

Blind Spot : Manuel Huet and the libertarian underground in France

By Imanol

Translated by Paul Sharkey

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The Kate Sharpley Library aims to preserve the history of the anarchist movement and record and commemorate the lives of the people who made up the movement. It's always good to see other people plugging away at the same task. The first translation of a piece by Imanol that we put up was 'The Massana Gang' which went in *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* No. 97-98, February 2019. Since then we've been glad to host translations of his studies from *El Salto* which are summed up by the heading they appear under: 'Ni Cautivos ni Desarmadas' – 'Neither Captive nor Unarmed'.

We're very glad to share this translation of Imanol's new book *El Angulo Muerto : Manuel Huet y la clandestinidad libertaria en Francia* (*Blind Spot : Manuel Huet and the libertarian underground in France*). Manuel 'Manolo' Huet Piera was part of the anarcho-syndicalist action groups in the years before the Spanish Revolution, fought in the Spanish Civil War and worked in the Ponzán network smuggling escapers and refugees out of Vichy France during the Second World War. After the war, Huet continued to aid the resistance to Francoism where, until now, his contribution was necessarily unacknowledged.

If you would like to get a copy of the Spanish-language first edition see <https://piedrapapellibros.com/producto/el-angulo-muerto-manuel-huet-y-la-clandestinidad-libertaria-en-francia/>. We know that Imanol is already researching for a second edition so there will be new discoveries to come but, for now, here is the story of Manuel Huet: an anarchist militant, but no longer an unknown one.

Kate Sharpley Library, April 2024

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BLIND SPOT

(Manuel Huet and the libertarian underground in France)

by Imanol

EL ANGULO MUERTO

Manuel Huet y la clandestinidad libertaria en Francia

Ni cautivos ni desarmados

(Piedra Papel Libros, 2023, Jaén)

For all the people I love

When faced with rabid dogs like the fascists, force being the only language they understand, one cannot go around brandishing a libertarian catechism. You have to go better armed than them and know how to beat them to the draw.

M.H.P aka 'el Murciano'

Acknowledgments

Greetings: the fact is that I had no intention of including any separate acknowledgments. Not out of any reluctance to express gratitude – far from it – but because I always have this thing about my first name being Al and the surname Zheimer. My memory is a complete disaster when it comes to almost everything. So, rather than run the extreme risk of leaving out a fair number of the people who have collaborated to a greater or lesser extent with this book, I was more inclined to give thanks to no one for anything and leave it at that, with everyone treated the same.

So, following a short chat with my proof-reader on this score, I cobbled together this version of one and from here I offer my most heartfelt thanks. THANK YOU to all who, in one way or another, made it possible for this book to see the light of day and grow and, above all, improve. But for your help and collaboration, it might never have been possible.

By Way of Introduction

I have always revelled in the tales told us by our elders. Some – the lesser number – have happy endings, whereas others have not so happy endings and many more used to end up reducing us to tears or with fists clenched from fury at the injustices they invoked. Something else that have more or less enjoyed is the fact that a lot of the people in those stories were, or are, virtually always nameless or rather little known. In my research into the libertarian contribution to the guerrilla war against Francoism, the escape lines or the anti-Nazi resistance in France, my interest has always been drawn to this lesser known or deliberately ignored side of things and I have chosen to zero in on it. So, when it came to my writing a book it had to be about someone who was always there, but who went unmentioned. And lo and behold here we have Manolo Huet aka *el*

Murciano, the great unknown. Of all the people who have talked or written about the matters I was looking into, Eduardo Pons Prades¹ alone brought up his name more or less frequently.

Manuel Huet Piera was a great driving force in the Barcelona action groups during the late 1920s and early 1930s. That does not mean, of course, that it has been easy to unearth information about him during that time, beyond a piece in *Solidaridad Obrera* recording his arrest and another in *La Vanguardia* reporting how one of his groups had been dismantled, how he had made good his escape; that piece identified him as the group's organizer. Antonio Téllez, that great saviour of the memory of the libertarian guerrilla war, wrote a book about the Ponzán Network² without mentioning him once; no mention at all, not even in the footnotes. Yet Huet was the man in charge of its Maritime Antenna [Maritime Outpost] and not merely a collaborator with it. The man in charge! Pilar Ponzán³ also wrote a history of the network orchestrated by her brother Paco and still no mention of '*el Murciano*', who, by the way, was not a Murcian at all, but a Valencian from Ayora. Luckily at the end of her book there are a few pages written by another of the network's organizers, Floreal Barberá and there we do find Huet mentioned a few times. If we turn to the anarchist involvement in the French resistance and when Paris crops up, we come across his name there again, but only as part of a list of people for whom no particulars are supplied. If there is anyone who is inclined to think that this guy's record holds no interest, let us add something about *La Nueve*, the company of Spanish republicans that was the first to enter Paris. Naturally, like the rest of his story, that sample was illegal and hush-hush. Just as his collaboration with that great anarchist counterfeiter Laureano Cerrada was to be hush-hush, no matter how much talk there may be nowadays about Lucio Urtubia and in case there is anyone eager to discover a different version of the Navarrese Urtubia's affairs, here are a few references so we can all come our own conclusions.⁴

Cerrada and Huet, two hard nuts from the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI), being good internationalists, were as likely to pull their strokes and deals outside of Spain, in France or in Italy as anywhere else: true the "Organization" always received its share of the proceeds, as between 75% and 90% of what was netted always ended up in the coffers of the CNT. Anybody seeking enlightenment regarding these things in a country as corrupt as Spain, cash however it was come by, could be used to "buy" the lives of female and male comrades held in prison, concentration camps or labour camps, or could "buy" pre-agreed sentences and customs officials would turn a blind eye at the right moment or certain police officers pass on by. Cash was key to all of this.

And, should my readers still have any lingering doubts, and need to hear some important name to buoy them up, there was always *Quico*⁵, a close friend of *el Murciano's* from whose home Francisco Sabaté's last ever group set off into the jaws of death in 1960.

We are delving, then, into the impassioned life story of a tough, practical man, courageous, of strong character, sound, demanding and forever accompanied by his inseparable .9 Parabellum special, stowed in its shoulder

¹ Eduardo Pons Prades, the Catalan anarchist born in Barcelona in 1920. While France was under Nazi occupation he was a prominent member of the resistance in the Aude department. One of the pillars of the recovery of libertarian memory and a prolific writer. Several of his books are listed in the bibliography at the end of this book.

² The Ponzán network was set up by Francisco Ponzán Vidal in 1940. With the help of the British Intelligence Service, it was dedicated to rescuing victims of Nazi persecution from all over occupied Europe and removing them to Spain. The network remained active up until the liberation of the south of France in the summer of 1944. [British Intelligence were interested in rescuing allied servicemen 'escapers and evaders'. KSL]

³ Pilar Ponzán Vidal, born in Huesca in 1910, schoolteacher. Jailed on several occasions for her libertarian ideology. In France she worked alongside the Ponzán escape line set up by her brother Paco.

⁴ That Lucio was a participant in lots of things, there is no denying. But there is some issue regarding the Navarrese's claiming of the credit for things done by others, or his exaggeration of the things he himself did. See for instance *Comme un chat* by Floreal Cuadrado, Editions du Sandre, Paris 2015, Luis Andrés Edo *La CNT en la encrucijada. Aventuras de un heterodoxo*, Flor del viento, Barcelona 2006 or, say, the dossier published in Toulouse and accessible as https://cras31.info/IMG/pdf/cras_dossier_presse_comme_un_chat_mai_2017.pdf

⁵ Francisco Sabaté Llopart aka *el Quico* was born in 1915 in Hospitalet del Llobregat. He may well be the best known member of the libertarian urban guerrilla campaign. He lost both his brothers in clashes with the security forces and was himself eventually gunned down on 5 January 1960 in the town of San Celoni.

holster, always with a bullet in the chamber. Cards on the table, then, we are embarking here upon the venture to discover the man behind the personality, his history and the misgivings that he aroused, the lingering impression being that we are coming too late to the places or persons who might supply us with the details of that history; not that that daunts us, of course.

And to conclude this, so to speak, appetizer, let us mention a couple of things in passing. That given the growing and worrying upsurge in fascism all around the globe, it looks as if we are doomed to repeat and pay the price for our mistakes. It may well not be unwarranted or out of step with the times and places to run an eye over the lives and handiwork of individuals with an acknowledged record of antifascist activism and perhaps learn something from them, or at any rate ensure that we are not caught on the hop. Then again, I can just see potential readers of a more academic bent stumbling upon this book with its few footnotes, because I reckon that such notes very often are distractions from a reading of the main topic (speaking for myself at any rate), as the text tries to abide by a chronological order and I can say also that my writing style (long sentences, colloquialisms), I am sure, breaches many, if not all of the rules laid down for such works: but one would have to be a bricklayer, in that working with stone is generally my metier and then suddenly be seized with an irrepressible itch to write after coming across a story that raises one's hackles like scorpions, as my pals at Barrio Canino⁶ might put it.

And finally, should anyone be wondering what has induced a bricklayer born in the former mining basin in Upper Llobregat to write a book about these things, then I can tell you that having been raised and spent some years there, no one there told me a single word about any of the things I will be dealing with below. My grandfather and some family members worked in the mines where Ramón Vila Capdevila⁷ also worked. I had uncles living in Berga, the home town of 'Pantxo' Massana⁸ and the El Castellot farmhouse, where my grandmother and uncle Gil were share-croppers (*masoveros*)⁹ was one of the places that Vila Capdevila used to drop in. And then along came the mid-90s when I came by Antonio Téllez's books on Sabaté and Facerías and I was still clueless about the topic. And there is nothing so attractive to piqued interest as the stories they refused to tell him or regarding which no one had anything to say.

⁶ A Madrid radio show specializing in, among other things, matters relating to the world of the libertarians.

⁷ Ramón Vila Capdevila aka *Pasos Largos* was born in the foothills of the Pyrenees in Peguera on 2 April 1908. A miner by trade he distinguished himself in the fight against the Nazis as a member of the French resistance. Subsequently he became a CNT guide and guerrilla up until August 1963 when he was gunned down near Castellnou de Bages by the Civil Guard.

⁸ Marcelino Massana Balcells aka *Pantxo* was born in Berga in 1918. A guide and libertarian guerrilla, the group he led never lost a member of his band and may well be the only person ever to do so, as far as we know. He remained active up until 1951.

⁹ A *masovero* is someone engaged in farming and who, whilst living in someone else's farmhouse, works the lands attached to it in return for wages or a share of the produce.

Chapter 1

Childhood Years

Manuel Huet Piera was born in Ayora in Valencia province in 1907, and according to his baptismal record he came into this world on 3 February that year, as the son of Manuel Huet Mas, a native of Ayora, and María Pérez García, a native of the same village. For the most part his home town was given over to farming and underwent a substantial expansion during the first two decades of the 20th century, leading, among other things to an increase in its population (from under 5,000 in 1900, to almost 6,500 a decade later). This boost to farming and population numbers also entailed some initial industrialization closely associated with the farming sector but it came to an abrupt halt with the outbreak of the economic crisis in the 1920s.

But a few years prior to that crisis, Manuel Huet senior decided to relocate to Barcelona, more specifically in 1914, along with his sons Manuel and José. In those days the journey from Ayora, with a first stop-over in Almansa some 20 kilometres away, was made by a coach belonging to the González-Benet family. That very same family also oversaw the sale of the Plaza de la Glorieta. The coach could carry eight passengers and the trip took three hours, inclusive of a halt at the Casas de Madrona windmill which offered some heat and a bite to eat. Whether the Huet family took that coach I cannot say and although things back then were very different, had they made the journey on foot it would have taken considerably longer. On arrival in Almansa they could catch the train connecting the comarca to the rest of the world. After the long trip to Barcelona, the family settled in the Poble Nou quarter.

The young Manuel Huet started work as a message boy at the age of 12 and by the age of 14 was employed in a timber yard before going on to engage with the cultural *ateneo* in the *barrio* where he learnt to read and write at the age of 18. All of which information seems to contradict the information circulating there, claiming that Manolo came from a bourgeois family.

He performed his military service (which lasted, remember, two years) mostly in Africa. It was in the land of the Rif that he picked up the trade of aircraft mechanic, with the flying boat section and this was tantamount to his acquiring a trade, as well as some snatches of Arabic. He also took part in the Moroccan war where he became acquainted with some people who later went on to become Spanish air force aces, including Major Ramón Franco or Lieutenant-Colonel Alfredo Kindelán, as their respective orderlies were from Barcelona, the same as he was. We know of his time in the Maghreb that he was posted at least to the base in Nador, as a photograph has survived showing the mechanic Huet at the foot of a Bristol bi-plane along with a comrade, with the curious accompaniment of the dog belonging to the son of Genera Sanjurjo. His involvement in the war in Africa was short-lived as it ended on 27 May 1927.

Later he was transferred to the naval air base in San Javier in Murcia; known as La Ribera, it was opened in 1926; another photo has survived from that time – taken at the Estudio Vidal in Cartagena in 1928. Finally in 1929 we find Huet working as an aircraft mechanic at the El Prat flying boat base very near Barcelona. Together with Captain Enric Pereira, he made the first night-time seaplane flight in the world. On board a Macchi-Savoia, they circled Montjuich mountain twice in tribute to the world exposition being held in Barcelona that year. Oddly enough, that flight was completely illegal and unscheduled but because of its success and Captain Pereira's standing, they were not sanctioned by their commanding officers and it was all chalked up to experience.

On returning to Barcelona, after completion of his military service, we find him back in Poble Nou where he was soon recruited by the National Confederation of Labour (CNT). If we go by Pons Prades's notes held in the Catalan National Archives in San Cugat, he started working as a wage labourer, but within a short time, by which point he was 22 or 23 years old, he was to acquire a Citroën taxi. Meaning by around 1929 or 1930. At around this point Huet met Rosa Curt, the woman he wound up marrying; they had one daughter and spent much of their lives together.

Besides carrying passengers, the taxi would start transporting CNT action and defence groups, because from that point on it was at the service of the libertarian trade union. He worked the night shift from the lower end of the Ramblas on the edge of the Barrio Chino and took pride in boasting that he had never been robbed,

despite the work he did and the location where he plied his trade. It was common knowledge that when a trade unionist was wanted by the police, if he could only reach the Barrio Chino, he could consider himself home and dry. One of the things that shocked me the most when I was searching for information about Manuel at the National Archive of Catalonia was that, according to Pons Prades, Huet was the wheelman in several raids by the 'Nosotros' group (in which Durruti, García Oliver, Ascaso, Jover, Ortiz and so on were active), but, luckily for him he was hardly ever arrested by the police and was therefore able to remain usefully anonymous. I had not probed the matter further because it seemed to me to be very hard to confirm or gauge, but on a subsequent visit to and chat with the former guerrilla Enric Melich at his Pontella home, I raised the matter with him, thinking that he was not likely to have any information about it. I was surprised when, after gazing at me for a moment, Melich stated:

"Well, his name was mentioned to me. Do you know who Cazorla was, the guy who moved away to Venezuela?"

"Juan Cazorla? The guy known as '*Tom Mix*', who was with the Barcelona action group?"

"The very man. He stated that Huet had been the '*Nosotros*' group's wheelman. I cannot tell you much more, but that much I do remember."¹⁰

Later, in various interviews I had with her, Antonina Rodrigo also confirmed to me that Huet had been part of the group. As for the '*Nosotros*' group, suffice to say that it was set up in Barcelona during the Republic, marrying its action group activities with those of an influencer group that stayed outside of the FAI until late 1933 and its essential purpose was collective action in pursuit of a revolutionary uprising.

Moving on, on 4 April 1932, Manuel Huet and Rosa Cort were formally married in the parish of Santa María in Poble Nou. What was a hard nut from the anarchist trade unions and future FAI member doing on consecrated ground? Here we have a curious tale told by Pons Prades to Kostas Flores (the Greek anarchist author of the stupendous book *Kyklos Alpha* on the Spanish libertarian movement during the dictatorship) which might clear the matter up for us. During one of their chats, Pons Prades told him that Rosa's father bought Huet a taxi, in return for his marrying his daughter. I cannot vouch for the truth of this story, but we do know that Manolo had been in possession of the taxi for a while back, if Pons Prades is to be believed. When we visited the parish church in question in search of information, they told us, sorry, but the church and its records had been torched in July 1936 to what I imagine must have been Manolo's great relief. What we do know is that during 1933, albeit that I do not know the precise date, the couple's only child, their daughter María, was born.

On occasion, as I re-examine areas that I have investigated time and time again, I stumble upon surprises. Searching Huet's full name on the internet for the nth time, up came an issue of *Solidaridad Obrera* one of the libertarian movement's go-to newspapers. It was dated 25 October 1933 and it was news to me. Hopeful of its novelty, I read through the paper in search of news. In the end, up it came: Driver arrested on the Ramblas by a city police officer and taken to the station under protest. And then the name: Manuel Huet Piera. He must have been a well-known name within the organization for them to have dedicated a complete article to one arbitrary arrest.

Right, arbitrary or not I cannot say, because this man's CV, as we shall see over the following pages, is anything but anodyne. And another point: he was not to allow himself to be arrested again, not by the city police, men in green topped with tricorne hats, hard nuts from the Brigada Político Social [BPS] or the Gestapo itself; freedom is the most cherished asset and he would fall only into the clutches of the French gendarmerie in September 1940 and the Italian police in 1947; but luck would be on his side and Manolo was not the sort to fritter away his chances.

