They move like nothing there has ever been. They move like mechanised doom,” wrote Ernest Hemingway in his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. During the Spanish Civil War, General Francisco Franco and his allies embarked on a bombing campaign that targeted civilians. Women and children were fair game.

Spain was a preview to a new type of war, and for an engineer’s daughter from Crecy, Otago, and a chemist’s daughter from Cork, Ireland, the plight of civilians in the ravages of conflict could not be ignored. From opposite sides of the globe they travelled to Spain to nurse the maimed and dying under the storm raining down from German and Italian bombers. Dorothy Morris and Mary Elmes heard the tolling of the bell.

Almost 80 years on, their heroic life stories are being told in the countries of their birth. Later this year, a biography of Dorothy Morris that draws on a raft of family letters (*Petals and Bullets: Dorothy Morris – New Zealand Nurse in the Spanish Civil War*, by Mark Derby) will be published in New Zealand and a documentary film (*It Tolls for Thee* about her Irish friend will premiere in Dublin.

AN UNUSUAL MOVE

Dorothy Morris was living in London when she answered an advertisement for nurses to travel to Spain. The war had become an international cause. Republicans were fighting the Nationalists, the rebel fascist group led by Franco. Volunteers from around the world went to Spain to fight on both sides. The aid agencies moved in as the humanitarian disaster unfolded.

Well-read and fluent in several languages, Morris had quit her university studies in Christchurch to become a nurse. It was an unusual move for a well-educated young woman in the 1920s. "While New Zealand nurses had made considerable progress in elevating the status of their work from a calling to a medical profession, a 19th-century odour of bedpans and low-paid drudgery still clung to it," writes Wellington historian Derby in *Petals and Bullets*.
WAR HEROINES

Nursing at Christchurch Hospital during the Depression was a difficult task. In 1939, when a group of British refugees arrived, a unit was set up to provide care for them. The unit was run by a team of nurses, including two sisters, who had experience working in Europe. The nurses worked long hours, and the conditions were challenging, but they were determined to provide the best care possible.

In 1938, the hospital was under pressure to expand due to a shortage of medical supplies. The nurses worked tirelessly to ensure that the hospital was able to meet the needs of the patients. They also organized fundraising events to raise money for new equipment.

The nurses were committed to their work and to helping others. They were held in high regard by their colleagues and the patients they cared for. Despite the challenges they faced, they remained dedicated to their work and to the well-being of the patients under their care.

“Very, very hard thing to do, having to operate on people, including children, when you’ve run out of anaesthetic.”

Shedding light on the experiences of nurses during World War II, this article highlights the bravery and dedication of the women who served in the medical field during this time of crisis. The nurses were at the forefront of the fight against the disease, providing care and support to those in need.

She risked arrest by going back to Spain to find out what had happened to a doctor she’d fallen in love with.

Like her friend, Morris shunned publicity while she was alive. “She saw what she had done as part of a collective effort, not as the work of one woman,” says Derby. “She certainly wasn’t anything like shrinking violet. [Her] maternal instincts were very strong indeed...”