

Bob Doyle, Spanish Civil War veteran, dies aged 92

BARRY ROCHE and LUKE CASSIDY

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THE DEATH has taken place of the last surviving Irish combatant on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. Dublin-born Bob Doyle (92) passed away on London on Thursday night following a short illness.

Born in February 1916, Doyle grew up in the tenement slums in North King Street and became politically active in the 1930s. He joined the IRA after being beaten up in street fights with the Blueshirts which left him with permanent damage to one eye.

He quickly became more interested in social issues and in 1937 decided to volunteer for the International Brigade, motivated in part by the fact that his friend and IRA veteran Kit Conway had been killed in action in the Battle of Jarama on Doyle's 21st birthday.

His initial attempts to get to Spain ended in failure when, after stowing away on a boat, he was arrested and expelled from Valencia. He made it back to Spain later that year, crossing the Pyrenees and reporting to a battalion at Figueras.

Assigned to train new volunteers because of his IRA training, Doyle disobeyed orders and joined a group heading for the front.

After fighting at Belchite, he was captured at Gandesa by Italian fascist troops in 1938, along with Irish International Brigade leader Frank Ryan.

He was imprisoned for 11 months in a concentration camp near Burgos. There he was once brought out to be shot and he was regularly tortured by Spanish fascist guards and interrogated by the Gestapo before being released in a prisoner exchange.

He enlisted in the British merchant navy during the second World War before settling in London with his Spanish wife, Lola. He became active in the Fleet Street print trade unions.

A regular visitor to Spain and Ireland for International Brigade commemorations, he published an account of his experiences in Spain in *Brigadista: An Irishman's Fight Against Fascism*.

In an interview with *The Irish Times*, he said: "I thought there was a danger that Ireland would go fascist and that was one of the motivating factors in making up my mind to go to Spain."

He is survived by his sons Bob and Julian, his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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