¹⁰ Enric Melich was interviewed in his home in Pontella on 3-3-2018

Chapter 2

The Tram strike

In the wake of the great crash of 1929, 1930s Barcelona was undergoing a full-scale economic overhaul. Things may not have been quite on a par with back in the wildcat years of the 1920s, during the so-called 'days of lead', but social strife was the order of the day. The streets were still witness to shootings, hold-ups, acts of sabotage, and wildcat strikes in a range of factories and firms and there was no diminution in workers' morale. They had discovered that in union lies strength and that if they answered blow for blow they might emerge as the victors in certain disputes and obtain changes that made their lives better, however slightly. The CNT's unions were growing, there were *ateneos* in the barrios and in lots of villages and the toiling masses had learnt to read and write, some at rationalist schools, some in the afore-mentioned *ateneos* and, many, in their prison cells. The yearned-for social revolution was no longer just an unreachable dream and they had to carry on educating, fighting and spreading the idea and shedding blood, but its advent was in prospect. For what was perhaps the very first time in that land of political bosses and deceitful priests, the unreachable dream was more imminent than not. These were the years of the anarchist uprisings; instigated by the FAI they were put to the test in the Upper Llobregat valley, in Aragon and in La Rioja. One followed upon the other and usually they were followed by merciless repression, jailings, torture, deportations, no matter whether it was the right or the left that was in power. During these quarrelsome years, social and labour strife grew exponentially throughout Catalonia, but especially in Barcelona: during 1933, 211 bombs went off, 365 acts of sabotage were carried out, and there were 107 shooting incidents. A further 175 explosive devices were uncovered and defused. The toll of victims rose to 35 dead and 194 wounded. Finally, it ought to be pointed out also that over those 12 months there were 73 important hold-ups carried out, usually on Saturdays, that being payroll day.¹¹ The tram strike stood out in terms of the intensity and duration of the dispute. It started early in 1933 and lingered until July 1936. Competition between the city transport services, buses and trolley-buses forced up tram prices. The rising costs brought in its wake an inevitable slump in passenger numbers: the struggle between the unions and the company dragged on ending with the dismissal of 16 workers that April.

Which is when the fun started. A strike was declared on 24 April as the mighty transport union brought trams, buses and the metro to a standstill; shortly after that, virtually the entire taxi fleet followed suit. Furthermore, gangs of strikers roamed the streets calling for solidarity from lorry drivers and carters, the bulk of whom also joined the strike, either of their own free will or under pressure from the trade unionists; bringing to a standstill a city that had very few private cars at the time and, above all, preventing the working masses and raw materials from reaching production sites. The workers on the Tibidabo cable car service also missed work, as did the loading and unloading services in the various train stations around Barcelona. Added to all that there was the dissemination of strike propaganda, the odd lorry was sniped at and thunder-flashes placed on tram tracks and there were arrests aplenty. The security forces were mobilized and the departure from the port of three warships was postponed due to the need for the troops they were carrying. Consideration was even given to commandeering a transatlantic liner for use as a prison hulk, deportation being one of the measures in fashion with those in government at the time. In the end the Transport union was shut down. The problem lingered on, with tensions running high or low up until November 1933, at which point a general transport strike was declared again, lasting from 18 November through to the following 13 December. Naval personnel drove the trams, under escort from pairs of Policia Armada. The dispute turned more vicious and the outrages started. On 22 November there were switch changes and explosive devices were planted, the upshot being that at least two soldiers were seriously injured – Julio Grau Peñalver, who had to have a leg amputated after an explosion – and José Roca Portugués who also lost a leg in the derailing of a tram. On 27 November, the sabotage of a switch point made two trams collide on the Plaza Universidad, with seven passengers injured as a result. On 1 December, a bomb planted at the electrical junction box in the Plaza Padró claimed the life of army ensign Julio Jarque Millán, and left a further seven wounded. On 4 December another bomb at the La Meridiana stop claimed two lives and left two people injured. The strike resulted in 150 sackings and hundreds of arrests.

¹¹ Figures taken from *La 2a República a Catalunya. Violencia política y conflictividad social* by Julià Rodríguez Camarà, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 2001

Not that the end of the strike brought about a return to normality. In addition to security personnel on board the trams (some in uniform, others in plain clothes), carloads of police patrolled the routes they followed. By February 1934, the unions were beginning to set fire to trams. Armed gangs, 4 to 6-men strong, would board and at gunpoint would clear the cars of passengers, dousing them with flammable liquid and setting them alight. Such attacks resulted in lots of gun-battles between the security forces and the raider groups. In one such shoot-out, the anarchist Rafael Arnau Martínez was killed in the exchange of fire. Brakes released, some of the burning trams sped down Barcelona's hills at top speed, only to end up crashing in unexpected locations. On Sunday 4 March, Ramón Gabaldi, a driver with the tram company, was fired upon as he tried to thwart the torching of the tram that he was driving and died three days later. A couple of weeks after that, a bomb went off beside the tram station in the San Andrés district. Meanwhile, the acts of sabotage and mass round-ups of anarchists throughout the city and adjacent towns continued. On 4 July a tram was set ablaze on the Calle Francisco Layret. That August, another one was burnt out between Badalona and Horta. Within days, another one had been torched in Badalona, with its conductor suffering gunshot wounds as he attempted to stand up to the assailants. The tram company's premises on the Plaza Lesseps was also set alight. On 6 October 1934, a state of war was declared, although the only changes were that there was increased censorship of the press and detainees were referred to military courts. In January 1935, a bus was burnt out between Santa Coloma and San Andrés del Palomar. In February, a further two buses suffered the same fate between Santa Coloma and Sant Adrià. On 16 March, a police ambush ended with the tossing of hand grenades, one of which exploded underneath a police car, resulting in the death of two Assault Guards and the wounding of several more. On 21 April, a burning tram was left facing the Casa Artigas district. On 20 August, two bombs were planted at the tram depot in Gracia. Sabotage attacks, arrests and shoot-outs between trade unionists and police were running out of control. Civil Guard patrols with heavy machine-guns were mounted at various points around the city. That same year, albeit at a date unknown, tram worker José Cabañes wound up dead. The social strife in Barcelona at the time, with the transport dispute to the fore, even triggered yet another declaration of a state of war in Barcelona during the summer of 1935 and the relocation of minister of War, Gil Robles, to the city.

Aside from the incidents listed above, we have to add, among others, the actions of the group in which Huet was active; he was involved with the action group led by Rafael Sansegundo García aka *el Pequeño*. We would remind readers at this point that Huet was working as a taxi driver and was thus fully engaged with the transport strike, taking part in sabotage operations as well as in hold-ups designed to see to the financial upkeep of strikers and their families. '*El Murciano*' was cited as a driver and organizer belonging to the group which was indicted for several hold-ups and sabotage attacks during 1935; another participant was José Vidal Coma aka *Vidalet*, who was among those arrested; he and Huet would serve alongside each other in the civil war and share the misadventures of early exile in France. Besides, that same group and its orbit included one Santiago Irazo Millán (who had, oddly enough, been a soccer player who had played in the first division with CE Europa during the 1929/30 season), Luis Carrillo Pérez, Salvador Solsona Gual, Joaquín Silvestre, Soledad Rojas Bounier (15 years old at the time of arrest), Jaime Rojas Silne, Margarita Redondo Lapeira (Sansegundo's partner), Fernando Rodríguez García, Martín Cañellas (Soledad's partner), Agustín Benlliure Justo, Pablo Mayo Mayo, José Pastor Górriz, José María Capdevila and Domingo Molina Font.

They stood accused of the 15 December armed robbery of the fuel store in the Calle Piquer, of the 5 January 1935 hold-up at the Morera liquor plant, the 8 February hold-up at the Ribas i Pradell company and the hold-up at the Donat company in the Paseo García Hernández. They were also charged with the torching of a tram in the Calle Rogent on 9 December 1934, the torching of trams on 24 March and 7 May on route 60, and another on route 62 on 26 May. And there was more. There was the burning of a van in the Sant Andreu *barrio* and the attempted arson of a bus in the same *barrio* on 6 June, when a bottle of flammable liquid had failed to smash. Plus the planting of an explosive device on a site in the Calle Entenza. Plus, they had planned an attack on the foremen at the docks, the arson at the Studebaker dealership on the Calle Bruch and the raid on a bank van, despite its being under a Civil Guard escort.

Rafael Sansegundo was arrested in June 1935 and at the time of arrest the police had seized 8 kilos of dynamite, two bombs, a crateload of detonators, 15 chargers, several lengths of fuse and gear for manufacturing explosives. It has to be acknowledged – and we have this from the Catalan historian Julià

Rodríguez – that when any member of the defence groups or committees was arrested, it was common practice for him to claim responsibility for as many actions as he could, the aim being to ward off consequences for others, and he would usually claim that his collaborators in those actions had been comrades who were already behind bars: the intention being at all times to spare the consequences for those still at large. Therefore those listed as members of groups and the actions credited to them were sometimes real and sometimes utterly false.

Huet was a taxi driver and a man of action, one of the CNT-affiliated taxi drivers and in addition to '*el Murciano*' we find others caught up in fund-raising raids and acts of sabotage: these included Fernando González Salvador (former president of the CNT taxi drivers, who served on the Regional Transport Federation of Catalonia during the civil war), Salvador Álvarez Padilla and Clemente Hellín Carrillo, whom we shall see united again with Huet in transporting weapons for the CNT columns. It is worth saying that taxis were a bit of a theme in 1930 Barcelona. For instance, we might begin by stating that the action groups normally used taxis as their means of transport in carrying out their operations. For one thing, they might, so to speak, pile into taxis, mention a destination and then, en route, they would stop the cab at gunpoint at a given spot for the rest of the group to board. After that, the driver would be stripped of his jacket and cap which the group's wheelman would then don, with the taxi driver being tied up or dropped off; the operation would then be carried out and the same taxi used as a getaway car before then being dumped. On occasion the taxi driver might be told where he could retrieve his cab, whereas at other times it was the police who found it and returned it to its rightful owner. But there was another side to that: certain taxi drivers were members of the CNT or FAI who worked with, or were directly involved in operations and in the event of something's going awry during the operation, off they would trot to the police station to report that they had been attacked and their cab stolen. If we pay careful heed to the newspapers of the day, we can find many such instances and if we recognize a few of the names we can find them mentioned in news items about hold-ups or sabotage attacks. It is also interesting to note what Antonina Rodrigo told us in her article about Gloria Prades where she mentions that in the battle against the bosses, taxi drivers played a very important role. It just so happens that many of these bosses had "paramours" and would take taxi rides to their extra-marital encounters. Big mistake. Remember that a lot of the taxi drivers were members of the CNT union and in this way they came to know the routines, time-tables and addresses of the paramours, where they might lie in wait for some disputatious boss.

We also know that, in the course of his activities in the Poble Nou quarter, Huet struck up a friendship with the Soto Ortiz brothers – Ángel and, above all, Manuel, with whom he was to work alongside for many years. The Soto brothers too had earned their spurs in social strife. If we delve into the newspaper records of *La Vanguardia*, we can see that Manuel's earliest arrests dated back to 1919. Later we find both brothers being arrested after the discovery of a workshop where explosives were being made and where lots of chemical products used for that purpose were found. The workshop was in the home of a single-story house on the Calle Provencals in the Poble Nou district. That was on 24 March 1934. Whilst charges were being prepared in relation to the workshop incident, further enquiries unearthed the fact that the brothers had had a hand in a range of sabotage attacks – on 4 February, for instance, they entered José Rabaixet's foundry on the Calle de la Diputació where they planted a large explosive device weighing 5 kilos and including 22 cartridges of black dynamite; they set the fuse alight and took to their heels. Displaying great presence of mind, one of the employees stamped out the fuse and carried the bomb out on to the street. Included with the Sotos in the indictment were Lorenzo Lecha Pérez and Paladio Illa Puixagut. Plus another three persons unknown, whose names, had they emerged, might assuredly have had a familiar ring. The Soto's actions alongside Manolo, '*Vidalet*' and who knows who else belonging to his earlier group, date from this time, because the brothers were thereafter given 18-year jail terms and would not be released until February 1936 and the Popular Front's victory in the elections.

In an after-echo of the tram strike, some of the workers who arrived as replacements for the ones sacked in 1933, were executed by the Control Patrols during the early days of the civil war: and after March 1939 it was the turn of several leading trade unionists to who had taken part in the strike and its disputes to be jailed and, in some instances, shot.

And, to bring this chapter to an end let us here detail a few of the tactics and the modus operandi of the CNT defence cadres operating during those times. Let us start with a motion tabled by García Oliver before the October 1934 National Committee of Defence Committees. Among other things, he stated that their members – volunteers every one of them – could be drawn from any of the branches of the libertarian movement, but would at all times be subordinated to the needs of the CNT. As an auxiliary organizational set-up, they were owed a fraction of the CNT's dues payments. An effort would be made to sponsor anti-militarist cadres inside the barracks: and it was spelled out that the basis group should be compact, no larger than six members, in order to facilitate its clandestine operations and flexibility, and that they ought to be made up of militants drawn from the same sectoral union. Each group would function as a tool for information-gathering and combat unit. It was stressed that they were held in reserve and on active call, even if assigned some theatre of operations to stick to and should not overstep the mark without formal notification. Finally, details were set out of what each of the members of the group should deal with, as set out below.

The first member was the delegate or secretary and his main mission was to liaise with other groups from the *barrio* and to encourage new groups. Second came the information-handler, who had to collate information regarding potential enemies within the theatre of operations, about buildings and state establishments and, finally, the public service infrastructure. The third member was tasked with analysing the intelligence collected by the information-handler and choosing the most strategic points to target. Member four, furnished with a listing of the selected strategic points, was to research them, choosing escape routes, safehouses, etc. The fifth member of the group concentrated on public services, lighting, water supply, gas and transport ... looking for the weakest points, likely locations for sabotage attacks or carrying out expropriations. And lastly, the sixth member was in charge of placement and plans of attack in the procurement of arms, cash, provisions ... and was also in charge of procurement and manufacturing of war materials.¹²

¹² Figures taken from *Tiempos de plomo*, pp. 80-81. Juan J Alcalde, *Grupos de Acción y Defensa Confederal*, Fundación Salvador Seguí Ediciones, Madrid, 2013.

Chapter 3

“El Padre”

Hanging around the Hotel Oriente in Barcelona in January 1936, Huet made the acquaintance of Robert Terres aka ‘*el Padre*’. Terres was an agent of the French secret services on his very first mission abroad; in particular, he was working for the intelligence services and passing himself off as a journalist. At the time, Manuel was still operating his taxi cab and working night shifts, which, on the one hand, brought him into contact with lots of folk and, on the other, deep knowledge of the city streets.

Out of their initial encounter would come a deep friendship and a lengthy collaboration that would include the civil war, the Second World War and beyond. We will later find ‘*el Padre*’, ‘*el Murciano*’ and Pons Prades tracking down those who had collaborated with the Nazis, or, in the late 1970s and 1980s, stopping over in a quiet hotel in the Cerdanya where they reminisced at length over hearty meals.

Born in 1913 ‘*el Padre*’ had joined the Military intelligence Agency’s P/A Section (a secretive organization dealing with both military and political matters, within and without the borders of France) in 1935, at the age of 22. The section’s mission consisted of monitoring and manipulating agents, tapping telephones or maintaining surveillance on pressure groups abroad, and he was posted to Paris. He was not a novice in such matters: his own father, a former career officer, had seen some such service during the Great War and had even headed up the Army of the Rhine’s special military services in 1920.

Throughout 1935 the French secret services were taking an interest in Spanish republicans, which is what prompted them to dispatch Robert Terres on a mission into Spain on 11 November 1935. His first stop-over was in Barcelona, where he hung out at the Hotel Oriente which was much frequented by foreigners and where he met Huet through the good offices of a CNT waiter. Terres was posing as a journalist and added that he was working on a comprehensive report on Spain, which entailed his making several visits to the country’s major cities over a two or three week period. Huet being a taxi owner and finding the arrangements to his liking quickly agreed to the deal.

Thanks to Huet’s connections in the CNT and in the FAI, ‘*el Padre*’ was able to meet and converse at length with prominent libertarian militants. This unexpected collaboration was of enormous use to him in carrying out his discreet and exhaustive x-ray of a Spain that was bound, full steam ahead, for inevitable civil strife. It would have been great to listen in on the conversations between the driver and his passenger and over the course of their tour of Iberian soil they became firm friends as they passed through cities such as Madrid, Valencia, Seville, Zaragoza or Oviedo. And we shall never know when they spoke from the heart, each of them holding his cards close to his chest. The spy was to confirm his links with the secret services and the man of action his own ties to gangs of expropriators and saboteurs.

The idealism and capacity for sacrifice of CNT and FAI personnel quickly seduced Robert ‘*el Padre*’ Terres, but in his dispatches he made no reference to the impression made on him by those workers who were so different from the sort of people for whom his findings were destined. In addition to leading labour activists, mostly from the CNT, but drawn also from the Workers’ General Union (UGT), the other main trade union in Spain at the time, Terres had contacts with certain high-ranking military figures and their conclusions were by themselves ominous. There was clear talk of an uprising, but there was also clear talk to the effect that it would not catch anybody on the hop; indeed, if the unions mobilized their masses, the outcome would be a far cry from a military march-past. In mid-February 1936, after the results at the ballot boxes went in the favour of the Popular Front, ‘*el Padre*’ wound up his mission and returned to France. Huet drove him to the El Prat airport in his taxi and they parted as friends. Neither of them realized that they would shortly be seeing each other again, in France, and not because Huet and Rosa honeymooned there on Terres’s invitation, but because the CNT was going to need all the arms it could lay hands on for shipment to the battle-front. Being a good agent, ‘*el Padre*’ kept his sources secret and for his own exclusive use, covering up both their names and their affiliations, which, whilst it spared him difficulties with his superiors meant that he could carry on relying upon them in the turbulent times that were on the horizon.

As we shall see throughout this narrative, Huet and Terres met in Barcelona in 1936 on a more or less casual basis (given the shifting circumstances into which a turbulent Europe was heading) and it blossomed into an increasingly deep relationship. Years later that friendship, that would bring benefits to both parties and which would outlive the war and the years thereafter, would develop into various forms of collaboration and into relaxed holidays in the hotel in Puigcerdá during the 1970s and early 1980s. Throughout their long, safe and fruitful chats, they would make no mention of the many and varied plots, some mentionable and others not, of rumours and heroic and craven actions, of people of courage and traitors and of secret or phoney intelligence.

Not that Huet was to be the only Spanish anarchist with whom '*el Padre*' was to collaborate: the list is a lengthy one. In the cases of some of these names, the dealings were strictly 'professional'; with others, like Paco Ponzán, they matured into admiration and open friendship; we shall see how, after leaving the secret service, Terres was to carry on looking out for his anarchists when the latter got themselves into difficulties with the French Republic.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves.

