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# Lost account of Spanish war sees light after 70 years

BY **ANGUS MACSWAN**

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1 OF 2. A bagpiper plays the Second Spanish Republic anthem during a ceremony to mark the 79th anniversary of Spain's Second Republic at a cemetery in Gijon April 14, 2010.

CREDIT: REUTERS/ELOY ALONSO/FILES

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(Reuters) - When Henry Buckley crossed the Pyrenees in 1939 with the remnants of the defeated Spanish Republican forces, he had reported on Spain for 10 years, witnessed the great battles of the civil war, and won a reputation as the most informed of all the foreign correspondents who had covered it.

The next year, he had written his account of the turbulent years leading up to the war and the conflict itself, "The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic", just as the wider fight against fascism that he had predicted engulfed Europe.

But a German bomb hit the London warehouse where the copies were stored, destroying all but a few. It remained a collector's item until this month, when a new edition was finally published.

"There are thousands of books on the Spanish Civil War and I would put it in the top five. It's a wonderful book," said historian Paul Preston, professor of Spanish studies at the London School of Economics.

"This is the culmination of a long struggle to get it out."

The book is infused with Buckley's sympathy for Spain's poor, eking out a living in feudal conditions in a country dominated by the army, landowners and the Roman Catholic church.

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He was outraged by Britain's refusal to back the elected Republican government and maintenance of an arms blockade against it while Hitler and Mussolini supported General Franco's nationalist rebels with ground, air and naval forces.

He was a great friend of Ernest Hemingway and the photographer Robert Capa; Hemingway sought him out whenever he arrived in Spain to get a good briefing on the situation.

More important, said Preston, is that Buckley knew all the major Spanish politicians and many military men of the era. The book is filled with deft pen-portraits. He was particularly taken by the communist firebrand "La Pasionaria", Dolores Ibarruri, describing an interview with her as "intense as a political meeting".

The Manchester-born Buckley arrived in Spain in 1929. Soon after, the monarchy was overthrown and the left-leaning Second Republic set out to enact reforms.

## REAL PEOPLE

"He had a deep knowledge of the country," Preston told Reuters. "You get a real feel for Spain in the 1930s."

"He had been in Spain a long time. He knew the people who were important on the right and left. He shows real people in real situations because he knew them."

Buckley, who wrote mostly for the Daily Telegraph, was a devout Catholic and was deeply troubled by the church's alliance with the conservative elite.

"All my sympathies were with the mass of the people. I had been shocked and horrified by the poverty of the peasants. The brutality of the police and the civil guards. I could not reconcile this with religion," he writes.

He reported the political events leading up to Franco's military strike, then covered most of the battles, shuttling to the front in cars, buses and trains. His reporting on the siege of Madrid, with shells raining down on civilians, will strike a chord with anyone reading today's news from [Syria](#).

"I watched the bombs gliding down for they were of [aluminum](#) they glistened in the sunlight. It is a horrid sensation to watch them come down. Every bomb seemed to be heading right at you even if it fell 500 yards away."

He was at Jarama, where the stand of the International Brigades so impressed him that he contemplated joining them. He was at the Battle of Teruel, where Reuters correspondent Dick Sheepshanks was killed by a shell.

He also reported the infighting between leftist factions in Barcelona, a subject of George Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia".

At the Battle of the Ebro in 1938, Buckley rowed across the river in a boat with Hemingway and Capa. The American writer described him as "a lion of courage, though a very slight even frail creature".

But there is no braggadocio in Buckley's writing. It is filled with self-deprecating humor and admissions of fear.

He details the appalling toll of civilians, from the summary shootings and mass executions on both sides to the artillery and air bombardments of cities by Franco's forces.

## OPENING SCENE OF A TRAGEDY

He is also firm in his belief that German and Italian support for Franco made the difference between victory and defeat. He believes the British government let the establishment's sympathies for the upper classes and fears of communism blind it to the growing strategic threat from fascism.

"I would not care if this just was the tale of Spain I were to tell, but in this Spanish tragedy is wrapped the whole collapse of our Western democracy and, I'm afraid, it marks the opening scene of a major tragedy in which our British Empire will be involved."



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Buckley's final anguished accounts come from the refugee columns over the Pyrenees and the awful camps they were herded into once in [France](#).

After Franco's victory, Buckley moved to Berlin, then Lisbon. He joined Reuters and covered World War Two, landing with allied forces at the Battle of Anzio.

He went back to Spain as Reuters bureau chief for many years before retiring in 1966 and living in Sitges with his Spanish wife Maria, who he had met in Catalonia during the Spanish war. He died there in 1972, three years before the death of Franco and the restoration of democracy in Spain.

"The Life and Death of the Spanish Republic" reappears as interest in the war appears to be growing. Several new titles have appeared recently, including Preston's "The Spanish Holocaust" and Daniel Gray's "Homage to Caledonia", the story of the 550 Scots who fought in the International Brigades.

"It was the last great cause," Preston said. "Amongst those involved are people who became icons - Orwell, Hemingway, Auden, Spender, Gellhorn. You've got fascism, communism, anarchism, Hitler, Stalin. A wonderful cornucopia.

"A lot was written by correspondents during the war, important ones. But this is the one that captures what was going on best."

(Reporting by Angus MacSwan; Editing by [Kevin Liffey](#))

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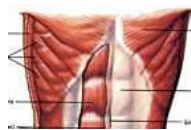
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