Obrera', *El Mundo Deportivo*, November 4, 1936, 4. For the *Batallón Cultura y Deporte* see: Iker Ibarrondo-Merino, 'Basque sportspeople under the shelling of the Condor Legion. Batallón Cultura y Deporte during the Spanish Civil War', *European Studies in Sports History* no. 12 (2019): 169-92.
 22. Domínguez and Pujadas, 'Estadios y trincheras', 200.
 23. 'La juventud por la libertad. Una magnífica selección de deportistas se contiene en el II Batallón del Regimiento Pirenaico que va a partir hacia el frente', *El Mundo Deportivo*, March 3, 1937,

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- 1; Jaume de Ramon, *El Regiment Pirinenc núm. 1 de Catalunya* (Barcelona: Rafael Dalmau, 2004).
24. Andrés Domínguez, 'La práctica de la modernidad: Orígenes y consolidación de la cultura deportiva en España', in *Atletas y ciudadanos. Historia social del deporte en España 1870-2010*, ed. Xavier Pujadas (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2011), 55.
25. Xavier Pujadas, 'Del barrio al estadio. Deporte, mujeres y clases populares en la Segunda República, 1931-1936', in *Atletas y ciudadanos. Historia social del deporte en España 1870-2010*, ed. Xavier Pujadas (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2011), 127.
26. Ibid.
27. André Gounot, 'Le "front populaire des sportifs" (1935-1939)', in *Les Mouvements sportifs ouvriers en Europe (1893-1939)*, ed. André Gounot (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2016), 178.
28. André Gounot, 'The project of the People's Olympic Games of Barcelona (1936), between Communism and regional Republicanism', *Cultura, Ciencias y Deporte* 1, no. 3 (2015): 117.
29. Pujadas, 'Del barrio al estadio', 137.
30. De Luis, *Historia del deporte obrero en España*, 224-34; Pujadas, 'Del barrio al estadio', 127.
31. Ramón Martorell, 'Salud y Cultura', *Crónica*, August 8, 1937, 8-9. *Salud y Cultura* was founded in 1913 at Fuencarral street 131 (Madrid) by workers from secular schools and based its financing on the payment of dues from its members, although without renouncing to some occasional governmental subsidies; For the Sociedad Deportiva Obrera see: De Luis, *Historia del deporte obrero en España*, 28-40.
32. Pujadas, 'Del barrio al estadio', 141.
33. Xavier Pujadas and Carles Santacana, *L'altra Olimpíada. Barcelona '36* (Barcelona: Llibres de L'Índex, 1990); Iker Ibarrondo-Merino, 'El apoyo a la Olimpiada Popular de Barcelona 1936 en Castilla' (PhD diss., Faculty of Sport Sciences, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, 2021), 187.
34. José G. Cayuela, 'La Sierra de Guadarrama, ámbito deportivo de la Sociedad madrileña, 1870-1936', in *Orígenes del deporte madrileño, 1870-1936: condiciones sociales de la actividad deportiva*, coord. Ramón Zabalza (Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 1987), 81-7.
35. Ibid., 106-8.
36. Ramón Martorell, 'Salud y Cultura', *Crónica*, August 8, 1937, 8-9.
37. 'Grupo alpino Salud y Cultura ante la Olimpiada Negra de Bertín', *Mundo Obrero*, February 4, 1936, 5; Ramón Martorell, 'Salud y Cultura', *Crónica*, August 8, 1937, 8-9.
38. 'Un batallón de skidores para la lucha en la nieve', *Estampa*, October 10, 1936, 21-2.
39. Ramón Tamames, *La República. La era de Franco* (Madrid: Alianza, 1973), 263-4.
40. Ibid., 265-71.
41. Gabriel Jackson, *La República española y la Guerra Civil, 1931-1939* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1978), 277-95.
42. 'Un batallón de skidores para la lucha en la nieve', *Estampa*, October 10, 1936, 21-2.
43. 'Batallón alpino juventud', *El Liberal*, September 25, 1936, 4; File 1561, Dossier 17, page 40, FC, CG, AHN.
44. Jacinto M. Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama* (Madrid: La Librería, 2006), 209. Velázquez is mentioned in the repression records at the AHN: File 1561, Dossier 17, pages 35, 40 and 44, FC, CG, AHN. He was a leader of Salud y Cultura: 'Se celebra una reunión en Madrid para formar el Comité Español', *El Socialista*, May 16, 1936, 5.
45. 'Se convoca a los milicianos que tengan prácticas de esquí', *El Sol*, September 25, 1936, 2; 'Está formándose el batallón alpino juventud', *La Voz*, September 25, 1936, 2.
46. 'Llamamiento a los esquiadores', *El Sol*, October 3, 1936, 2.
47. 'Batallón Alpino juventud', *El Liberal*, September 27, 1936, 5.
48. 'Se celebra una reunión en Madrid para formar el Comité Español', *El Socialista*, May 16, 1936, 5.
49. 'Editorial', *Cumbres*, no. 5, October 1937, 1.