Chapter Four

‘Capità Collons’

We come now to a thorny issue, especially thorny in these times when independence for Catalonia has become such a fashionable trend. Miquel Badía aka *Capità Collons* (Captain Bollocks) was chief of police under the Generalitat of Catalonia, an activist in Estat Catalá and a rabid anti-anarchist. His brother Josep was active in the same Estat Catalá party and was an active separatist militant. In certain Catalanist circles their murder is still being represented as an attack upon nationalism. And whilst on the one hand it is a fact that anarchism has always plumped for the internationalist option as opposed to nationalism of whatever complexion, Miquel Badía was bumped off because of his unrelenting persecution of trade union activism and because of the torture and murder directed at members of the libertarian movement. When, years later, an attempt was made on the life of one of Badía’s followers, Superintendent Quintela, it never occurred to anyone to dub that an outrage, an attack on Galician nationalism or anything of the sort. The targets were those regime personnel who distinguished themselves in the crackdown on members of the Organization and the aim was to do for them before they could do for you.

‘*Capità Collons*’, who described himself as such, stating: “I am neither left nor right. All I know is that I am a nationalist and socialist”¹³, was born in the town of Torregrossa in 1906 and moved away to Barcelona in 1922, following in the footsteps of his brother, Josep Badía. Seemingly, he came into contact with the separatists from Estat Catalá through sports and was soon in touch with the ‘*escamots*’¹⁴ and embarked upon his military training. In fact, in May 1925, he was part of the gang that attempted to kill King Alfonso XIII using a powerful bomb. An informer thwarted the attack and resulted in the young Miquel being sent to prison, with a 12 year sentence. From 1926 until his release in April 1930 he served time in a number of prisons for the abortive assassination plan. After that and it appears on Maciá’s instructions he set about organizing the *escamots* of the Juventud de Esquerra Republicana and those attached to Estat Catalá. Among other things, those groups would be deployed to break a number of strikes, primarily those organized by the CNT. From 7 February 1934 Miquel was the Generalitat’s Public Order chief and made his name torturing masses of trade unionists as they were arrested, and his practices included mock shootings and he left a long trail of victims in his wake. Albeit that his reign of terror was not ended by the unionists who perished in the police stations, but by his own thuggishness; in September that year, during the trial of a lawyer affiliated to his party, he ordered the police to storm the court and arrested the prosecution counsel mid-trial and dragged him off to the police station. This thuggery backfired on him and resulted in his dismissal. In the wake of the failed attempt to proclaim a Catalan republic on 6 October 1934, a lot of Catalan nationalists were forced to seek asylum in France, leaving behind them 1,000 rifles that ‘*Los Solidarios*’ had bought in Eibar but which had ended up in *escamot* hands. After Badía and his crew fled, those rifles were recaptured by the anarchists and the latter would not let them go before they were forced to put them to good use in July 1936. Up until the Popular Front won the February 1936 elections, the Badía brothers resurfaced in Barcelona after benefiting from an amnesty. Albeit that there was more than one person living in the ‘*Rosa de Foc*’ (Barcelona) happy to see the return of Senyor Collons.

As to why these two birds should be invoked here, suffice to say that during one of my visits to the archives in the Pabellón de la República and whilst leafing through some of the papers of Francisco Ponzán and Pons Prades, I came upon an unpublished manuscript by Pons Prades. The folder, entitled *Memorias de un tiempo, 1920-1937*, consisted of an index and a brief commentary upon the chapters. Chapter 20 is entitled “The attack on the Badía brothers”. Imagine my surprise when I started to read through it and stumbled upon the following: “I discovered the identity of the three Woodworkers’ Union militants who carried out the attack, through the taxi driver [MHP] who took part in the outrage. Miquel Badía was targeted, not just because he had been a high-ranking police official in 1933 when the Woodworkers’ strike broke out, but also on account of his behaviour at police headquarters on the Via Layetana, and the way he treated militants detained there ... The attack was decided by the trio that carried it out – all of them victims of the police back in 1933 – without the Woodworkers’ Union having had anything to do with it.”. Luckily, we know whom those MHP initials

¹³ <http://luissoravilla.blogspot.com/2011/05/tambien-tuvimos-camisas-pardas.html>

¹⁴ *Escamots*: A Catalan term indicating the groups or squads of the para-military organization set up by Estat Catalá at the beginning of the 1920s.

referred to; he was working in Barcelona as a taxi driver and was also involved with the action groups. Unfortunately, this information is very hard to verify, but I did not want it to be left to go a-begging. For one thing, it offers further confirmation that it was libertarian action groups that eliminated the Badias, and for another, it opens a fresh vista, since it is taken as certain fact that the executioners were Justo Bueno and his group. The story is that Justo nor his comrades were members of the Woodworkers' Union; actually they belonged to the metalworkers' union. Be that as it may, we know of Manolo that he was ready to take up arms and was not the sort to brag about actions carried out; on the contrary, silence and discretion were weapons upon which he habitually relied; so, for one thing, I reckon that if he spilled the beans to his friend Eduardo Pons Prades it was because he definitely did act as the getaway driver in the attack. In the course of my investigation several things have fallen into place that initially looked concocted or incorrect.

According to what we know about the matter, on 28 April 1936, four well-dressed men armed their weapons and steeled themselves; the car chosen for the operation was a dark red Ford bearing the Barcelona 39763 number plates. Huet was at the wheel for he was, as we know, a driver by trade and could hold his nerve if any problems arose. Alongside him, if Pons Prades's account is to be credited, were three members from the Woodworkers' Union. Seemingly, the gang also had knowledge that the pistole carried by Miquel Badía had been in for repairs from the previous day, or maybe they were just lucky; in any case, they were not about to give him time to draw any weapon. The gang set off for the Calle Muntaner, making for No 55 where the Badía brothers lived. Manolo waited in the car with the engine running whilst the other three dismounted and took up strategic positions and lay in waiting with weapons loaded. At 3.20 the Badía brothers stepped out of the doorway and headed towards the city centre. Across the street, one man began walking in parallel with them, not taking his eyes off them. Meanwhile, the other two caught up with them from behind and once within range accosted the brothers to a cry of "Badía!" When the Badías turned around, the shouter put three bullets into the former police chief whilst his comrade fired on the brother. The upshot was that Miquel Badía was killed outright by a bullet in the head, one in the chest and one in the kidney. As for Josep, he too was shot in the head but nevertheless had enough life in him to make it to the nearby Sepúlveda dispensary, where he died on the operating table. Meanwhile, the three men climbed into the Ford with all haste and the car sped off in the direction of the Plaza de España.

Since then, much has been written and there has been a lot of conjecture. This is but one version of events or only a few names have been changed, but the essence is the same. The Badías – especially Miquel – had played with fire and not only got their fingers burnt but lost what they held most dear – their lives. The CNT gunmen had had to bide their time, but in the end they had partly settled their accounts.

Chapter Five

The Civil War

By 17 July 1937, with the exception of the Republic's government, both right and left were on tenterhooks. There was a whiff in the air of rapidly impending events that might alter the nation's fate. The CNT in Catalonia lobbied both the Generalitat and the civil government for weapons. The upshot? Just the usual formal refusal to arm the trade unions. And as the volume of the sabre-rattling grew, members of the Marine Transport Union jumped the gun. That night they raided the arms caches on board the vessels *Manuel Arnús*, *Argentina*, *Uruguay* and *Marqués de Comillas* sitting at anchor off the port of Barcelona. The weaponry seized was ferried away to the Union's premises for safe-keeping.

The fall-out from the raid was not long delayed: in a cold sweat, the Catalan authorities mounted an urgent investigation and found where the libertarians had stashed the weapons. The Assault Guard was promptly ordered to retrieve the arms and they made straight for the premises, surrounding the building. The CNT members dug in on the premises and refused to hand over the much yearned-for booty. In Barcelona (the *Rosa de Foc*) the rising tension hinted at a further bloodbath on the streets of the city as shouts and threats were traded. After painstaking negotiations, a small fraction of the loot was handed over to the security forces, ensuring that one side would not be returning empty-handed to its barracks and that the other had access to priceless weaponry that they would very shortly be needing to put to use. The following day, July 18, watchmen and keepers of the peace were systematically stripped of their weapons and visits were made to a number of armouries around the city: they needed to get to get the jump on the fascists. On the night of 18-19 July, sometime between 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning, the military sallied forth from their barracks But I am getting ahead of myself.

Plainly, one has to make the most of the circumstances. And one of the things that had to be exploited during the July days was the fact that the chief lady telephonist at the Generalitat of Catalonia's Department of Labour was none other than Gloria Prades from the CNT, mother of the future guerrilla and author Eduardo Pons Prades. Over to him:

"Those 4 days in July showed just how much intelligence the telephonist Gloria Prades passed on from Barcelona to Madrid and Valencia – and vice versa – and from the Generalitat's Department and the high command of the CNT. The latter was based in the Poble Nou district on the Calle Wadi Ras, in the home [actually it was on the Calle Pujadas] of Gregorio Jover, the future commander of the Xth Republican Army Corps and there could be found, among others, Durruti, Ascaso, Sanz, García Oliver, Ortiz, Huet and García Vivancos. Information also flowed from the Department to the Woodworkers' Union on the Calle del Rosal [in Poble Sec].

The 'runner' was Gloria Prades's oldest son – Eduardo, 16, who shuttled backwards and forwards across Barcelona carrying messages hither and thither, not to mention unwritten messages, jumping on and off his bicycle."¹⁵

Little by little I uncovered the part that Manolo had played during those telling times in July 1936 in Barcelona. And even though there are still gaps in our knowledge, these are shrinking as our research progresses; what I am more than certain of is that he did not stay home. On the one hand, if we look at Pons Prades's writings, we find him listed with the best known names from the libertarian movement – people like Jover, Durruti, García Oliver, Francisco Ascaso, Antonio Ortiz and so on, in premises on Poble Nou's Calle Pujades (as we have said already it looks as if he had a pretty solid connection with the members of the '*Nosotros*' group.) In such company, the most significant representatives of syndicalism in action, he tried to come up with prompt solutions and effective answers to the manoeuvres being mounted by the military and the Falangist militias once they had ventured forth from their barracks. That was one of the keys, attacking them once they were without their protecting walls and at a remove from their stores and powder-kegs; that and thwarting their attempts to seize key buildings or joining forces with units from the various barracks.

¹⁵ *Anécdotas de una guerra, 1936-1939* by Eduardo Pons Prades, Unpublished text.

In the vicinity of the home on the Calle Pujades, around twenty trusted militants stood guard, protecting the area from anything untoward. Another thing that I have discovered, this time thanks to the collaboration from Valencia from my friend Mac, is that Huet had been put in charge of the strategic deployment of what few vehicles were available to the libertarian movement in the city of Barcelona at the time. In addition to his own taxi, outside the Calle Pujades premises, a couple of lorries had been commandeered from some nearby factories and one had been armed with the sole Hotchkiss machine-gun available to the libertarian forces.

As they waited for the agreed signal to come, namely, the wailing of the ships', factories and such-like sirens to ring out as a warning against the troops' departure from their barracks, more anarchist militants were gathering. The stashed weapons were handed out, whether from safe-keeping in Jover's home or those ones stashed beneath the stands at the nearby Jupiter soccer pitch.

Finally, at 5.00 a.m., a distant sound could be heard: at first it was a dull noise but it soon grew in volume and spread throughout Barcelona. It was long awaited signal: the ageless summons to a general strike and armed uprising; conformation that the army was taking to the streets. What neither the military nor the Falangists travelling with them were expecting was that the people, with the anarchists in the van, were waiting for them. They would let them sally forth from their barracks but would not allow them to capture their main targets nor withdraw to the safety of their barracks. The anarchist column set off down the Calle Pujades, making for the Rambla del Poble Nou, folk joining it en route and singing the well-known strains from '*A las barricadas*' and other anarchist anthems; street followed street as the column swelled – Calle Pedro IV, Calle Mercader ..

Rivers of ink have been expended on what happened in Barcelona over the ensuing hours. An enormous number of things have been set down in writing, with everybody offering pretty much his own 'take' on events, with a greater or lesser degree of truthfulness: what is beyond dispute is that the military lost the battle and the Generalitat ceded power to parties and trade unions. The next thing we know about Huet is that once Barcelona had been liberated, and seeing how things were going in the major cities around the country, instead of joining the columns setting off for Aragon (whether on orders from the union or because he himself had his roots in Levante, we do not know) he set off for Valencia as the position in that city was as yet unclear. The people had taken to the streets, but the military had stayed inside their barracks and where they stood was not clear. The days went by and the military remained behind the walls whilst the militians could not make their minds to attack them. So, on 24 July, a train set off from Barcelona, made up of a locomotive, two passenger carriages and a goods carriage laden with armed CNT personnel in an attempt to decide the fate of Valencia; those on board included Manolo and José Vidal aka *Vidalet*, José Pérez Ibáñez aka *Valencia* and Alfonso Miguel Martorell. Meanwhile, 100 armed militants from the CNT set off for the same destination. The arrival of reinforcements and above all of the weapons they brought with them ensured that the sappers' barracks were successfully stormed on the 29th. On 1 August the so-called Guadalajara and Lusitania barracks fell, with the remainder captured on 2 August, thereby securing Valencia city for the Republic. So Huet was busy there up until at least 3 or 4 August.

From here on we are operating on the basis of conjecture. If we go by the texts posted on the internet or what little has been written about Manolo, he was one of the organizers and members of the '*Nanos de Eroles*' (Eroles's Boys). That was a squad dedicated to hunting down and capturing fascists and fifth columnists lurking in Barcelona and its environs and it was under the direction of Dionisio Eroles Batlle. I have absolutely no idea if he actually was a member of that squad; if he was, he was in the company of, among others, the future guerrilla Salvador Gómez Talón or Luis Carrillo Pérez (who was one of his comrades in the action groups in which he had been operating prior to the civil war), but there is no clarity on that score and I have not found a single piece of paper authenticating his involvement with Eroles's squad nor any report relating to it, albeit that Pons Prades assures us that he was and that is something to be borne in mind as our investigation proceeds.

As for Dionisio Eroles, it should be said that he was chief of services at the General Commission for Public Order. A former member of the Sants action groups, after his appointment in July 1936, he was continually at daggers drawn with Artemi Aiguader, a member of the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and councillor in charge of Internal Security. Apparently, in the course of his pursuit of fascists and fifth columnists, items of value were being turned up and some of these Eroles held on to for himself, for the use of the union and as future bargaining counters. In November 1936, his agents thwarted a Catalan nationalist coup d'état which,

among other things, had been planning to eliminate Companys and several heavyweight libertarians in Catalonia. On 4 March 1937, the government disbanded the Control Patrols, albeit that they did not disappear until June, following the defeat of the revolution in May 1937. During the May Events, specifically on 4 May, five of Eroles's bodyguards were dragged out of their homes and murdered by Stalinist forces. The fact is that disarmament of the CNT's rearguard had been in progress for some time past. On 17 August a warrant was issued for the arrest and capture of Aurelio Fernández and Dionisio Eroles himself and Eroles had to make himself scarce for a while. He left for exile in January 1939, opting to settle in Paris where he worked alongside Marianet and Esgleas. Difficulties and frictions soon cropped up regarding the loot that Eroles was supposed to have carried out to France. For which reason he was forced to relocate to Perpignan, Toulouse and Montauban. Arrested by the French police on 28 March 1940, he wound up in the Le Vernet punishment camp. In that camp he quarrelled very violently with someone who worked with both Esgleas and the Ponzán network – to wit, Victorio Castán who was in charge of retrieving scattered funds on behalf of the MLE (Spanish Libertarian Movement). Eroles was executed in the Pyrenees in 1941. Some sources have it that he was executed by members of his own network and one of the grounds alleged was his refusal to hand over said funds. But back to Huet. He also served with the department of the air force alongside Francisco Garcia, on behalf of the CNT and the UGT's Daniel Núñez; this according to the book *Poder legal y order real en la Cataluña revolucionaria de 1936*, written by Josep Antoni Pozo González.

And here we come upon what may be a doubt or a contradiction: whether he was serving with the *Nanos de Eroles* or holding down a position at the air force agency, wherever he was, he had only two and a half months to do either, because by mid-October 1936 he was on the Aragon front.

Let it be stated here that in a number of the chapters of this book, there will be repeated reference to the Pyrenean trails that, with the passage of time, would mark the return paths by which weapons, people, fears and hopes were trafficked. Right from the very outset of the war, trails were beginning to be opened up via which ever-present cross-Pyrenean smugglers had travelled and would continue to travel in order to secure whatever products were in short supply on the other side of the mountain range and from which a handsome return could be obtained. So, on the Catalan or Aragonese side and above all thanks to libertarian militians or militians from the POUM, those very same trails were used in the procurement of light arms for the ill-equipped columns fighting on the Aragon front. We know that in October, Huet and his pal Manuel Soto, were chosen to travel to Barcelona to secure funding for arms purchases made on the CNT's behalf; this was somewhat strange if he was a member of the groups tackling fifth columnists in Barcelona itself, as he would have been in Barcelona already or, at worst, in its environs, rather than on the Aragon front. Besides, we know that, say, Aurelio Fernández, bent on securing arms for the "Control Patrols", had built up a network of his own¹⁶ on behalf of which 18 trips were made for the purpose of buying light weapons, primarily from Switzerland, from Swiss and French dealers through the good offices of the Swiss trade unionist Lucien Tronchet. Those arms were intended for the Control Patrols alone, whereas the arms that Huet was buying were going directly to the Aragon front. So, having left the soil of Aragon behind and once in Barcelona, having examined the detail of the mission and collected the funding, off they went to Paris. They were accompanied by – among others, Margarita Ros from Valencia, on account of her perfect command of French. And Clemente Hellín, a taxi-driver like Huet, both taxis being brought along to be filled up with arms.

In Paris they stayed at the Hotel Crillon. It was not long before they were looking up Robert Terres and he put them in touch with a trader acting on behalf of Belgium's Fabrique Nationale. From that first trip they managed to fetch back just pistols, automatic handguns and plenty of ammunition. From Paris they had to get hold of a couple of trailers, the weapons being too many to stash in the boots of the taxis and they were shipped from there to the Luchón valley, the Pyrenees, where they leased a dozen mules to ferry them across the mountains to the Benasque valley. Manuel Soto was to oversee that leg of the crossing along with the chef muleteer. Once on the Spanish side, preparations to receive them were made by comrades Zafón and Lozano, who had secured two lorries from the Durruti Column under the supervision of Miguel Prades, Gloria Prades's brother and uncle of Eduardo Pons Prades.

