



The Merseyside Volunteers: Profiles



John 'Jack' Headley appears to be one of the earliest Merseyside volunteers to enlist in the International Brigades, and was listed as being age 50 at Albacete on 19th December 1937. He was an organiser of the painter's union, Communist Party member, one-time IRA (Irish Republican Army) member, NUWM (National Unemployed Workers Movement) activist, and a frequent speaker at the Edge Hill Lamp and Islington Square, Liverpool. Jack regularly fell foul of the authorities, and received a number of convictions as a result of his activism:

Belfast, 1919: 'unlawful assembly' – 6 months prison and expulsion; Rotherham, 1920: 'seditious speeches' – 6 months prison; Sheffield, 1923: 'obstructing the police' – bound over for 12 months; Liverpool, May 1926: 'doing an act likely to cause disaffection under the emergency regulations' – 3 months prison; St. Helens, November 1926: 'doing an act likely to cause disaffection' – fined £5 and £2.10s costs, or 28 days prison; Portsmouth, 1931, 'seditious speeches' – 6 months prison; Liverpool, September 1932: 'accused with 5 others of inciting a riot at a demonstration in Islington Square'.

With this history, it seems inevitable that Jack would be near the front of the queue to go and fight in Spain.

Tommy Hadwin was born in West Kirby in 1898. Tom joined the Royal Navy in 1916 and took part in the battle of Jutland during the First World War. He left the service in 1925. Tommy joined the ILP (Independent Labour Party), became active in the NUWM, and later joined the Communist Party. In 1936 the Communist Party asked those with military experience to go to Spain, and Tommy joined the naval section of the International Brigades along with three other Merseysiders: Jack Coward, Albert Cole and Fred Hayes. He served on the Republican destroyer 'Alcalá Galiano', escorting medical and food aid ships to Spain. Tommy was repatriated home due to illness in 1938, where he remained active in local politics for his entire life.



Frank Proctor was born in Liverpool in 1917. At 19, having been made unemployed, he left to undertake training at a steelworks. He left his apprenticeship, determined to support the Spanish Republic, and reached Spain in April 1937. He joined the Brigade – eventually becoming an acting lieutenant. Frank was killed at Sierra Pandols on the 24th August 1938, in the aftermath of the Ebro offensive. What follows is his obituary from the Liverpool Daily Post, 8th September 1938.

LIVERPOOL DAILY

SPANISH WAR VICTIM

LIVERPOOL YOUTH'S DEATH IN ACTION

A Liverpool youth, who, while serving with the International Brigade in Spain, was wounded three times and showed conspicuous bravery on several occasions, has now been killed in battle.

He was Frank Proctor, aged 21, of 13 Faraday Street, off Breck Road, Liverpool 5, and although his death took place on August 24, it was only on Tuesday that news reached his home. Local officials of the Communist party broke the news to his mother, and yesterday confirmation was received from Mr. Harry Pollitt, of the Communist party headquarters, who wrote that on August 24 Frank Proctor received a wound which appeared to be slight, so that he was able to continue in the fighting until he met his death. The letter added: "High tribute is paid by officers and men in the British battalion to the gallantry and soldierly qualities of your son."

Young Proctor joined the Territorials in Liverpool when he was sixteen years old and distinguished himself by winning a "King's Prize Medal" for shooting in 1935. He became unemployed, and at the age of nineteen was sent to London under a Ministry of Labour scheme as a trainee in a steelworks.

FRANK PROCTOR.

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His mother told the *Daily Post* that he was "heart and soul" in the Government's struggle in Spain, and before he finished his London training tried to reach Spain. He did, in fact, get as far as Paris, where he encountered difficulties over a passport question, and returned to Liverpool. He was not in Liverpool long before he left home without saying farewell, and the next news of him was in a letter to his mother in which he said he was on his way to Spain. This was in April, 1937, since which time he has been in Spain, although corresponding regularly with his home.

Frank Proctor fought in several battles in Spain, and, on account of bravery and zeal in duty, was promoted sergeant in August, 1937. On May 19 last, the day after his twenty-first birthday, he was promoted to the rank of acting lieutenant. Spanish Government newspapers mentioned his brave deeds on more than one occasion. A correspondent in one journal, which Mrs. Proctor showed to the *Daily Post*, in recounting events at a battle in Aragon, stated: "On the last day of the battle, we pushed Jim Coone's No. 3 gun right up the main street under machine-gun fire. Jim, a large, red-bearded Cockney, slipped across the street to get a better view of the enemy machine-guns. As the Fascist machine-gun cracked he dived into the doorway opposite me and crumpled up. Commissar Bill Alexander and Liverpool Proctor immediately made the same dive across enemy fire in order to look after Jim. They got by without a scratch, but Jim died half an hour later."

Frank Proctor received his first wound in August, 1937. His mother received the official news and wrote to him asking after his condition. He replied that it was "a wound too trivial to mention." He was wounded a second time on August 16, 1937, and spent two months in hospital. The third occasion was shortly before his death during an offensive on the Ebro front, but he appears to have gone on fighting.

About two months ago, he was in a party with the Liverpool Labour councillor, Mr. J. L. Jones, who is also fighting in Spain, which had a visit from Mr. George Bean, President of the Liverpool Guild of Undergraduates.

Mrs. Proctor has sent her son regular supplies of cigarettes and tobacco, some packets having been despatched by her and relatives as recently as this week before they knew he had met his death. Last Monday the *Football Echo*, which he had keenly anticipated reading, was posted to him. In the *Echo* last night Proctor's death while "fighting for his wonderful ideals" was announced, along with his favourite quotation, "Perfect in body and beautiful in mind, his bravery was second to none."



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1. Obituary for Frank Proctor, Liverpool Daily Post, 8th September 1938

2. Republican poster. 'Forward comrades! The SRI (International Red Aid) protects your children'

3. Republican poster. 'Land and Freedom. Organ of the FAI (Federación Anarquista Ibérica / Iberian Anarchist Federation) New Times'