

Anna Campbell, British woman fighting with Kurdish YPJ, dies in Afrin

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A British woman volunteer for the Kurdish female YPJ battalion was killed in Syria in the battle against Turkey and Turkish backed FSA forces in Afrin. She died on the 15th of March, and has been described by her father Dirk Campbell as a woman who “would go to any lengths to create the world that she believed in.”

Talking to the *Guardian*, YPJ Commander Nesrin Abdullah said that Campbell was on the frontlines in the battle against IS in the eastern province of Deir ez-Zor when she demanded that she be allowed to fight in Afrin, a small enclave located in north-west Syria.

“After the initial attacks on Afrin, comrade Helin insisted on joining the operation to defend Afrin, Abdullah said, “Before leaving, she had already received her military training, and, although we wanted to protect her and did not agree with her decision .. she incessantly insisted on her wish to leave for Afrin.”

In order to avoid being conspicuous to Turkish forces, she even dyed her hair black before setting off to Afrin.

According to her father, “Anna was very idealistic, very serious, very wholehearted and wanted to create a better world. She wasn’t fighting when she died, she was engaged in a defensive action against the Turkish incursion.”

The city of Afrin was taken from the YPG three days after her death.

On Sunday, the city of Afrin was confirmed to be occupied by the Turkish Armed Forces and its Free Syrian Army affiliates — many of which have been described as Jihadists. Launched on January 20th, so-called “Operation Olive Branch” has been subject to criticism from the United Nations, the European Parliament, members of the UK parliament and various humanitarian agencies. Footage taken over the course of the operation shows looting, extrajudicial killings, the mutilation of dead female bodies and property theft. The estimates of the civilian death toll range from 300-500 civilians.

“Isn’t it the case that Mr Erdogan is using the cloak of respectability, Nato, to hide an alliance with Alqaeda and to engage in this sort of barbarous murder and slaughter of innocent men, women and children. Shouldn’t the British Government be absolutely clear that he must now end this offensive?” David Lammy, MP for Tottenham, told the House of Commons on the 12th of March.

Anna Campbell was a passionate activist for left-wing causes, and as her father describes, she sought to fight against “unjust power and privilege”. One activist who worked with her in a prisoners rights campaign described her as “articulate and passionate about her beliefs.”

“I met Anna when she came to the area to campaign for the release of IPP prisoners”, James told The

Region. "She helped organise a demonstration outside of conservative MP Elizabeth Truss constituency surgery of which a parent of one of the prisoners attended."

Anna Campbell was involved with the smash IPP campaign, which sought to protect the almost 4000 prisoners who were affected by "Imprisonment for Public Protection" legislation, which often extended detention time, and even allowed for former prisoners to return into confinement (in the absence of a crime) if the British State deemed that appropriate. Campbell's campaign called it "part of the war on the working class".

James, who worked with her on this campaign, says he and other activists immediately connected with her when she visited his city. "She had a warmth and confidence that made you trust her pretty much instantly," James told The Region.

Anna Campbell is the eighth British volunteer to have fallen with the Kurdish YPG/YPJ, and is the first British woman to have died in combat. She self-identified as a feminist, and as her father told the BBC, "when she heard about the political experiment in Rojava this seemed to her to be the way the world should be."

** The name James is a pseudonym in order to protect our sources anonymity.*

* The Region 19/03/2018 11:23:

<http://theregion.org/article/13061-anna-campbell-british-woman-fighting-with-kurdish-ypj-dies-in-afri>
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British woman killed fighting Turkish forces in Afrin

Anna Campbell believed to be the first British woman to die alongside Kurdish forces in Syria.



Anna Campbell was reported to have been killed in a Turkish airstrike on 16 March. Photograph: Handout

A British woman fighting alongside Kurdish forces in Afrin, northern Syria, has been killed, her Kurdish commanders have said.

Anna Campbell, from Lewes, East Sussex, was volunteering with the US-backed Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ) - the all-female affiliate army of the People's Protection Units (YPG) - in the besieged city of Afrin when the convoy she was travelling in was struck by a Turkish missile on 16 March.

Sources say the 26-year-old initially travelled to Syria to join the Kurdish struggle against Islamic

State, but begged her Kurdish commanders to send her to the Afrin front after Turkey launched a ground and air offensive to oust Kurdish forces from its borderlands in January.