¹⁶ Anyone interested in this matter will find it dealt with in quite some detail in *La otra memoria histórica* by Miquel Mir and Mariano Santamaría Rodríguez, Nowtilus, Madrid, 2011

During the trip and more especially during their stay in Paris, 'el Padre' was to show Huet a report that he had forwarded to his superiors after the trip he had made into Spain on which he was accompanied by the Barcelona taxi driver: among its conclusions we find this: "a military coup is a matter of days or weeks away."¹⁷

Trip number two was to prove different. Instead of a demanding passage between the Pyrenean peaks, they plumped for a seaborne route from Canet-plage beside Perpignan and two ships were to be loaded up with arms bound for Catalonia. That embarkation point would be used again by Huet in moving refugees, once he had set up his Maritime Antenna¹⁸ in Sète.

Shortly afterwards, a third trip was laid on, overland again. This time the border (*muga*)¹⁹ would be crossed via Puigcerdà as the frontier there was under the surveillance of CNT comrades. On the latter two trips, the arms brought in were rifles, light machine-guns, machine-guns and lots of ammunition. Between these arms procurement trips and the time he was in service with the 7th Transport Battalion there are written mentions of his having served with the *Libertador* guerrilla group. The latter operated on Aragonese soil but the merest glance of Téllez's book on the Ponzán network unearths the names of its members and there is no mention either of Huet, or Lozano or Soto, so we can discount that claim once and for all. The *Libertador* group was incorporated into the Special Long-Range Intelligence Service (SIEP) in August 1937. Besides, we have it from Huet's own admissions to Pons Prades that it seems he met Ponzán in Toulouse in 1941 at the beginning of that summer, which completely rules out Huet's participation in the guerrilla group prior to then.

According to an order from the Defence Ministry dated 22 July 1937, Huet was transferred from the Transport Militias to No. 1 Company, 7th Automobile Transport Battalion. That unit was based in Vilaboi del Penedés (Sant Boi de Llobregat these days) from 28 July 1937 up until the end of the civil war. Huet was granted the rank of captain. Thanks to the good offices of the folk working in the archives of the Pabellón de la República, I gained access to three issues of the review *Tracción*. It was published by the 7th Automobile Transport Battalion, as was one edition of its predecessor, the so-called *Boletín Interior*, produced by the very same unit. From those publications we gained a better appreciation of the day to day life of the Battalion and of some of its component personnel. One of the first surprise finds was the discovery among the signatures accompanying the articles published of that of a José Huet, quite possibly Manolo's brother. This was the first suggestion that they may have served with the same unit, or maybe it was just a coincidence that there was another Huet in the Battalion. If forced to choose between these options, my preference would be for the former; that this was his brother José; besides, I reckon that option follows a certain logic as Manolo was accompanied throughout the war by several of his friends.

Thanks to such publications, we learn that the 7th Automobile Transport Battalion was set up on the basis of personnel drawn from the so-called Transport Militias answerable to the Generalitat's Defence Department, following the decree from the government of the Republic militarizing them in July 1937. The unit was placed under the command of Captain Santos Gamero Abarretegui, he being a professional soldier from the army transport branch and it took its orders from the Rearguard and Transport Services board of the Army of the East. Thanks to the Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo, I came up with a list of the battalion's officers and sundry documentation regarding it; to my surprise all of the names, some of them captains but primarily lieutenants, were CNT personnel. Most belonged to the Transport Union and a lot of them came from Barcelona. Besides, they all came from the Transport Militias and that looks like it was another stage in the shift towards total militarization of the militias; but in the case of the 7th Battalion, rather than scattering the libertarians through communist units, they were left together in a wholly or mainly anarchist unit.

By way of an aside here, let me note something about the functioning of said units because, broadly speaking, there is very little information regarding them:

¹⁷ *Los senderos de la libertad*, p.40, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

¹⁸ The Maritime Antenna referred to the organization charged with ensuring the escapes of persons on the run from Nazism using sea routes rather than overland crossings of the Pyrenees, which was the more usual route. It started operations in the summer and autumn of 1941 under the leadership of Manuel Huet, aided and abetted by a sizeable team of libertarians. It was based in the town of Sète and made up part of the Ponzán network.

¹⁹ *Muga*. This term, probably derived from the Basque language, means frontier.

“Units at Transportation Corps level were not assigned to Mixed Brigades. The latter had section-type units. The transport battalions answered to the General Rearguard and Transport Services Board and to different military commands. The motorized battalions were normally assigned to the Army or Army Corps level. But never to Divisions or Brigades specifically. All the Mixed Brigades were assigned a small Motor Vehicle Section at their disposal, usually with very few vehicles. They were there to cover basic needs. In relocating from Brigade to other areas, they needed the assistance or specialized motorized Companies or Battalions.”²⁰

On foot of the useful information gleaned from copies of *Tracción* and the *Boletín Interior*, we can say that the Battalion boasted an itinerant cinema; a sound movie projector with a built-in powerful speaker, ensconced in a small truck and, inside that truck, a library sat cheek by jowl with the projector. It also boasted different wall newspapers put together by the various companies, and indeed there was even some competition between them, with the winning company being awarded a 200-peseta prize. The review offers this description: “What is a wall newspaper? It is a gymnasium, an intellectual and artistic training field where our soldiers’ cultural activities are on display.”²¹ We also know that they also boasted a range of “soldiers’ homes”. And that Huet’s No1 Company had its own library and that, shortly before the end of the war, the Battalion had its own training school. Notably, the Battalion also sponsored certain children’s canteens. And, above all, there was the fortnightly publication of the review *Tracción*, a worthy successor within the unit to the Battalion’s previous mouthpiece, the *Boletín Interior*. As to the publications themselves, they stood out in terms of their fine presentation, news sections, joke pages, mechanical advice pages, opinion pieces and some articles referring to the personalities of certain of the Battalion’s personages or commanders.

Manolo turns up right from the outset with the rank of captain commanding No 1 Company, with Florencio Gras as his commissar. We are not sure that José Huet, Joaquín Blesa, Josep Vidal or Joaquín Gastón were attached to the same company or were scattered throughout the Battalion, albeit that if we check the back of one of the snapshots I came across at the Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya (National Archives of Catalonia) as part of the Pons Prades holdings, both ‘*Vidalet*’ and Blesa belonged to his company. Investigating further, we find another old acquaintance who also served in the unit. This time we are talking about Salvador Solsona Gual, another person active in the same action group as Huet and Rafael Sansegundo; he was transferred from the Transport Militias and we find him bearing the rank of lieutenant. We can also say of him that he was also a member of the FAI’s ‘*Fructidor*’ group, as was Manolo, and that he too belonged to the Barcelona Transport Union and penned articles for *Tierra y Libertad* in 1932. The transfers of Huet and Solsona date back to 22 July 1937: in the same official bulletin there is a lengthy list of names attributed to the 7th Battalion, but none of the afore-mentioned is listed, even though we reckon that it was no accident that José, ‘*Vidalet*’ or Joaquín Gastón somehow finished up in that unit.

Thanks to a copy of the review meant for the commissariat, dated 1 October 1937, we know that the 7th Battalion, or at any rate part of it, including Huet, was posted to Caspe (Aragon) and we even have details of the pay issued to its members, ranging from the 635 pesetas payable to Huet as captain to the 310 due to privates.

The Battalion was sorely tested from December 1937, taking part in the battle of Teruel, with some of its companies distinguishing themselves in Mora de Rubielos and earning commendations for their performance. In May 1938, they were called upon to take vigorous action to stem the rebel push into Aragonese territory. Shortly after that, the battalion set up its headquarters in Segarra de Gaya. At that time, it was under the command of Major Francisco García Martín who had been confirmed in that post that June, before it moved on once and for all to Vilaboi. During that time, the Battalion would be reshuffled, winding up with 6 companies, some of which would eventually be issued with modern gear in excellent condition. After the Republican front was cut in two, No 1 and No 6 companies moved on to operations on the Catalanian front.

During the battle of the Ebro, some republican batteries – especially the 10.5 calibre ones – ran out of ammunition completely and were only able to fire shells that they had manufactured in a variety of workshops

²⁰Taken from page 22 of

http://www.todoslosnombres.org/sites/default/files/tln_inv_sedano_moreno_lorenzo_gonzalez/salmeron.pdf

²¹ *Tracción*, organ of the 7th Automobile Transport Regiment, January 1939

the previous day. Once assembled, they were promptly loaded on to lorries and shipped from there to the batteries that were about to use them. One of the transport companies involved in this was Manuel Huet's company. The next news on our subject dates from late 1938, more specifically from 5 December that year; we have an order allowing him to move through the Ebro front sector, stipulating that Manolo was wounded, having sustained various injuries in an accident, rendering him unfit for service until late that month. Just as the year was drawing to a close, and off his own bat, he applied to be allowed to resume his post, where Lieutenant Domingo García Vives had been standing in for him. His application was granted even though he had not fully recovered and he rejoined No 1 Company on 25 December 1938. No 1 Company was commended by the high command for its hard work on the Ebro front. Apropos of this, I have come across a dispatch from the Asturian Santiago Blanco who had also been assigned to the transport battalions, referring to how things had been during the time of the battle of the Ebro and the time thereafter:

"The high command was crying out urgently and menacingly for lorries. Our drivers and mechanics were exhausted. We lost a few vehicles due to weariness in drivers who fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into the mountain cliffs. Enemy aircraft were watching from a great height and swooped almost vertically upon our caravans.

We were defenceless in the face of such attacks. Our only defence was to dive into the ditches alongside the roads. Or take shelter under the illusory protection of the trees."²²

Towards the end of December 1938, the company dedicated itself during the republican army's retreat to the transportation of the wounded and it was here that Manolo was to meet the man who would be his friend through many years and vicissitudes – the guerrilla and author Eduardo Pons Prades. They moved some 12,000 wounded, initially out of the provinces of Lérida and Tarragona in the direction of Barcelona. Later, from Barcelona out to the hotels and spas in Gerona province and finally out to France. Besides transferring the wounded, they shipped children towards the border. According to Huet's own testimony:

"In Gerona we picked up around a hundred kids most of which were '*los madriles*', as they called themselves. They already assumed that Catalonia was a goner, just the same as the north and Aragon had been before it, and they said that as long as their home city, to wit, Madrid, had not surrendered, all was not lost. Listen, we were flabbergasted because these were tiddlers, the oldest of them being no more than 12 or 13 years of age. And it did not matter whether boys or girls. Sure, one of the girls, when we stopped near the border to fill up on petrol from an air force depot asked me: "And what is your opinion? Do you think we're going to lose this war?" My response was that it all depended on whether or not we received arms, but that at the moment what they needed to do in France was try to make good use of their time and to study ... I was interrupted by one lad not three feet tall. 'What's this nitwit saying? Are we supposed to believe we'll be living out our lives in France?'"²³

After the kids from Madrid who were dropped off near Perpignan at a former repair depot, the next batch was made up of more close-lipped Aragonese who were less talkative and more resigned and they wound up in La Junquera.

²² *El inmenso placer de matar un gendarme* pp. 283-284, by Santiago Blanco, Cuadernos para un Diálogo, Madrid, 1977

²³ *Realidades de la guerra civil*, pp. 290-291, Eduardo Pons Prades La esfera de los libros, Madrid 2005.

Chapter 6

National Treasure

After spending December and January transporting wounded, by the end of the latter month Huet's lorries were commandeered while shuttling around the northern part of Gerona province. What was going on? On the one hand it was obvious; the war was lost and the final disaster had been knocking at the door for some time past: army columns and thousands of civilians packed the roads and were approaching the lines separating some of the last republican-held territory in Catalonia from the border with France. As we have said, Huet's lorries were parked up and commandeered by order of the Republic. We can just imagine, for one thing, the surprise and then the strenuous complaints raised by Manolo as well as by the remainder of the 7th Battalion's officers in situ. Silence was the response they received and not a word of explanation. Well, there was nothing for it but to look around and throw themselves into the most utter chaos and the company's members would shortly be taking bets as they tried to decipher what was behind the puzzling order to park up and what the immediate future held. How many days they were stalled there we do not know, but what we do know is why they were there. Here let us pass over to Neil McLaren, one of the international observers monitoring developments surrounding the purpose for which Huet's lorries had been commandeered; it was, quite simply, for the purpose of evacuating the nation's artistic assets: Initially the idea was to use French lorries for the shipment but, given the circumstances of unrelenting air raids by Franco's air force, the decision was made not to risk either French equipment or French lives needlessly. Consequently, the removal would be carried out by Spanish drivers under escort from carabineers.

Which is why they were marshalled in Le Perthus pending orders to move out. From that point onwards, that became the chief concern. The retreating army of the Republic would reach the border in a matter of days.²⁴

What were the art works from the Prado museum doing on the border with France? Near the border, to be sure, but where? How had they made it that far? And was there something else in addition to works of art? We might raise a number of such queries and, if we wanted to probe deeper, many another as well, so let us at least attempt to answer them as best we can. If we cast our eyes back a couple of years, we can get a rather more clear-cut view of this queer relocation exercise.

It all started back in Madrid on 29 October 1936. That being the very first day that fascist plane randomly bombed the city. After which there was no let-up in the air raids. On 5 November, the republican government signed an order for the evacuation of the most significant works held in the Prado museum. It may be worth mentioning that both the packing and the shipment of the art works were overseen by the then Director-General of Fine Arts, the Valencian mural painter and communist activist Josep Renau, together with fellow painter Timoteo Pérez Rubio. And also that, aside from an attempt to rescue those celebrated treasures for posterity, the republican government was also out to save its own hide; thereby abandoning the people of Madrid to their fate, they decided that they themselves should be evacuated too, as if they were part and parcel of *Las Meninas* or other dark paintings. Besides keeping artistic treasures close meant ready access to a source of funding as well as a certain claim on international opinion. On the night of 9-10 October 1936, a convoy of lorries, blacked out and keeping a low profile in an attempt to evade falling bombs set off for Valencia. The premises chosen to house the art works in Valencia – world famous works as well as those housed previously at the Prado and other outstanding pieces – were being prepared and protected against possible air raids. The locations selected were the renowned Torres de Serrano, as far as the most important works were concerned and the church of the Colegio del Patriarca for lesser art works. Just in case there was anyone left none too keen on the relocation of the artistic legacy, German planes carried out an air raid on Madrid on 16 November, dispelling any criticism at a stroke of the pen and even though the Prado museum was illuminated by white symbols indicating that it was no war objective, it too was targeted and hit. On the same day, bombs fell on the academy of Fine Arts, the National Library and the Museum of Modern Art.

And what did ordinary folk think of this entire nonsense? Well, a few contemporary verses from the time shed some light on that:

²⁴ *El sete camió. El tresor perdut de la república* p 187, Asumpta Montella, Ara Llibres, Barcelona 2007

Why not turn the people of Iberia into second-hand dealers?

Why not trade Titians for aircraft shells?

Why not swap Murillos for gun-metal gear?

*Why not let the odd El Greco go for sniper's rifles?*²⁵

Yes, if these verses are to be heeded, the people of Madrid would have swapped art works for arms. Of course, that was not the end of the story. The progress of the war was clarifying a few things and putting matters into perspective. The republican defences were losing ground and it was soon plain that the fascists might break through the front lines. The instinct of self-preservation prompted the government to relocate once again in the month of March 1938, this time to Barcelona and it goes without saying, the art works moved with it. Another "meaningless" detail was that not only did the art works go with them, but off they went with something else, the Bank of Spain's gold and silver, hitherto held in storage in the La Aglameca mines very near the port of Cartagena. They were all – government, gold and artistic treasures – on the move again and Catalonia-bound. In making this move, Juan Negrín – nobody's fool – already had storage sites waiting and ready. The major art works would be stored in the Perelada castle; other works and some of the treasure, strings of precious stones, jewellery, time-pieces, etc., were bound for the San Fernando castle in Figueras and finally the bulk of the treasure of gold, silver and platinum ingots were stashed in the Canta de La Vajol mine very close to the frontier.

Now, having answered a few of the queries raised earlier and cleared up – as well as we can – the business of the art works, back to Manolo. The waiting continued, with the lorries and the man-power parked up near the border and the war being lost at pace, not to mention that the fascist troops were drawing ever nearer. Finally, news arrived that brought some ease to the accumulated stress after all that waiting. On the night of 3 February, in the so-called Figueras Agreement, the republican government came to an arrangement with an international committee regarding evacuation of the nation's artistic assets to Geneva. The order was sent out immediately and the news shortly after reached the lorries and their respective crews. But let us hear from the international committee's delegate:

"The route passed through the towns of Darnius and Agullana, both of which held caches drawn from museums in Barcelona, Vic, Vilanova y la Geltrú and Gerona, the assets from which had initially been held in Olot. Given that the responsibility for the Catalan treasure as well as that from central Spain had been shifted shortly before to the Central Board, we were called upon to provide suitable transport for such works, since all of the individual efforts to secure it had proved pointless. So the order went out for the commandeered lorries to proceed immediately to the three most important caches which were La Vajol, Perelada and Figueras, under escort from Senor Pérez Rubio and Giner, in addition to the Catalan caches in Darnius and Angullana.

At one o'clock on the morning of the 4th, the first lorries pulled into Le Perthus from Figueras, loading up again on the afternoon of the 5th, by which time twenty-nine lorryloads had crossed the border. Those lorries came from La Vajol and Perelada and carried, properly crated up, the art works rescued from the Escorial, the Prado and other locations in the heart of the peninsula."²⁶

As Neil McLaren tells us, some of the lorries, including Huet's lorry, were taken to the Perelada castle, loaded up and duly protected, as the rain never let up throughout the trip. That rain and the fact that the highways were completely crammed with rivers of refugees heading for France ensured that on a couple of occasions the refugees delayed the convoy and insisted that the crates be jettisoned and people taken on board. Huet clambered on top of one of the crates and explained what was inside them; that these were art treasures, an asset belonging to the Spanish people and the property of them all. Despite a few scathing retorts, the lorries were able to press on and reached the depot in Le Boulou without undue upset and there they unloaded their precious cargoes. As they crossed the border and heedless of the safe conducts they were carrying, as Huet himself records, an attempt was made by French gendarmes to prise the crates open, more with a mind to

²⁵ Taken from the page <https://www.cromacultura.com/museo-del-prado-guerre-civil-2/>

²⁶ *El tesoro perduto de la república*, pp. 187-188, Asumpta Montella, Ara Llibres, Barcelona, 2007

commandeer or steal some of the contents than with any intention of checking the goods. The shipment would eventually make it as far as Geneva and the League of Nations. Huet had fond memories of the painter Josep Renau, emphasizing his organizational gifts and infectious dynamism.