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50. 'Por el Batallón Alpino juventud', *El Liberal*, October 26, 1936, 7. In this event, people enjoyed a musical performance by the USY military band, the Russian film 'The sailors of Kronstadt' (Efim Dzigan, 1936), a speech by Luis Cernuda (member of the battalion) and a poetry reading by Rafael Alberti. Both were two of the most important poets of the Spanish Generation of '27. Cernuda was a member of the Alpine Battalion from October 1936 to February 1937. About his involvement in the battalion see: Bernard Sicot, 'Luis Cernuda: los años del compromiso (1931-1938)', *La Experiencia Literaria*, no. 16 (2009): 105-130.
 51. File 1561, Dossier 17, page 40, FC, CG, AHN.
 52. Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 209. Balaguer is mentioned in the repression records at the AHN: File 1561, Dossier 17, page 68, FC, CG, AHN.
 53. 'Batallón Alpino', *La Libertad*, September 16, 1936, 5; 'El alistamiento en las milicias de la república', *La Voz*, September 22, 1936, 2.
 54. 'El comandante Rodríguez, de oficio mecánico, que fundó el batallón alpino', *Mundo Gráfico*, July 14, 1937, 2. Rodríguez López was born in Madrid, the son of a Galician unionist immigrant who was a peasant and switched from countryside to town and opened a bakery. He had studied in secular socialist schools and was also president of the Socialist Youth of Puente de Segovia district (Madrid), being a ski and a Walking champion in Spain.
 55. 'Socorros y donativos', *La Voz*, September 22, 1936, 3; 'Noticias diversas', *El Liberal*, September 23, 1936, 6. The *Sociedad Peñalara* collected donations for the battalion at its office, Pi y Margall St. no. 5; the *Sociedad Deportiva Excursionista* accepted cash or equipment at its secretary office, Eduardo Dato St., no. 5.
 56. 'La bandera del 5º Regimiento condecorada con la medalla de oro de la Cruz Roja', *La Voz*, October 12, 1936, 3; 'El Batallón Alpino', *La Voz*, September 28, 1936, 3. The combatants enjoyed with various songs to cope with the war. We can highlight this one: 'Con su cabo a la cabeza y sus esquís a sus pies, son los amos de la sierra, y al fascismo han de vencer [With their sergeant at the head and skis on their feet, they are the masters of the mountains and have to defeat fascism]' (Clemente Cimorra, 'Un día de ventisca y nieve con los esquiadores de la guerra', *La Voz*, November 29, 1936, 1).
 57. 'Los milicianos del batallón alpino esperan en las crestas nevadas entrar en liza', *Crónica*, December 20, 1936, 12. They ultimately would change the name to Mountain Battalion (File 1561, Dossier 17, page 3, FC, CG, AHN).
 58. File 1561, Dossier 17, page 73, FC, CG, AHN; 'La organización de las milicias voluntarias', *Ahora*, October 28, 1936, 9.
 59. File 1561, Dossier 17, page 9, FC, CG, AHN; Mauro Bajatierra, 'La guerra. Sangre y nieve', *Umbral*, February 5, 1938, 8-9.
 60. File 1561, Dossier 17, pages 6 and 30, FC, CG, AHN; Mauro Bajatierra, 'La guerra. Sangre y nieve', *Umbral*, February 5, 1938, 8-9; Luis Gallego, 'Luchemos', *La Voz del Combatiente*, April 29, 1937, 3; 'Relato de la guerra. Los guardabosques actúan', *La Voz del Combatiente*, June 11, 1937, 3.
 61. 'Los milicianos del batallón alpino esperan en las crestas nevadas entrar en liza', *Crónica*, December 20, 1936, 12.
 62. Miguel Arribas, 'Ayer, hoy, mañana', *Cumbres*, no. 1, January 1937, 8.
 63. Mauro Bajatierra, 'La guerra. Sangre y nieve', *Umbral*, February 5, 1938, 8-9.
 64. Francisco Molina, 'Nuestra especialidad', *Cumbres*, no. 5, October 1937, 3; Francisco Molina, 'La maniobra', *Cumbres*, no. 9, June 1938, 2. 'Tropas de montaña', *Cumbres*, no. 2, February 1937, 2.
 65. 'Relato de la guerra. Los guardabosques actúan', *La Voz del Combatiente*, June 11, 1937, 3.
 66. Enrique Hurtado, 'El deporte en nuestro Batallón', *Cumbres*, no. 3, August 1937, 6; 'Deporte', *Cumbres*, no. 5, October 1937, 8; Enrique Hurtado, 'Desarrollo deportivo en el ejército', *Cumbres*, no. 10, July 1938, 10.
 67. Enrique Hurtado, 'El deporte adaptado a la guerra', *Cumbres*, no. 2, July 1937, 7.

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68. 'Festival-homenaje al ejército de centro por la Unión de Muchachas', *Ahora*, September 7, 1937, 2.
 69. 'Clausura de la Exposición de guerra de la Llar del Combatent Catalá', *La Libertad*, August 30, 1938, 2.
 70. 'En la Sierra Nueva', *República*, January 29, 1937, 5.