“They refused at first, but she was adamant, and even dyed her blonde hair black so as to appear less conspicuous as a westerner,” a YPJ source told the Guardian.

“Finally they gave in and let her go.”

She is not only the first British woman killed fighting alongside Kurdish forces in Syria, but also the first Briton to die there since Turkey launched its incursion into Kurdish-held territory on 20 January.

In a statement to the Guardian on Sunday, YPJ commander and spokesperson Nesrin Abdullah said: “[Campbell’s] martyrdom is a great loss to us because with her international soul, her revolutionary spirit, which demonstrated the power of women, she expressed her will in all her actions ... On behalf of the Women’s Defence Units YPJ, we express our deepest condolences to [her] family and we promise to follow the path she took up. We will represent her in the entirety of our struggles.”

Her father, Dirk Campbell, described her as a “beautiful and loving daughter” who “would go to any lengths to create the world that she believed in”.

“Anna was very idealistic, very serious, very wholehearted and wanted to create a better world. She wasn’t fighting when she died, she was engaged in a defensive action against the Turkish incursion.”

In recent months Turkey has shifted its focus from fighting Isis in Syria to preventing the YPG from establishing a foothold along its border, arguing that the YPG is linked to its own insurgent group, the Kurdistan Workers’ party (PKK). The US, EU and Britain, however, do not consider the YPG a terrorist group, which it has supported in its fight against Isis since 2014.

Dirk Campbell said his daughter had dedicated her life to the fight against “unjust power and privilege”.

He said she was a committed human rights and environmental campaigner who would “put herself on the line for what she believed in”.

“It seems a small thing, but I remember when she was 11, she protected a bumblebee from being tormented by other kids at school,” he recalled. “She did it with such strength of will that they ridiculed her. But she didn’t care. She was absolutely single-minded when it came to what she believed in, and she believed what Turkey is doing is wrong.”

He said his daughter’s passion for campaigning was inspired by her mother, Adrienne, who was well-known on the south of England’s activism scene and died of breast cancer five years ago. “Anna was a credit to her mum, my wife, and was carrying on a lot of the kind of work that she was doing,” he added.

Campbell told her father of her plans to travel to northern Syria last May after she heard about the grassroots feminist and socialist revolution that has swept Rojava (the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Syria and heartland of the YPG/J) and inspired the Kurds’ fight against Isis.

“I didn’t try to stop her,” Mr Campbell said. “Because I knew, once she had decided to do something, she was unstoppable. That’s why she went to Rojava: to help build a world of equality and democracy where everyone has a right to representation. When she told me she was going I joked: ‘It’s been nice knowing you.’ I just knew it might be the last time I’d see her.”

Upon arrival in Rojava, Campbell completed the YPJ's mandatory month-long military training course, in which new recruits learn basic Kurdish, weaponry and battlefield tactics on top of a crash course in the egalitarian and feminist ideology of the YPG/J, and was assigned to an infantry division, comprising a mix of Kurdish and international fighters. There she was given the nom-de-guerre Helîn Qerecox and sent to the front.

YPJ sources said she spent her first months in the country fighting in Deir ez-Zor, Isis's last major stronghold and scene of the jihadist group's bitter last stand. But with Isis now on the brink of defeat, foreign fighters within Kurdish ranks have faced a choice: return home or remain in Syria to help the YPG repel Turkey's attack.

"After the initial attacks on Afrin, comrade Helîn insisted on joining the operation to defend Afrin," said Abdullah. "Before leaving, she had already received her military training, and, although we wanted to protect her and did not agree with her decision ... she incessantly insisted on her wish to leave for Afrin. She even gave us a condition: 'Either I will go home and abandon the life as a revolutionary or you send me to Afrin. But I would never leave the revolution, so I will go to Afrin'."

She added: "For us, as the YPJ, comrade Helîn will always be a symbol as a pioneering internationalist woman. We will live up to her hope and beliefs. We will forever pursue her aim to struggle for women, for oppressed communities."

Mark Campbell, activist and co-chair of the Kurdistan Solidarity Campaign, added: "Anna, by all accounts, was taken deep into the heart of the Kurdish people as she stood side by side with them in their darkest hour. Our thoughts and condolences are with Anna's family and friends as this time."

Campbell is believed to be the eighth British citizen killed while serving with Kurdish forces in Syria.

Matt Blake

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