There is a record of the next batch of lorries that crossed over during those February days in 1939. One group of 29 lorries crossed over on the 4th and 5th and on the 6th shipment was interrupted due to severe and relentless air raids, which held up the passage of the following group of 26 lorries. Most of these vehicles passed through Le Perthus, although some were forced to use the coastal route via Cerbère, due to the air raids. Finally, a further 16 lorries crossed over using secondary roads and indeed mountain trails. In all, 71 lorries crossed over, carrying 1,868 crates. From Le Boulou the crates were taken to the station in Ceret and thence on to Geneva. The national art treasure took the road back to Spain in the late summer, arriving back at their original sites on 9 September the same year.

I would love to know what would have happened if, instead of ending up hauling art works, Manolo had been sent to La Vajol, to the Canta mine there. Bear in mind here that his men included a number of expropriators whose adventures he had shared prior to the outbreak of the civil war. Although I imagine that Senor Negrin was perfectly well aware that the 7th Motorized Transport Battalion was composed for the most part of CNT personnel, he chose to have the national treasure hauled by forces closer to the government's thinking. Given Huet's background as an expropriator, and since we know that some of the gold never made it to the far side of the border, I cannot help wondering what would have happened had he loaded up his lorry with ingots.

Chapter 7

Exile, the *Dora* and the Diamond-cutters

As an addendum to the previous chapter, they crossed the border in February 1939 with 50 of their lorries. Luckily for Manolo and unfortunately for most of his countrymen who had it in mind to quit Spain, we need to outline here, albeit briefly, the reception that awaited them from the French Republic (then governed by a left-wing administration) was anything but warmly welcoming. First it closed the border to the floods of refugees, even though the gendarmes who were so zealous in watching from their guard-posts could see Francoist aircraft strafing and bombing the columns just across the borderline, regardless of whether these were made up of military or civilians. And then the most troglodyte element of the French press made it its business to play on the terror inspired by the red hordes that were out to get across that border line, those horned and tailed devils. The fact is that the French government had been expecting maybe a tenth as many refugees and it was also a fact that the welcome reserved for them was shameful, back-handed and pathetic and we could go on tossing in degrading adjectives until the cows come home. And to cap it all, all of the people – estimated to number about half a million, many of them wounded or sick – who were running away from terror and a lost war and starvation and, of course, the wintry weather at the time. First, they were stripped of their arms (those that still had any) and then they were herded like livestock into concentration camps. ‘Camps’ may be going a bit far, as there were no real camps to begin with. They were incarcerated on waste ground and beaches, with no cooking facilities, no huts, no bathing facilities, nothing ... Well, it is not true to say that they had nothing; they had barbed wire and Senegalese sentries or gendarmes as well. Of course, we cannot lump all of the daughters and sons of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* in the same basket, but, all in all, the reception that the French accorded our forebears was truly lousy. Just to indicate the cleanliness of those camps, here is a report from two doctors, one French (Peloquin) and the other head of the Spanish Republican Army’s Military Medical Agency (Joaquín d’Harcourt):

They pointed out that dysentery and pneumonia were wreaking havoc, as were typhoid, TB and, in some instances, leprosy; that one in three of the inmates were suffering from ticks and lice, with skin ulcers and eye and throat inflammation very commonplace thanks to the violent sandstorms whipped up by the wind; Dr d’Harcourt added that mental and nerve complaints constituted a much more serious issue than any other affliction.²⁷

Sound familiar? Can anyone see a similarity with what has happened and is still going on in Europe recently? True, the personnel these days come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan or various other countries racked by war. Strip the colour out of the stills and videos, and the difference between them and those who were fleeing from another country at war – Spain – is not so great: maybe the only difference being that the little Spanish girls and boys had no need to traverse a sea and drown there. Moreover, the fear and the humiliation, the sexual predation, thievery and all the blights attendant upon forced exile are still rampant.

One sometimes hears the plea that the Popular Front government in France had been expecting about 50,000 refugees to cross the Pyrenees and was wholly swamped by a massive influx ten times that size. Unfortunately, and to the shame of that neighbouring country, it needs to be borne in mind that, one year on, due to the Nazi invasion of the Low Countries, the floods of people fleeing from the war far exceeded the numbers of the Spanish refugees. It is estimated that around three million inhabitants, mostly from Belgium, but also partly from Holland flooded in; luckily for them, they met with a very different reception. The more recent masses were welcomed in France but instead of being transferred to the “welcome camps” in which the outcasts from red Spain, or, as the French sneeringly referred to them, “be-sandalled army” had been interned, lots of premises were commandeered and converted to shelters for them; naturally, I do not at all see that as a bad thing as logic dictates that it is all for the better if the refugee can be afforded a minimal level of dignified treatment. What I cannot fathom, is that there was no place and no resources for the half million male and female red fugitives from fascism and that shortly after that some three million people from Europe, also fleeing fascism, could be placed and treated decently. Or can the far side of the Pyrenees still be regarded as

²⁷ *Los vencidos y el exilio*, p,238, Eduardo Pons Prades, Circulo de lectores, Barcelona 1989

part of Africa and was the fascism there less scary? Or maybe the folk from Belgium and Holland lacked the horns and tails associated with the demons from republican Spain?

Fortunately, Manolo was spared the camps²⁸, since he had until very recently been hauling kids and national treasures and was aware that the welcome on offer was not that warm. And he, above all else a survivor, managed to put some miles between the border and the gendarmes and himself.

Allow us a short aside here to point out that the French police had drawn up a list of foreigners to be kept under close surveillance and it included Manolo's name among a heap of other anarchists and of him it stated: "Huet Piera (Manuel), born Valencia 1908, son of Manuel and Maria Piera, labourer, of Spanish nationality. Anarchist belonging to a FAI action group. Arrested for armed robbery in Barcelona."²⁹

Huet was accompanied by his pal José Vidal Coma aka *Vidalet* and after slipping through multiple checkpoints set up by the gendarmerie, given the issues with refugees, they made it as far as Perpignan. There one of the first things they did was to drop in on the premises of the SIA (International Antifascist Solidarity). There they were handed a small sum of money so that they could leave the area that posed problems for the undocumented, essentially the Pyrenean area and adjacent departments. The newspaper published by that organization carried a notice from Manolo and Francisco García asking for news or contact details for Huet's brother, José and his son, also called José.³⁰

Over to Manolo for his own account of his meanderings on French soil at the time:

"We moved to Bordeaux and, from there, after a few days, we headed for Paris where we then placed ourselves at the disposal of the CNT National Committee, then headed by Mariano R. Vázquez aka *Marianet* (the visit was also used to make contact with Robert Terres). In order to organize and facilitate the exit from France of our most compromised comrades, our friends were dispatched to several Mediterranean ports and Sète in the Hérault department was allocated to me [seemingly Huet's involvement in smuggling folk out by sea routes started much earlier than we had thought]. I was there when war was declared and before the end of September 1939 I and other comrades tried to enlist in the French army. We underwent medical inspection in Montpellier and then were told that they had not yet received any specific instructions regarding Spanish refugees other than to steer us in the direction of the Foreign Legion. We refused to sign on with that unit and were left twiddling our thumbs. We soon came by the papers we needed to escape the clutches of the gendarmerie who were rounding up refugees everywhere in order to place them in concentration camps. Even though we were at the disposal of the military, we were permitted to assist with the grape harvest, which we did, in a little village near Béziers. There, after much pleading, we got the mayor to secure us a work permit and an identity card, which is to say, a residence permit valid for three months, renewable upon expiry. So we now had two sets of papers: military and civilian. And along came the armistice [22 June 1940] – still we had had no word from the military, by the way – which was signed while we were in Sète, giving a helping hand to the local fishermen, because if one wants to use the open seas for anything other than fishing, it is better to have good friends among those who work on them."³¹

Once settled in Sète, the two friends were joined by another former member of the transport battalion, Joaquín Blesa. A further destabilizing factor would soon come into play, making life that much more difficult

²⁸ Should any of our readers, of whichever sex, wish to be awkward and learn more about what went on the camps, here are a few recommendations: *El éxodo. Pasión y muerte de españoles en el exilio* by Federica Montseny, Galba Ediciones, Barcelona 1977; *La diáspora republicana* by Avel·lí Artís-Gener, Editorial Euros, Barcelona 1975; *Trescientos hombres y yo*, Anda Delso, FAL, 1998; *El inmenso placer de mater un gendarme* by Santiago Blanco, Cuadernos para el diálogo, Madrid 1977; and *Los vencidos y el exilio*, Eduardo Pons Prades, Circulo de Lectores, Barcelona 1989.

²⁹ Isère Departmental Archives (Grenoble), Catalogue series M, a document referring to foreign anarchists. "Foreigners to be kept under close surveillance". April 1939.

³⁰ *Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista*, 2nd year, No 18 16-3-1939

³¹ *Republicanos españoles en la Segunda Guerra mundial*, pp. 323-324, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona 1975

and hazardous for republican exiles in France. On 14 May 1940, Third Reich troops crossed the French border: within 40 days they had overwhelmed any opposition from the supposedly mighty French army. With France now split into two zones (the occupied zone governed by the Germans and covering the north and west of the country, from Hendaye as far as the Swiss border; and the so-called 'free' zone run by Marshal Pétain and his far right militias, with its capital in Vichy, occupying the centre and south of the country), Manolo and Josep Vidal were arrested in a huge round-up carried out in Sète by the police in September that year. The outcome was to be very different for the two friends: on the one hand, *Vidalet* was to be shipped off to the Le Vernet concentration camp in the Ariège, finishing up later in the Djelfa camp in Algeria. Whereas Huet was to be luckier in that, possessing a valid work contract, he came through the ordeal without undue upset.

Manuel had only recently been hired as a mechanic with a Greek-owned, Panamanian-flagged motor-boat by the name of the *Dora*: that boat was anchored in the French port of Sète. His mechanic's job would last our subject up until early 1941 and, as one might imagine, over that time he got up to a lot more things in addition to sorting out malfunctions on the *Dora*.

The *Dora* might be said to have lived in that port as she had been moored there for some time and had even been on the verge of being scrapped. Her crew comprised of the Greek-born Captain Adriana, an Italian by the name of Montecorvo as mate and a huge Turk who acted as stoker, plus two Greek seamen, an Egyptian one and two Cypriot cabin boys. The latter held Huet in high esteem as he ensured that an end was put to the physical abuse visited upon them and he got the rest of the crew to share meals with them. In addition to them, Manolo Huet, as chief mechanic, took some members on his team on as crew; these included Joaquín Blesa aka *Quimet* as cook, he being passed off as Segunda Montero's brother (they had both been hired together and *Quimet* was clueless when it came to cooking and Segunda had to advise him). Segunda Montero aka *Conxita* was hired on as attendant and hairdresser for the captain's wife. And finally there was Santiago Llorda who, in addition to being a cabinet-maker, served as assistant mechanic, although he subsequently was not along on the trip that they were about to embark upon.

On-board preparations plus the hiring of fresh crew hinted that the ship was about to weigh anchor. At the beginning of October 1940 "the passengers" started to arrive – a large number of mature men, generally with their wives in tow and drawn from the diamond-cutters' union in Antwerp; some had briefcases cuffed to their wrists and others resembled walking jewellery displays; every one of them was Jewish. Once the diamond-cutters were on board, the *Dora* waited until nightfall before putting out to sea and hugging the coastline. The reason for this soon became clear when, following some flashing lights signalling from shore, the captain ordered the engines to stop. Once the boat had come to halt and dropped anchor a motor launch approached, dashing up to transfer a large number of suitcases to the *Dora*, suitcases that the diamond-cutters had chosen to keep far from prying eyes in the port of Sète. Thanks to *el Padre's* reports we know that one of the heads of the Marseilles mafia, a fellow by the name of Carbone, had acted as go-between, connecting with the vessel's owners to ensure a passage for the diamond-cutters. And it was also Carbone who rented hotel rooms and bribed the police and customs officers (French and German alike), all on the instructions of the entrepreneur, jewel-dealer, Nazi collaborating Jew Michel Szkolnikoff, of whom more later.

Paul Bonnaventure Carbone was born on the illustrious island of Corsica in 1894. From what the comrades from the CIRA (International Centre for Research on Anarchism) in Marseilles told us, he had flirted with socialism in his younger day. But as is well known, the other mafia family in the area – the Guerrinis – lined up behind the socialists whereas Carbone and his partner François Spirito decided to espouse a more right-wing stance; to be more specific they aligned with the far right. Come the Second World War, each family stood its ground, the Guerrinis joining the resistance whilst Carbone and Spirito collaborated with the Germans, not that that was any obstacle to both families' continuing to smuggle in heroin. Their arrangement with the French state specifically required that the heroin could not be retained in France. Here the historian Alfred McCoy tells how the French fascists made use of the thugs controlled by Carbone and Spirito and other Corsican mafiosi in combatting left-wing demonstrators throughout the 1930s and how, later, it was the Gestapo that used them to spy on resistance networks. Unfortunately for Carbone, it seems that in 1943, the resistance blew up the train in which he was travelling and his trip and his business came to an end right there. Meanwhile, seeing what way the wind was blowing, Spirito opted for exile in Spain. How strange, right? Later on, the next clients of the

Corsicans, once the collaborationist mafiosi were out of the way, were the gringos from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) who hired them in the late 1940s to break communist strikes. It was this latter association that prompted the Corsicans to turn Marseilles into the western hemisphere's heroin capital in what was to prove a lengthy and prosperous association. But back to our story.

Having made it clear how the owners of the *Dora* and the diamond-cutters came into contact with one another, let us see Manolo's thoughts on the subject:

"I was taken aback that he [the ship's owner] should have been so influential as to rescue me from the clutches of the police. Later, once I witnessed what sort of passengers the *Dora* was waiting for, I understood the situation and the reason for my good fortune in that specific context."³²

If these thoughts are to be credited, it looks as if Manolo was arrested along with *Vidalet*. Not merely arrested, but also held, and it looks as if everything was only sorted out thanks to the intervention of the *Dora's* owners and, naturally, the good will of those who had hired their services.

For the night on two months that it took for the trip from Sète to Lisbon, the *Dora* left the shores of France behind; the engine broke down near Cabo de Palos and, there being no wind at all, they were marooned mid-sea for several days in a row. The break-down led the diamond-cutters to think that they were about to be asked for more money or even that they were about to be dumped in the middle of the Mediterranean. In fact, Huet had had suggestions from captain, diamond-cutters and even the Turkish stoker as to how he should restore power to the vessel but he flatly rejected them all. Huet fixed the engine and the *Dora* was able to sail on. As she passed Gibraltar, there was an unexpected development and the ship was held there for several days as they had no 'Navicert' (a sort of shipping passport issued by the British).

The Spanish crew's nerves were on edge over that time due to the unwanted proximity of the Civil Guard to Gibraltar. In the end, the motorboat set off for Casablanca, in which port there was a replay of its unwanted stop-over at the Rock, albeit that this time it lasted only two days. There was supposed to be an American vessel waiting to collect the diamond-cutters and carry them on to the United States, but the ship never arrived. The next stop was Lisbon and the diamond-cutters were very much on edge; they finally made it to the port a few days later and the "passengers" were able to find a ship, the Canadian-flagged *Galatea* to ferry them and their luggage across the Atlantic. During that final stage of the trip and as they sailed across the Atlantic, the youngest of the diamond-cutters, who spoke very good Spanish and had had a few conversations with Huet, handed him a box of shoes. The gift was by way of payment for the decent way in which the Spaniards had treated them and was intended to buy their protection until final arrival in Lisbon. The box in question contained a dozen chamois leather purses filled with 20-dollar gold coins which they all agreed to set aside for "organizational" expenses. During their stay in Lisbon, 'el Murciano' quit the *Dora*, intending to sign on with the British Royal Air Force. Huet still carried his Spanish Air Force credentials, identifying him as a flying-boat mechanic. Questioned about this, Manolo's response was: "Not that I would be overly keen to serve under the colours of the British, because we hold that they bear the main responsibility for the republic's defeat in our war. But, for me, the essential point is that we carry on fighting fascists, wheresoever they be."³³ Although treated very well at the British Embassy, his application was ignored and so Manolo rejoined the crew of the *Dora*. Once back in the shipboard routine, Huet one night bumped into a former officer of the republican army in the port of Lisbon, one that was posing as a mute vagabond, sleeping on the streets; as it was biting chilly, he gave him a blanket, escorted him on board and left him to sleep in one of the life-boats. Days after that, as they sailed off and with the connivance of *Conxita* and *Quimet*, the man became the ship's first Spanish stowaway He would not be the last.

The ship set sail again for Sète where they arrived in mid-December without major upset. Huet's contract as an on-board crewman on the *Dora* as long as she was at sea or anchored in the port ensured that the gendarmes

³² *Republicanos españoles en la Segunda Guerra mundial*, p. 324. Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1975

³³ *Exiliados: La emigración cultural valenciana (siglo XVI-XX)* p, 279. Various authors (Published by Manuel García), Generalitat Valenciana, Department of Culture, Valencia, 1995.

stayed away from Huet and his comrades; the French police were still at their dirty tricks, hounding Spanish republicans across the length and breadth of France's 'free' zone.

A few days after the return of the *Dora* following the diamond-cutters' trip, news reached them that a half a dozen Spanish refugees, fleeing from a train delivering them back to Spain, were roaming the area and dodging the gendarmerie. It just so happened that this information came from the former officer who had stowed away on the *Dora* before finding a job in the port shortly after coming ashore. Contact was established with the fugitives through *Conxita*. They were supplied with food and later hidden in a small house rented on the Corniche district of the port and two women and three children stayed there whilst the menfolk remained on the ship. Both the house and the bunks on board the *Dora* were from then on constant refuges and shrines for runaway or undocumented Spaniards. An added complication was the efficacy of the gendarmes and Manolo was at a loss in explaining how, during that period, and right into the autumn, they were not caught red-handed.