 71. Joaquín de la Cámara, 'Serranía', *La Voz del Combatiente*, April 20, 1937, 6.
 72. File 1298, Dossier 1, FC, CG, AHN.
 73. Teógenes Díaz, 'el Ejército político, premisa fundamental para ganar la guerra', *La Voz del Combatiente*, February 5, 1937, 4.
 74. Mauro Bajatierra, 'La guerra. Sangre y nieve', *Umbral*, February 5, 1938, 8-9. That was the case of the soccer player of Madrid FC José María Muñagorri: File 1561, Dossier 17, page 43, FC, CG, AHN. Manuel Balbuena was killed for desertion on April 1938: File 1561, Dossier 18, pages 147-179, FC, CG, AHN. Manuel Fouz was also killed on February 1938 for desertion: File 1561, Dossier 18, pages 180-214, FC, CG, AHN.
 75. File 1561, Dossier 17, pages 5-6, FC, CG, AHN. Luis Rodríguez Manteola was killed on December 1937 allegedly for desertion. However, his murder was ordered for suspicions about his political loyalty: File 1561, Dossier 18, pages 3-42, FC, CG, AHN.
 76. Pedro Sánchez López, 'Kultura Cultura', *Cumbres*, no. 3, August 1937, 6.
 77. Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 137.
 78. All the issues of *Cumbres* are available in the Hemeroteca Municipal de Madrid, collection Periódicos Varios de Guerra (PVG), vol. 7, no. 16, 386/2.
 79. The records concerning victims of Franco's repression found at the Archivo Histórico Nacional allow us to draw an organization chart of the Alpine Battalion.
 80. File 1561, Dossier 17, page 24, FC, CG, AHN. Number of soldiers by the end of 1937. See Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 213.
 81. File 1561, Dossier 17, page 5, FC, CG, AHN.
 82. 'El Batallón Alpino crea la 4ª compañía', *El Liberal*, December 19, 1936, 4.
 83. File 1561, Dossier 17, page 67, FC, CG, AHN; Alberto Palmer, 'Editorial', *Cumbres*, no. 8, February 1938, 1.
 84. Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 210.
 85. The official name was 'Batallón de Montaña del Ejército de Centro'. See 'Circular del Ejército de Tierra', *Diario Oficial del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional*, no. 146, June 18, 1937, 653.
 86. *Ibid.*, 211.
 87. 1st company: Alejandro Gutiérrez (Jun./18/1937-Aug./31/1937), Ángel Tresaco (Aug./31/1937-Oct./01/1938) and Crescencio Montenegro (Oct./01/1938-Apr./01/1939); 2nd Company: Miguel Arribas (Jun./18/1937-Oct./01/1938) and José Pérez (Oct./01/1938-Apr./01/1939); 3rd Company: Vicente García (Jun./18/1937-Apr./01/1939); 4th company: Jesús Velázquez (Jun./18/1937-Oct./01/1938) and Ricardo Palacios (Oct./01/1938-Apr./01/1939); 5th company: José Valdevira (Jun./18/1937-Jan./24/1939) and Victoriano Rodríguez (Jan./24/1939-Apr./01/1939); 6th company: Ambrosio Tiedra (Jun./18/1937-Apr./01/1939); 7th company: José Liaño (Jun./18/1937-Apr./01/1939). See Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 211.
 88. Political commissars appear to have their origins in the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Commissars were responsible for the discipline of the unit and mediation between militiamen and the military command. See Amanda Marie Spencer, 'The Defence of Madrid: The Spanish Communist Party in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), Vol. I' (PhD diss., Department of History, University of Sheffield, 2006), 120-1.
 89. *Ibid.* Palmer is mentioned in the repression records at the AHN: File 1561, Dossier 17, pages 33 and 44, FC, CG, AHN.
 90. Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 189-206; García Candau, *El deporte en la guerra civil*, 112-20.

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91. The Thälmann Battalion was part of the International Brigades in the SCW. Named after the German communist Ernst Thälmann, included around 1,500 German, Austrian, Swiss and Scandinavian soldiers. They fought mainly in the defence of Madrid. See Arnold Krammer, 'Germans Against Hitler: The Thaelmann Brigade', *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 2 (1969): 65-81.
 92. Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 54.
 93. Two companies were usually at the highest positions of the Guadarrama front while other two remained at the rearguard. The rest of the battalion was involved in surveillance or supply services and a small part of the battalion was on leave in the nearby towns.
 94. The night of March 5, 1939, Colonel Segismundo Casado, commander of the Republican Army of the Central Region, carried out a coup d'état in Madrid with the collaboration of some socialist, republican and anarchist leaders, allegedly to reach an honorable peace agreement with Franco and to avoid the shedding of more Republican blood continuing with a hopeless struggle. Communist units resisted and tried to secure Madrid, but they were wiped out by the anarchist General Mera 4th Army Corps. On March 29 Franco marched unopposed into Madrid. See Ángel Viñas, 'Playing with History and Hiding Treason: Colonel Casado's Untrustworthy Memories and the End of the Spanish Civil War', *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 91, no. 1-2 (2014): 296-7. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14753820.2013.868646>
 95. Arévalo, *El Batallón Alpino del Guadarrama*, 85-6.