The *Dora* remained at anchor in the port of Sète up until the autumn of 1942, at which point the Germans overran the south of France which had hitherto been under the control of the collaborationist Vichy government.

Chapter 8

The Escape Lines and the Maritime Antenna

In late August 1940, Manolo had a meeting with Robert Terres in Toulouse. They were to set about recruiting comrades, including Joaquín Blesa, whom we mentioned regarding the trip on the *Dora*, or Jaime Collado; both were former members of the Durruti Column and conversant with a number of mountain trails. To begin with, cash came from the diamond-cutters' gold; the phoney papers and weapons were a matter for '*el Padre*'. They began ferreting out and searching for cross-border trails, setting up temporary shelters for people on the run and shortly after that the Antenne Maritime (Maritime Network) was launched. Initially they sought to operate as a link in the chain of the *Sabot*³⁴ network set up by the Belgians, even though they remained at all times under Terres's command. That network was initially devoted exclusively to intelligence-gathering, but gradually it turned its attention also to smuggling out persons wanted by the Nazis. The *Sabot* network petered out in 1943 due to infiltration by the German spy Adolphe Manet, which triggered a rush of seizures and arrests. Oddly enough, the man who had staked all on him was Paco Ponzán who was usually so cautious and not used to misreading people: and this mistake had dire consequences for the Belgian escape line.

The 'family' was growing. Juan Zafón and his partner Lucía Rueda aka *Patro* showed up and joined the network in the summer of 1941, and the young Valencian woman Segunda Montero aka *Conxita*, who had also served as crew on the *Dora*, was to become its chief liaison. All three did sterling work for the network. But let us hear from Lucía Rueda herself:

"*Conxita's* main task was to liaise between Sète and Toulouse. I knew her very well as it had fallen to us to operate together quite a few times, especially when it came to picking up runaways. This sometimes happened within metres of the Demarcation Line and we would escort them as far as Toulouse, Sète, Marseilles or Perpignan. Our ability to move around without undue upset was greatly assisted by our access to good papers very much in good order. Our youth and likability were a help to us. We needed all of that and a lot more, because on occasion the runaways got us into difficulties.

On a number of occasions it fell to us to escort aviators – British, most of them – something for which Britain rewarded us with four highly praiseworthy certificates, but the fact was that they carried on with their support for Franco, just as they had throughout our war."³⁵

Recruitment continued and now it was José Ferrer aka *Popeye*, who would handle liaison efforts for the network. *Popeye* could be found making weekly border-crossings, especially during the first few years of the world war. Manolo highlighted his commitment and professionalism. He was later to resurface in Barcelona in charge of the defence groups there in the latter half of the 1940s.

Another member of the team was Joaquín Gastón San Vicente. A native of Agüero (in Huesca) and a former carabineer, he was subsequently to be arrested and murdered by the Anti-Marxist Squad led by the notorious Manuel Brabo Montero. The latter was a captain in the Civil Guard and the son of another notorious figure, the renowned anti-anarchist Manuel Brabo Portillo, who would end up murdered by libertarians. Twenty years later, Huet was looking for revenge for the loss of Gastón as he searched for a way to assassinate the former Civil Guard. Let us digress somewhat here in order to delve into the life and death of Joaquín Gastón, because a few years back an interesting book was published regarding his murder and it has some interesting detail to offer us.

Joaquín Gastón San Vicente was born on 21 October 1906 in the San Felices neighbourhood, part of the little town of Agüero in Huesca, the son of Eusebio and Rafaela, he was the second born of two sons and three sisters. In the late 1920s he moved away to Sabiñánigo but apparently was obliged to leave that area following the turbulent strike in 1932 which featured a succession of acts of violence. The next reports we have of him place him in Perpignan and then in Marseilles where he was to learn French, something that was to stand him

³⁴ *Sabot*. Another of the escape lines operating in Europe during the Second World War. Organized by the Belgian secret service and under the command of Pierre Bourriez aka *Sabot*. Both Huet and Ponzán collaborated actively with that network.

³⁵ *Los senderos de la libertad*, p.207, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

in good stead shortly thereafter. Although he tried his hand at various jobs, he was a mechanic by trade. In 1935 he could be found in North Africa, spending some time in Algeria and later, Tunis. Back in the peninsula by 1936, once the civil war broke out he fought under the colours of the republic. If we are to believe what it says in *La muerte del espía con bragas* (the book we mentioned just now) it looks as if he initially served with the CNT militias, before moving on to the 7th Motorized Transport Battalion, where he ran into Manolo Huet; in fact, he was under Huet's command. If he did indeed spend time with the Transport Battalion, it was between 10 January 1937 and early October the same year, or else, having graduated from the military academy up until the end of the civil war. We do know that from 8 October 1937 until 2 July 1938, he served as a carabineer with the 38th Battalion of the 222nd Mixed Brigade, before applying for admission to the Popular Army's Military Academy.

Once the civil war was over, Joaquín crossed into France as part of the republican retreat and we do not know precisely when he joined the escape line or started working as the libertarian organization's liaison. We know that during his stay in Sabañáñigo he had become personally acquainted with Francisco Ponzán, but we have not been able to establish if it was Paco who recruited him or if Manolo Huet recruited him later, by which time he was in Sète. On the basis of the dates, we incline towards the latter option. Remember that up until September 1940 Terres and Huet had not met up to start helping people escape by sea. Maybe it was Ponzán's people that first made contact with him, as we know that Joaquín Gastón was working for MI9, British counter-espionage, as were Ponzán's people also. Even as Huet's group was working for Terres's French set-up and the Belgian *Sabot* network up until the summer of 1941 at which point both Paco and Manolo met each other in Toulouse. Bearing in mind that the British pulled out of France following the collapse of the French army in June 1940 and transferred their contacts to the Deuxième Bureau (the French secret services), we can be almost certain that it was Ponzán, or one of his men (quite a number of whom were from Huesca like Joaquín was) that recruited him into their network.

Joaquín specialized in acting as go-between rather than as a guide, meaning that he primarily passed information between Barcelona and Perpignan. Familiar with the border and speaking good Catalan, Spanish and French, his normal crossing route was through the La Junquera area and the intelligence that he normally carried was delivered in the form of coded and microfilmed documents concealed inside dummy cigarettes. According to the testimony of his brother Eusebio, a member of the Francoist Policía Armada, who also crops up in the book cited above, Joaquín was "officially" working as a forestry worker in a forest near the border and had set up home in Figueras, which was a considerable help in his toing and fro'ing.

What we do know about Joaquín Gastón is that, apparently from late 1942 or following his arrest in La Junquera in March 1943 for irregular border crossings, he was to wind up an informer for the Francoist General Security Directorate (DGS). That did not stop him from passing intelligence on to the British, nor from working with libertarian networks, which makes him a double agent (or, in the jargon of the secret services a 'W'). Thus, when he arrived in Barcelona, some of his dispatches were sent off to Madrid to be photographed, before being returned and then passed on to the British. And it must be conceded too that back in those turbulent times people did whatever they could. Another libertarian informer, on a broader scale, the notorious Eliseo Melis, was working for the Brigada Político-Social. But in return for certain information, not always accurate, he was a reliable agent for the Ponzán network, as we shall see anon. Yes, it turned to him in relation to matters or cases of huge significance, but he was completely sound. So it is hard to know what Joaquín Gastón was peddling and what he was silent about. We also know that from February 1943 onwards the police had issued him with a pass allowing him to transit through border districts and a phoney passport to spare him potential problems. Unfortunately for both these informants, they met with similar fates as both were executed: Gastón was killed by Falangists from the Anti-Marxist Squad on 1 October 1943 in Argenton, killed by blows that shattered his skull after he attempted to escape. Melis was gunned down on the streets of Barcelona by a libertarian action group on 12 July 1947. The fact is that in late 1942 and early 1943 the *Pat O'Leary* network was hit by successive waves of arrests because not only was Joaquín Gastón acting against it but there were at least a further two infiltrators operating at a level within the organization far higher than any that he reached. The *Pat O'Leary* was one of the most important escape lines operating in France under the occupation; it was set up and funded by the British secret services.

Gastón was arrested on 27 September 1943 by veteran Falangist Pedro Sáez at a club on the Calle Muntaner on the outskirts of Biarritz. He was taken to the District IX Falange headquarters on the Calle Valencia where he was to more held hostage than remanded until early morning on 1 October. By the way, it should be said that the Falangists that killed him – Pedro Sáez Capel and Augusto Fernández Fuster – had stripped his body and dressed him in some knickers, the aim being to pass the matter off as a murder linked to homosexual circles, by way of diverting attention. Unfortunately for them, a sloppy search carried out of Gastón left two letters undiscovered and in the ensuing investigation the individuals and positions implicated in the matter and above all, the people for whom Gastón had been working, blew the gaff. We shall see anon how Huet sought to settle scores with Brabo Montero for this killing: because the order to arrest Gastón had come from him, despite warnings, and despite his having recently been set free by the *Segunda Bis*. Brabo Montero also knew from the outset the location from which Gastón had been kidnapped and his failure to act had been one of the crucial factors in the Falangists' subsequent actions.

Our digression regarding Gastón now complete, let us press on with the escape line. Using their own funds and what '*el Padre*' was supplying to them, they were bribing customs officers, harbour police and later on, gendarmes. They settled upon several embarkation points for folk who needed to get out to Spain and among these was the beach and the port in Canet near Perpignan, the very same location as had been used during the Civil War for shipments of arms. Other points selected included Port Vendres, Agde and Sète. Once the network started to grow and with the passage of time, the ports of Marseilles and Nice were added to the list. In Canet, an important asset was to be the prestigious Font restaurant run by Antoine Font who was to work with the escape line up until August 1944 and the liberation of the south of France. And down beside the beach in Canet itself the Hotel de Tennis, run by Solange and Fernand Lebreton, was used as safe housing for people awaiting evacuation, as were the nearby Villa Anita or Dr George Rodocanachi's home. In Marseilles we find Louis Nouveau's apartment or the Noailles Hotel being use as safe housing, as was Gaston Negre's home in Nîmes. In Cerbère, they could also call upon the assistance of Vicente Mora. Thanks to an old photograph, we also know about one of Huet's safe houses and the network in Perpignan. The snapshot shows a building located at No 7, Avenue de la Gare there, a two-storey house. As the back of the photograph notes in pencil, a lieutenant from the gendarmerie lived on the ground floor. Upstairs, with an exit via the rear of the building, were Manolo Huet, *Conxita* Montero (there seems to be a blend of the nickname and surname here, as her forename, let us remember, was *Segunda*) and Ángel Soto, recorded as a member of the Poblenou FAI, plus the latter's brother-in-law, identity unknown to me. The last sentence on the back of the snapshot gives the game away ... That this was a channel of the *Pat O'Leary* escape line!

Over the summer of 1941, Huet and '*Conxita*' travelled down to Toulouse to see the latter's brother; I do not know if Manolo had other brothers, so, until such time as something to the contrary surfaces, let us stick to José. As a result of the trip, Manuel made contact with Francisco Ponzán, the effective head of the last link in the chain of the important *Pat O'Leary* escape line. According to Huet:

"I made Francisco Ponzán's acquaintance at the beginning of the summer of 1941 in Toulouse, through the good offices of comrades from our organization (the CNT). On finding out that I was living in a sea port, he accosted me and asked me lots of questions and suggested to me that we might collaborate with his group. I found out later that prior to getting in touch with me he had asked the organization for 'my file'. Because, given the circumstances, one could not be too careful, of course."³⁶

Neither Ponzán nor Huet trusted the British, although they did work with them and they tried to exploit both the funding and the infrastructure in what was at that time a common struggle. As Huet put it:

"With those guys [a reference to the Allies] one had to be very careful and, in the case of the British, so far and no further. We should not forget what they did to us during our war ..."³⁷

Another name that we are going to add to the record is that of Floreal Barberá. Once Manolo and Paco got to know each other, what the new line was going to be was defined in Floreal's Toulouse home where they gathered in order to deal with the establishment of it, security precautions and other matters relating to the

³⁶ *Tiempo de Historia* No 24, p.33 1976. *Las cadenas de evasión españolas*, Eduardo Pons Prades

³⁷ *Los senderos de la Libertad*, p. 101, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de viento Ediciones, Barcelona 2002

Maritime Antenna. Barberá was a staunch member of the Ponzán network, albeit that not much has been said about him: his home was a safe house, a refuge for escapers and where propaganda or travel documents could be printed up either in French or in Spanish. In fact, he was one of the few to know about the 'Villa Tallada' in Banyuls or Pedro Mora. And he even served some time in jail with Paco Ponzán when the latter suffered his final arrest. Another recruit was Juan Sangüesa aka '*el Navarro*' who cooperated regularly with Manolo and Juan Zafón as part of the antenna; at present I have no more information about him.

After gauging Huet as useful, Paco entrusted him with two specific tasks: 1 – Handling a significant sum of money to be used in the purchase of a motor-boat with a capacity for 20 or 30 people: the boat had to be capable of putting out beyond the Cap de Creus and ferrying its passengers as far as the coast of Catalonia or Valencia. With regard to this mission, they toyed for a time with the idea of buying the *Dora* and turning it into a fruit ship and turning it over to rescue missions. Apparently, it was complications regarding legal registration of the boat that prompted them to give up on that idea. 2. – Making preparations to make an illegal excursion into Spain for the aim of travelling to Barcelona and Valencia. The intention was to put in at the ports of both cities and make contact with officers from the various fruit-carrying motor boats that visited French Mediterranean ports, in order to ensure clandestine delivery of escapers through the payment of an agreed fee. Usually, the tariff stood at around 5,000 pesetas per transported individual; 2,000 of that money was spent on bribes for policemen, military or duty customs officers, and the remaining 3,000 were for the fruit boat in question. The numbers of people smuggled out on such trips oscillated between 30 and 75. All of this was intended to ease the backlog in overland passages. They had to tread carefully because the Gestapo and Vichy's goons had a bee in their bonnets. Just when they had located a suitable vessel and were negotiating, along came the Rue Limayrac shambles, in which one of the network's mainstays was exposed. That significant set-back left the Maritime Antenna cut off from Ponzán's people and it was at that precise point that up popped "*Gilbert*" to carry on with the work on behalf of '*el Padre*', pending the re-establishment of the connection.

A short time after that Huet travelled to Andorra to handle smuggling arrangements into Spain and began to dole out fees and bonuses to deserving souls to ensure the smooth operation of the escape network. Both Ponzán and he bribed and paid off policemen, customs officials, port inspectors or whatever. The usual form of payment was in hard cash but gifts such as Cuban cigars that '*el Murciano*' obtained from Andorra also went down well.

Huet had this to say of it:

"Via Andorra I made my first clandestine trip into Spain, with a briefcase well packed with whatever bribes it might take to pave my way. The fact is that from that trip onwards, I managed to befriend a border guard in La Seo de Urgel and, thanks to a few friends in the principality, I was able to ensure that he took delivery of a splendid gift for the future wife of a son of his whose wedding was approaching. That friendship proved very useful for me later. You can see the sort of little touches it took to resolve ticklish problems, with just a request. Remember, it was thanks to me that *you* made it into Spain [he was talking about his friend Pons Prades] in 1945, on your second clandestine trip ..."³⁸

With the Maritime Antenna up and running, the next recruit would be the Frenchman Gerard Vogel aka '*el Rubio*' or '*Gilbert*', a direct envoy from '*el Padre*'; he was to serve as the link between Terres and the Maritime Antenna. Vogel's father-in-law, Picard (and here again there are two versions on offer: the first has Vogel as the son of the civil servant Picard, whereas a different version has him, not as his son, but as his son-in-law) who was a high-ranking police officer in the city of Pau, from where he was to rescue him from one than one tight spot involving the gendarmerie or the Vichy milice. As the months went by and the adventures stacked up, Vogel was to become a great pal of Manolo's. Moreover, he was trustworthy under the direct command of Terres and also already part of the underground sector of the French secret services that was working directly for the resistance. '*Gilbert*' arrived in Sete in the wake of the Rue Limayrac incident and the breakdown that it entailed between the Maritime Antenna and the rest of the network. He also introduced some improvements: from then on, the antenna was to be organized from within, so that it might escape attention. A hard core

³⁸ *Los senderos de la Libertad*, p.101, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

relocated to Pezenas, between Narbonne and Montpellier. Juan Zafón and Lucía Ruedo were living in that city: from then on more significance was to be credited to that location as an organizational hub, as far as go-betweens were concerned, as well as in terms of somewhere for those on the run to rest up. Others who worked regularly and closely with the Maritime Antenna were the libertarians Gregorio Jordán and Francisco Pérez Ruano. Gregorio was from Aragon and he had been resident in Barcelona up until the civil war and he was also one of the few people in the know about the Banyuls base. For his part, Francisco Pérez would later make his name in the resistance in the Lot-et-Garonne department and Antonina Rodrigo vouched for his being a friend and collaborator of Manolo's. Pérez Ruano was also locked up in Toulouse's Saint Michel prison in 1943 where he was a cell-mate of another of the Maritime Antenna's operatives, Floreal Barberá; Paco Ponzán was also a prisoner there at the time. Francisco Pérez settled in the Bordeaux area once the world war was over. Another close collaborator from that time (about whom we have no further details) was Caparrós. Not only did he usually operate with Huet and Segunda Montero during 1942 and 1943, up until they were forced to flee to Vienna, but we find him at Manolo's side in Paris in 1946, at the meeting also attended by Gerard Vogel aka 'el Rubio' and Floreal Barberá. It took me a long time to discover that he was Joan Caparrós, a Catalan CNT member who acted as a courier for the *Pat O'Leary* escape line and the Belgian '*Sabot*' line. Remember that prior to joining the Ponzán group, the Maritime Antenna had worked on and off for the Belgians from the '*Sabot*' line. Finally, we have another unknown figure, a former captain of the Spanish Republican Navy, Germán Roca, who worked with Huet and the Antenna from 1940 onwards, or at any rate up until Manolo and Segunda took off for Austria in mid-1943. Regrettably, I have not yet been able to gather any further details about him.

Thanks to Evelyn Mesquida's book *Y ahora, volved a vuestras casas*, we have a glimpse of a different side of Manolo. In her interviews with Floreal Barberá, the writer reveals that the Ponzán network used to operate through small teams. Moreover, as far as Barberá was concerned, his preferred stomping ground was the Banyuls area. In the course of interview, the people-smuggler told Mesquida that on one occasion they smuggled a sizable group across. By 'sizable' I mean there were almost 30 of them which, given the plan to keep as low a profile as possible, made things a bit difficult. He recalled that very careful painstaking preparations were made and how the network had four guides on hand for the venture. In addition to Floreal Barberá, there was Manolo, regarding whom we had not known that he was also dabbling in overland crossings, and quite possibly Josep Ester who, as we know was living in Banyuls itself. Barbera described Huet as one of their finest guides as well as remarking that he was the one he most admired and whom he deemed his best friend. From which remarks we conclude that this could not have been the only excursion mounted by '*el Murciano*' across the Pyrenees; we may conclude that aside from organizing escapes by sea, weather permitting, he was also smuggling people overland.

It was also at around this time that Manolo put Ponzán's people (and therefore the members of the *Pat O'Leary* line) in touch with an important underground photography laboratory; it was based in the French Midi, more specifically in the city of Carcassonne. Run by the renowned photographer Agustín Centelles Ossó, it had the assistance of a Barcelona photographer by the name of Ferrán Pujol. The lab supplied the 422nd GTE (Foreign Labour Group) which was posted nearby with the papers needed by its clandestines and whatever was required for other issues that arose: they also supplied some of the escape lines, mainly the *Pat O'Leary* line, with Huet acting as the main contact and some resistance groups, as Pons Prades testifies; he was operating in that area. Among other things, the lab produced French as well as German identity documents, *Ausweis* (German passes), certificates for inter-GTE transfers, relocations to various places, transfer orders for concentration camp or prison inmates, Red Cross transfer orders, and papers from the Francoist consulates and vice-consulates around France, plus, of course, the odd touched-up snapshot.

That laboratory worked without mishap up until 20 January 1944, when a huge dragnet operation orchestrated by the Gestapo in Carcassonne wound up with about 500 arrests being made. Several of those arrested held papers from the 422nd GTE. Despite the apparent inactivity on the part of the German forces of repression over the ensuing days, precautions were put in place and the laboratory was dismantled: some of the gear was stashed in crypts in the Saint Michel cemetery, thanks to the cooperation of a pal of Manolo's, a former Barcelona taxi driver like himself who was working there as a foreman. It needs to be said that those precautions bore fruit. Centelles successfully crossed into Andorra that April with the Cantabrian guide

Marcelino Pérez aka *Comprendes*. Apropos of that trip, it should be said that whilst making their way discreetly towards Andorra, trekking through the night without saying a word, they bumped into one of the frequent German border patrols and their ferocious dogs. *Comprendes* was a dab hand in such matters; he went armed solely with a big knife and when the dogs appeared he wrapped a thick woollen muffler that he had wearing around his left arm; next, he waited for the dog to charge, holding out his left arm as bait and, as the hound fastened his jaws on his protected arm, Marcelino used his right hand to plunge his knife into the dog's belly, felling it on the spot. While he was accompanying the photographer, the latter was eye-witness to how the Cantabrian saw off two such dogs before continuing on his way towards the tiny Pyrenean territory (Andorra) without mishap. Before the sun came up, they were in the Ordino guesthouse and by the following night slept in La Seo de Urgell. Shortly after that trip, a further two round-ups mounted on 5 and 20 May delivered a heavy blow to both the 422nd GTE and the resistance groups in the area. A short while later, Marcelino Peña was arrested by the Spanish police: Assumpta Montella in her book *Contrabandistes de la llibertat* dates that as late 1943, but if Pons Prades's dates are correct, the round-up occurred on 20 January 1944 and therefore the trip came after that. *Comprendes* was ferociously questioned and tortured and, among other things, they broke two of his fingers and his subsequent confession led to the arrests of several of his escape line comrades. Sentenced to a 25-year prison term, he died shortly after recovering his much yearned-for freedom.

In the summer of 1942, due to the backlog in crossings and guides shortage due to the large numbers eager to get across the border, Ponzan, Huet and Albert Guérisset aka *Pat O'Leary* met together. In an effort to boost the throughput and step up the sea-borne traffic, at this point the Maritime Antenna switched networks, ceasing its collaboration with the *Sabot* line and it started to work full-time for Paco Ponzán's network. Expeditions were still being organized via Canet-plage and the beach at Miramas near Marseilles. On security grounds, as noted earlier the antenna started to travel overland from Pezenas between Béziers and Montpellier.

On other occasions, rather than fruit company vessels they used British naval vessels for their sea-borne evacuations. During 1942, the *Pat O'Leary* line mounted several operations using Royal Navy vessels; one such vessel was the so-called *Bluebottle 1* operation in which the *HMS Tarana* was used. Eight men were evacuated, among them SOE (Special Operations Executive) agent André Simon or the renowned squadron leader Whitney Willard Straight on the night of 13-14 July from the Saint Pierre beach near Narbonne, their final destination being the port of Gibraltar. *Operation Bluebottle II* took place on the night of 15-16 August from the beach at Canet very close to Perpignan, and again eight men were evacuated, three of them aviators. Again, the vessel was the *HMS Tarana*; on the same night the ship put ashore six SOE agents on the beach at Agde.

Operation Titania was mounted on the night of 21-22 September; instead of the British vessel *Tarana* the Polish vessel *Seawolf*, also based in Gibraltar, was used. Again, the beach selected was Canet and this time the evacuees numbered 22; four batches were formed, leaving at intervals of 15 minutes after 23.30 and they included five pilots who had escaped from the La Revère fortress on 23 August, five members of the *Pat O'Leary* line, including André Postel-Vinay, Paula Spriewald and Francis Blanchain. Colonel Val Williams, one of the men in charge of laying the groundwork for the escapes from La Revère should be mentioned, together with three Canadian commandos captured in Dieppe and Colonel Pierre Fourcaud, in addition to several SOE agents.

Operation Rosalind was mounted on the night of 11-12 October and again the *Seawolf* was the vessel used and Canet the beach selected. The evacuees on this occasion numbered 32 and prominent among them were several escapees from the La Revère fortress or one of the *Pat O'Leary* line personnel parish priest Josef Myrda (who had facilitated the escape from that fortress). We also know of the trajectory of one of the men involved in this evacuation, Sergeant Geoffrey Robinson, an aviator from 149 Squadron based in Barnsley, Yorkshire. He had been shot down over Belgium and was subsequently taken under the wing of the *Pat O'Leary* line. There followed a roundabout trip to the Mediterranean. Among the places he passed through were Lille, Paris, Libourne or Bergerac before he eventually reached Marseilles. There they secured him phoney papers and he was escorted on his train journey to Perpignan; we cannot tell whether his escort was Segunda Montero or Lucía Rueda. He was then brought to Canet-Plage where they hid him in a bungalow until the night appointed for collection by the *Seawolf*.

On operations mounted using either British naval vessels or in conjunction with Polish allies, they listened in on the BBC, waiting for the coded phrase: that same night they would load the fugitives from the pre-agreed beaches.

In the latter two operations – *Titania* and *Rosalind* – the would-be evacuees hid out in the hotel and bungalows run by Solange and by her husband, Fernand Lebreton. A stone plaque on the approach to Canet-Plage records both names and their roles in the *Pat O'Leary* escape line.

In December 1942 a team of British commandos led by Major Hasler came ashore in the Gironde estuary from the submarine *HMS Tuna*. Using five dinghies (a sixth fell apart as it was leaving the ship) headed for the quays of Bordeaux and Bassens; only two of them made it and they set several mines on a number of ships under German control. The raid on Bassens resulted in the sinking of the *Tannenfels* and the *Portland*, whilst the raid on Bordeaux destroyed the *Cap Hard* oil tanker and the *Dresden* and *Usaramo* cargo vessels. The *Sperbrecher 5* was damaged but not sunk; the operation was a complete success albeit that, between arrests and fatalities, the crews of four of the dinghies were lost. The only ones left were Major Hasler and private Sparks who were staring at a great manhunt mounted by German counter-espionage services across France with Abwehr forces and the Gestapo working hand in glove on this occasion. It took the escapees up until 6 January to make contact with the resistance which passed them on to the '*Marie Claire*' escape line which relocated them to Lyon. Problems with border crossing points meant that the two Britons ended up in Marseilles where the *Pat O'Leary* line took charge of them. Well, actually, taking charge of them requires a little more explanation. For a start, it needs saying that in the hunt for the two British commandos, the two German counter-espionage agencies worked in tandem with each other, which was unprecedented in France and in the end they wound up capturing several contacts from the '*Marie Claire*' network. That, together with the border crossings issues, resulted in a team from the *Pat O'Leary* going to collect them from the Marseilles docks area. And the team in question? None other than *Patro*, *Conxita* and Huet. But over to Manolo:

"It wasn't easy as we had to fall back on the little disreputable – and cheap – hotels in the port of Marseilles. Some of those establishments had been familiar to me from as far back as the war in Spain. You could run into dealers in small arms there, which is what we were interested in. Later we made it our business to strike up relationships with customs officials whom we had previously slipped bribes to afford us free passage and allow us to board fugitives on Valencia fruit-carrying motorboats returning empty to Valencia. And then one of them put us in touch with one of his comrades who was involved in the French resistance. From him we learnt that the two survivors were in his care and that they had even tried to make radio contact with London, in order to secure a sea passage on board an allied submarine. But that that plan had fallen through."³⁹

So, a little while later, through contact with the resistance, the two members of the British commandos were first picked up and collected and then escorted to safety by Lucía and Segunda. In an effort to go unnoticed, they were brought to Sète; here we hand over to the testimony of Lucía Rueda, one of the women tasked with their travel arrangements and, it seems, with finding them bearable:

"Yes, the fact is that both *Conxa* and I have rather unpleasant memories of them, these two survivors from the famed '*Operation Nut-Cracker*' [the operation's proper name was *Frankton*, and the *Nut-Cracker* title was devised by Lucas Phillips who used the title for his book on the subject]. Especially one of them, I believe he was a captain [the reference is to Major Hasler], a pompous and unlikeable sort. We went down to Marseilles to pick them up, taking greater than normal risks, as they were shabbily dressed and their papers were worse. It was obvious from a mile away that they were no sons of the French Midi. The truth is that I was scared by their aspect. I was afraid that we might be called upon to halt right there in the middle of Marseilles and that this might be our last trip ever. In view of the captain's pomposity, *Conxita* even hinted to me that we should make ourselves scarce and let her mother look after them. ... Well, we completed the trip with them without the slightest hitch. Luck was on our side. Yes, because that very day, on the train, there were more checkpoints than

³⁹ *Los montañeros de la libertad, 1936-1944*, pp. 16-17. Unpublished text, Eduardo Pons Prades.

usual, forcing us to switch carriage several times. In Sète, they were issued with fresh clothing and papers and then we escorted them as far as Toulouse.”⁴⁰

They were subsequently brought to Perpignan where they were picked up by the guides who escorted them over the border and finally as far as Barcelona. It seems like Major Hasler’s personality carried on stirring up problems for Ponzán’s people-smugglers as well, who were on the brink of leaving them to their own devices up in the Pyrenees. Years later, Hasler wrote a book giving his version of events, expressing not one word of gratitude to the women and the guides who had essentially saved his life and private Sparks’s life.

Then again, and this is something normally not mentioned, in addition to moving people around the Ponzán network was embedded with the resistance and hid a direct connection to London as it was working for the British. Once it saw the benefits on offer, Great Britain began to arm and support a variety of groups that toed De Gaulle’s line, but, above all, the ones that had a more direct connection, such as the *Pat O’Leary* line, which, if we recall, was working for the War Office. Here we have the testimony of Alfonsina Bueno, an active member of that network, operating out of the seaside town of Banyuls, like other members of her family:

“Another task we had to handle, under cover of darkness, of course, was swimming out to sea, sometimes for a real distance, from Banyuls or at other times from Cerbère or Port Vendres, and bear in mind that the seas off Banyuls can be dangerous because of the abrupt falling away of the shelf; our task was to swim out and retrieve packages dropped by parachute. Occasionally these contained food but what we almost always found in them was weapons and our Angelina swam alongside me like a frog. I can still see her so kind and so tiny in her bathing suit. But Banyuls was such a small place that our activities and way of life were too obvious signs that something out of the ordinary was going on in regarding ourselves and the precious premises we were living in. By which point we were compromised.”⁴¹

In March 1943 a dangerous encounter was to cause the network serious problems. A young Belgian married couple, heedless of the organization’s advice, decided to venture out of the La Corniche fisherman’s district in Sète and popped into the city centre. Shortly after that they were arrested by the Gestapo who did not have much difficulty getting them to talk. Luckily for the Maritime Antenna, the Belgian exiles had not been processed through the safehouse in Pezenas and were therefore in no position to blow its cover, the way they had with the safehouse in La Corniche, where the Germans showed up shortly afterwards. In spite of everything, luck was on their side, because when the German troops arrived on the spot, there was no one else awaiting evacuation from the house and no papers or weapons that might raise suspicion. The only person there was *Conxita*. Despite her being so young, once Segunda Montero realized that they had not stumbled upon anything compromising, she intervened, begging the officer to please not hand her over to the French. She was an undocumented refugee and unfortunately the undocumented normally had the misfortune to be repatriated and handed over to the Spanish authorities. Her gambit worked and shortly after that the Germans handed over the refugee girl, paperless, to the French and as a first step the latter shipped her off to prison in Montpellier.

Meanwhile Manolo, completely oblivious to this series of events, was blithely making his way home to the recently raided safehouse. Here again, fortune smiled on them. Taking every possible precaution, the local shopkeeper (who had no sympathy at all for the German occupiers and who had been following developments) managed to tip Huet off secretly that he should get offside as fast as he could, which was about to spare him an assured rough time, or maybe worse.

Once safe, Manolo gathered together his group and they assessed the damage. They had lost the Belgian refugees but, miraculously, Segunda was the only member of the organization captured, so anything compromising was relocated and when news came that *Conxita* was in the hands of the French authorities, the resistance machine sprang into action. Huet tipped off ‘*el Padre*’ and the latter contacted the father of ‘*Gilbert*’ and the latter, availing of his high position at the Prefecture in the Basses Pyrénées department and his useful connections ensured that within a month and a half Segunda was back on the streets. ‘*El Padre*’ was still

⁴⁰ *Los senderos de la libertad*, pp. 207-208, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

⁴¹ Taken from <http://lacntenexilio.blogspot.com/2013/02/alfonsina-bueno-ester.html>

looking out for his own. Just to be on the safe side, Manolo decided to switch theatre of operations. He stayed away from Sète for a while and pursued his seaborne expeditions from rather further away. The locations selected were Marseilles and Nice, up until Segunda was freed, whereupon they both took off for Austria. With a little time still on his hands – two or three months – Huet orchestrated several seaborne outings from the ports along the Côte d’Azur.

Let me just mention, out of curiosity, some of the ploys used in order to minimize the problems faced by the flood of escapers once they reached Spanish soil. Given that the Francoist apparatus was trying to avoid a lot of French people crossing the peninsula just to finish up joining the Gaullist forces in North Africa, the word was sent out that, once over the border, they should destroy their identity papers. That done, rather than identifying themselves as French, they were to pose as French Canadians as the latter were less tightly monitored. That worked until the droves of Canadians showing up in the Pyrenees, began to tip off the Spanish police and customs officials. With that initial advantage blown, they started to look into another and the Francoist sent out a circular ordering the arrest of all Frenchmen between the ages of 20 and 40; those being the key years. After that papers were destroyed and any Frenchman, if brazen enough, had to pass for under 20 or over 40 ... Needless to say, this did not always work, because, unfortunately for those on the run, a picture is worth a thousand words, as well as giving away the age of the fugitive.

To complete this chapter I have selected one of the many dubious points raised by Huet, as at the opening of this story, and one of the few which I have been able to clear up. Why was Manolo known as ‘*el Murciano*’ if he came from Valencia? As is often the case, simple questions ought to bring simple answers. But of course, until one has confirmation from someone who knew Manolo in life, or finds a mention in some book, no matter how many possibilities one might be juggling, they are merely suppositions. I shall leave it Pons Prades to answer my query: His *nom de guerre* was always ‘*el Valenciano*’, which nickname was occasionally changed to ‘*el Murciano*’ in order to throw off the French police.⁴² To which allow me to add that once Pons Prades started publishing books mirroring the adventures of his friend and how reserved the latter usually was, he was put down on paper simply as ‘*el Murciano*’. In fact, in the testimonies of both Alfonsina Bueno as Josep Ester, members of the antenna’s Banyuls station, Huet is cited as ‘*Valencianet*’. Over to Alfonsina first of all:

“I ought to state that back in 1941 when my husband was in the Le Vernet concentration camp, Paco Ponzán Vidal was already using me to move weapons for the maquis. Plainly he was testing me: everything went well with *el Valencianet* and even with a priest who was in the network with us.”⁴³

For his part, this is what Josep Ester has to say regarding the *Valenciano* whose trail we are following:

“*El Valencianet*’s ‘sweetheart’ had also been arrested in 1943. I cannot say whether she had learnt, through *el Valencianet*, of Paco’s arrest and where he had been imprisoned. It would come as no surprise to me if she had. The ‘sweetheart’ was dispatched by *Valencianet* to Perpignan to liaise with the Pelipos at the station, where a ‘rendezvous’ took place.”⁴⁴

Bear in mind that the “sweetheart” was Segunda Montero who had actually been arrested in March 1943, whereas Paco’s arrest came that April.

⁴² *Exiliados. La emigración cultural valenciana (Siglos XVI-XX)*, p. 276. Various Authors (Published by Manuel García), Generalitat of Valencia, Cultural Department, Valencia 1995

⁴³ Taken from <http://lacntenelexilio.blogspot.com/2013/02/alfonsina-bueno-ester.html>

⁴⁴ *Notas para Odette? Por si algún día está obligada a defender mi honorabilidad*, Josep Ester Holdings, IISH, Amsterdam

Chapter 9

Paco (Part One)

Allow us to explore the life of Francisco Ponzán Vidal at some length as it is a story worth the telling. Born in the city of Oviedo on 30 March 1911, he moved with his family shortly after that to Huesca which was to be his home-from-home. By the time he turned 12 years of age, his mind was made up that he no longer wanted to assist in the religious practices so fashionable at the time and he refused to go to Mass and the Salesian fathers who ran his school expelled him. Thanks to that he switched schools and among other things that brought him into contact with Ramón Acín who was his art teacher (this was the same Ramón Acín's whose lottery win funded the filming of *Las Hurdes, tierra sin pan* by his chum Luis Buñuel) and who from then on became his friend.

Between Ponzán's father's library and his talks and arguments with his teacher, the libertarian idea took hold and spread like wildfire through his mind and he never let go of it. On the one hand he started to attend the Ateneo Cultural Libertario and on the other he trained to become a teacher but that was brought to an abrupt end when he was 18. Posted as a teacher to the little town of Ipas near Jaca, he suffered his earliest arrests due to the uprising headed there by Captains Fermín Galán Rodríguez and Ángel García Hernández on 12 December 1930 in the city of Jaca; it resulted in both officers facing a summary trial and subsequently being executed.

From then his visits to Aragonese prisons grew more frequent, whether in connection with strikes like the one in Sabañáñigo in 1932 or the revolutionary uprising in December 1933. Franco's revolt in 1936 caught him in Huesca where he was on holiday; and he was forced to flee the city as the fascists took control of it. Three months after that he was in post as Transport and Communications councillor on the Regional Defence Council of Aragon. With the establishment of the Council of Aragon and its subsequent choice of Caspe as its base, his new mission was attached to the Intelligence and Propaganda Under-Secretariat, a department run by his close friend Evaristo Viñuales.

As the war proceeded, issues within the republican camp were on the rise. The Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was gaining ground from the revolution, thanks to all the aid reaching it from Russia. Finally, come May 1937, the situation erupted on to the streets of Barcelona, with two well-defined camps: on the one hand, the CNT and the POUM, supporting the revolution and the militias and, on the other the PCE, the Catalan nationalists, the Generalitat and the central government, out to strip power from the workers' organizations and the Militias Committee, by pressing ahead with militarization and, at Stalin's behest, the reassertion of the government of the Republic. The differences between them led to a shooting war in Barcelona and the libertarians, thanks to the barrio defence committees, gained the upper hand within a few hours in much of the city. In spite of that, and the alarming number of losses, or the dispatching of regular troops to Barcelona, the visible heads of the CNT folded their arms and called for a cease-fire. Among the anarchists was Francisco Ponzán who, after taking part in the clashes, was finally arrested by the communists. Just as they were leading him to his execution, he was rescued at the last moment by a group of comrades. The libertarian upper echelons issued an appeal for calm to the membership, urging an end to the conflict. What was left of the revolution had just been lost and the end of the war was in prospect.

Later, following the revolutionary defeat in Catalonia, the communists turned on the Council of Aragon, ensuring on 11 August 1937 that it was disbanded. Meanwhile, Ponzán managed to get to safety by seeking refuge with the 127th Mixed Brigade, joining the *Libertador* group, a guerrilla unit that habitually operated behind the enemy lines and which included many friends of his. That same month the group began to operate under the aegis of the SIEP (Special Long-Range Intelligence Service), answerable to the intelligence services of the Xth Army Corps; Francisco was made a lieutenant and reported to the high command on behalf of the group.

After the Republic's collapse, Ponzán and his men crossed the border via Bourg Madame on 10 February 1939; unlike many another serviceman, rather than handing over their weapons, what they did was wrap them carefully and bury them in five 20-litre milk churns right beside the border line. It would not be long before they were going back to retrieve them. 21 May was the date chosen by Ponzán for Joan Català and Jean

Benázet to go fetch them, loading the churns into Benázet's car and making a 25-kilometre round trip around the fringes of three states in a vehicle that luckily was not stopped by the gendarmes. They arrived without mishap in Varilhes, the town in which both Benázet and Francisco were living. Paco's people retained some of the arms and he rest was passed on to the groups that the organization was starting to dispatch into Catalonia, albeit that we are getting ahead of ourselves there.

Francisco, the members of the *Libertador* group, Joan Català and a few others who had joined forces, were interned in the Le Vernet concentration camp in the Ariège department. That was where the French authorities had built up a mass of anarchists, including the remnants of the 26th Division, formerly the Durruti Column. Once they were in place, they also interned some of the International Brigaders there plus some communists. Le Vernet was a particularly harsh, strict, high-security concentration camp. As Paco's mind was always busy, when a search began inside the camp for carpenters to improve the facilities, he volunteered with his team, as Joan Català tells us:

"Ponzán who was forever involved in anything and everything, undertook along with his group to carry out the improvements (all the woodworking) and first a hut was constructed for us, complete with kitchen and sleeping quarters and we were pretty decently off and had our own cook, our provisions were guaranteed, which was a big deal back then and we were, besides, well treated by the gendarmes. But Ponzán here had his eyes focused more on the future, so we had greater freedom and more scope to act and could move freely around the camp and were issued with arm-bands to show that."⁴⁵

Thanks to such work, it was not long before he was being allowed to venture outside of the camp, initially on a temporary basis, only to quit it once and for all that September, again thanks to the priceless assistance of Jean Benazet, a communist who did whatever he could to help the Spanish refugees; Benazet secured him lawful employment in his own workshop and he settled in Varilhes.

Having referred earlier to the matter of arm-bands let us now deal with how they managed to get out of the camp, whether for some private trip, or never to return, without drawing too much attention and alarming the sentries. Paco was also involved with the gardening squad and its members were allowed out of the camp, displaying their particular arm-band. The squad included a young 16 year-old by the name of Antonio Nacente, a native of Labata in Huesca province; he had been closely connected with Ponzán since civil war times. He being so young, the sentries did not keep such a close eye on him and Nacente was able to come and go without a hitch. The gardeners only needed their arm-bands before they could get out of the camp in the mornings and when they returned in the evenings after their day's work was done. The young lad was tasked with asking his comrades for their arm-bands, re-entering Le Vernet and passing them on to Paco. On taking receipt of them, Paco handed them out to the people chosen by him so that they might leave the camp. Once outside and after working for a bit, they handed the arm-bands back to Nacente and made their way towards the highway where they were picked up by Benázet in his own car before being dropped off a long way away. Finally, the youngster would redistribute the arm-bands to their legitimate owners.

Having sorted out the means of entering and leaving the camp, Ponzán set to work. With an eye to Spain as well as cooperating with the network established by Pallarols⁴⁶ for using false papers to help comrades facing serious issues within Franco's prison camps such as Los Almendros or Albatera to escape; as well as giving his attention to France, within the Le Vernet camp itself, by reorganizing the CNT and securing permits and work for the most important and neediest comrades. At the same time action groups were dispatched to Barcelona to raise funds as well as carry out personal attacks and, above all, to keep the flame alive and press on with the fight against Francoism. Given the positions Ponzán had held during the civil war, the SERE (Spanish Refugee

⁴⁵ *L'etern discontent*, p. 105, Joan Català, Josep Ester Borrás Study Centre (Col·lectiu A les trinxeres, 2017)

⁴⁶ Esteban Pallarols Xirgu aka *José Riera* was born in 1900 in Cassa de la Selva (Gerona). During the civil war he served as CNT secretary in Torelló and was in charge of the Manlleu collective. In the wake of the 'May Events' in 1937 he served on the National Committee of the FIJL in Valencia. In May 1939 he was appointed general secretary of the first (post-civil war) CNT National Committee. His main concern was to rescue comrades from Franco's camps and prisons. He was arrested in December the same year. Tried in 1943, he was sentenced to death and shot on 18 July in Barcelona's Campo de la Bota.

Evacuation Agency) asked Paco about the chances of finding a better place for him to spend his exile than France, but Ponzán roundly refused, stating: "My place is in Spain or near to Spain, so I am staying here."⁴⁷ The guide Joan Català was another of those offered the chance to relocate to Mexico, but he too declined the offer.

Meanwhile, Paco was still unable to take his eyes off what was going on in Spain. The prisons there were crammed, the repression was ferocious, and then there were the concentration camps, starvation and fear ... So they began to make trips and dispatch people to set up networks and support bases as well as try and rescue comrades.

On one of his trips into the Spanish interior, Ponzán was wounded by Civil Guard gunfire in Aragon in May 1940. In the light of what he had seen, he quickly drew up a report on the situation in Spain, as well as an action plan designed to turn it around; this he forwarded to the libertarian leadership in exile. Below I have set out the section dealing with that action plan, by way of an indication of what sort of a man Francisco Ponzán Vidal was:

"Our plan is this; primarily, to make use of the comrades working on behalf of England and France and make use of their resources. Second: to set aside a small sum of money for Spanish purposes. Third: to be mindful of action, the foundation of success.

Two things, I know, are going to shock you: the issue of money and the matter of action. The first can be resolved by appointing a dynamic or moral treasurer or administrator, if you have any left, and dispatching him into Spain where he will monitor spending. The business of action brings with it the fear of reprisals. I do not know why to think of it when our finest people have been lost for good but others may come forward and also orchestrate the fight against the repression by striking at the very hearts of those who are disposed to unleash it.

On foot of comrades there and a few dozen here, action groups at comarcal, regional and local levels can be organized within the major cities inside Spain. Clever propaganda can be developed. A lot of interesting matters can be tackled. And the gear required for action made ready. All within a matter of three or four months. Later each group will be assigned its own targets. And can start to act at will. They might blow up all the transmitters on the same day, or all the power stations and distribute manifestoes and bring every train service to a standstill by blowing up the 500 locomotives they have and can do whatever they please, giving our irreconcilable foes the feeling that there is out there the mightiest organization ever seen in the history of the proletariat. And, once and for all, world anarchism can be saved.

I do not want to get bogged down in the details when that is the over-arching idea and it may well be that some may be reluctant to take us seriously. But we already to press on and forge ahead with this plan, or part of it, alone. Using whatever means we can, answerable to none other than our own consciences and our dead and the latter have nothing to upbraid us over."⁴⁸

Towards the end of 1939, this plan was handed over to Juan Manuel Molina Mateo aka *Juanel*, for presentation to the General Council of the Libertarian Movement which was dominated by that unchanging double act, Esgleas and Federica Montseny.

Can the reader guess what the response to the plan was? We imagine that he or she can: in fact, not only was the plan rejected out of hand, but they showed contempt for both author and messenger. They used pretty words such as "suspect" or "undesirable" and so the latter finished up cutting all ties with the Council. Soon there began the divorce within the exile community between the bureaucrats and those disposed to act. Unfortunately, that will be replicated at various points throughout this book. With the occasional, honourable exceptions.

By early 1940, Ponzán had made his initial contact with the British secret services, more particularly, with an agent by the name of Marshall. The Intelligence Service (IS) provided funds, cover and phoney papers; and

⁴⁷ *Clandestinos. El maquis contra el franquismo, 1934-1975*, p. 99, Dolors Marín, Plaza & Janés, Barcelona, 2002

⁴⁸ *La red de evasión del grupo Ponzán*, pp. 162-163, Antonio Téllez, Virus Editorial, Barcelona, 1996

Ponzán and his group passed on intelligence regarding the Francoists, military installations, Nazis within Spain, the ports and bases where some of their units were taking on provisions, or documents and materials for the border. They also set about drafting and massively circulating a leaflet calling for Spanish non-intervention in the Second World War, and from France these were moved to the Hotel Paulet de Les Escaldes in Andorra and from there various groups distributed them throughout several of the largest cities in the peninsula. But let us now move on to a curious anecdote regarding those leaflets.

Chapter 10

Dangerous Friendships

Once that anti-Francoist leaflet landed on Spanish territory, with its call for Spain to stay neutral in the world war, there is no denying that it was to make no great impact on the population; due to the international tensions at the time, and quite possibly because it was one of the first examples of propaganda critical of the dictatorship to circulate throughout the country. The document was to enjoy widespread distribution and was to be handed out on about 20 occasions: every leaflet had been smuggled across in the knapsacks of the group's guides and made it through to several cities such as Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Logroño, La Coruña and Valladolid.

Remiro and '*Coteno*' (the former acting as a liaison for the network, normally carrying messages or confidential intelligence; besides his companion was a people-smuggler and one of Ponzán's guides) whilst in Barcelona boarded at a boarding house in the Calle Aurora run by a Galician family and posed as travellers. During that time they built up a good relationship with the boarding-house owner and things being what they are, the latter had a good friend who would drop by to see him during his few leisure moments and he turned out to be a captain in the Civil Guard. As they spent a little time together in conversation, the captain in a way befriended the guides and happened to get wind that Remiro was off to La Coruña for a few days, in the light of which he suggested to Remiro that he might deliver a few gifts to his daughters who were living in that city. Remiro saw no issue with this and the very next day the Civil Guard turned up with some slippers for each of his ... 17! ... daughters! The man had been hell bent of having a boy child and had refused to give up in the attempt until such time as that spectacular outcome was achieved.

And things being as they are, on their trip to distribute the leaflets they had a brush with the security forces while in Valladolid railway station. The upshot was that they had to jettison some of their parcels as they fled. As luck would have it among the anti-Franco handbills were the 17 pairs of slippers that the Civil Guard captain had sent his family. The poor captain was greatly irked at having to explain to his superiors how he had come to be mixed up with anti-Franco groups and clandestine propaganda.

Fortunately, nothing more came of it. Remiro and '*Coteno*' had time to tip off the rest of the comrades who normally stayed at the boarding-house; they made themselves scarce and no one wound up in custody.

But not everyone was so lucky and time was not on their side. An infiltrator planted in the ranks of the Libertarian Youth in Valencia betrayed the city's groups who were distributing pamphlets. The upshot was that 32 arrests were made and 10 of the detainees received death sentences, 7 of which were to be commuted. Ángel Tarín, Enrique Goig and Enrique Escobar were less fortunate and were to be executed, charged before the Francoist courts with offences against state security, high treason and espionage.

Chapter 11

Paco (Part Two)

We left Paco and his people in contact with the British secret services. The latter soon grasped the usefulness and versatility offered by the libertarian group, so whenever anything special cropped up, they would send in Ponzán's people. Oddly enough and among other things, it needs saying that the IS got wind of an army powder store in Zaragoza's holding some sort of an out of the ordinary German shell that they had long been after. The briefed Ponzán about this and thanks to his connections in the Aragonese capital, not after that the shell was bound for France, en route to its final destination in England. Small wonder that the British held these Spanish libertarians in high esteem. Months after that, in June 1940, following a big raid on the network, the Aragonese militants were sentenced to death, albeit that this was later commuted to 30-year jail terms. The Spanish authorities were only too mindful of the disappearance of that shell and the distribution of those leaflets.

Come the German invasion of France in mid-1940, the collaborative efforts grew: on the one hand, the British pulled out, but the Belgian and French services put in an appearance. Thanks to Robert Terres's memoirs, we know how the switch-over of agencies occurred and of the conversation between Terres and Captain Marshall prior to the latter's imminent departure for England:

"Tessier, would you take them under your wing? They're the best agents I ever had in my life. It irks me to leave them like this ... high and dry." [Bear in mind that Terres had to 'hire on' a team of some 15 agents, without guidance from his superiors and with the French army in complete disarray.]

"Of course I will, not that that means anything. Where am I going to be tomorrow? And what about them ... how do they feel about it?"

"I have already broached it with them ... What do they think? ... Look, Tessier, they've already lost one war, their own, nearly a year and a half ago now and they have carried on ... the mere losing of a second, our war, is not going to make them walk away. With Franco on one side of the Pyrenees and the Germans on the other, they have no option but to fight alongside whoever accepts them ... in this instance, us, should there be anything left of our services a days from now. Besides, Tessier, I want to tell you something ... They are convinced that only defeat for Germany and fascists generally can open up the way to the liberation of Spain. So?"

"As long as the Germans do not devour us whole in what is left of this week, I think we may be in great need of these Spaniards."

"You can get in touch with them whenever you like. I have forewarned their leader that you would be coming to see him on my behalf. Parker knows where he is to be found and will make the introductions. Apart from that ... Sort yourself out! The ball is at your feet now."⁴⁹

And just before the British departed, the last thing that Marshall did was to arrange a meet with Paco's sister, Pilar, since Francisco was in Spain, and hand her 200,000 francs to be handed to him once he returned. That sum, which was considerable for those times, was used, among other things, on renting the premises on the Rue Limayrac in Toulouse and the 'Villa Tallada' mansion in Banyuls. And so, a little after that, in early August through Agent Parayre aka *Parker* [the NCO under Terres's command] Ponzán and '*el Padre*' were formally introduced to one another.

"Look, Paco, our friend Marshall assuredly explained the reasons for my being here. We can be of help to each other. Allow me to say that I have no desire to become your boss. More of an ally. "

"I was expecting as much."

"Let me tell you that I cannot give you the money the British did. We have been beaten, we are poor and, like you yourselves, obliged to lead a clandestine existence."

⁴⁹ *La red de evasión del grupo Ponzán*, pp. 193-194, Antonio Téllez, Virus Editorial, Barcelona, 1996

"It is not quite the same, as you are perfectly well aware. Anyway, getting down to brass tacks, Lieutenant, what exactly do you expect from us?"

"What do I expect from you? Nothing concrete right at the moment. You know the border and are au fait with everything going on there, you know everybody and have friends on both sides. Organise them.

All that I ask of you is that you stand by and keep me briefed on all activity that might be observed on the border and also possibly, facilitate the passage of my agents or my mail. You cannot be unaware that your countrymen do all in their power to facilitate Nazi infiltration ... As I say, then, monitor them, track down their crossing points and, as for the rest, do as you see fit, whatever you please, and make whatever contacts you like. All that I ask of you is that you keep me informed of anything that might be of interest to the CE that I represent."

"Agreed, but ... What are you offering us in return? We are on our uppers, as you know. For the time being we are surviving on the money that Captain Marshall left us, but that is not going to last long."

"I am offering you the protection of my agencies in all your pursuits. We cannot pay, but under our protection, you can rely upon your knowledge of the border. Let us speak frankly: You know better than I do that there are goods and Jewish refugees to be smuggled across ... I can offer you official cover for those sorts of activities vis a vis the customs personnel and gendarmes and furnish you with sound or phoney papers, any passes that you might like, and weapons besides. You can fund yourselves howsoever you like and I will cover for everything done on the authority of my agency and, in return, you can supply me with bits of information and smuggle my agents across when asked."

"Did we not agree that you were under the radar as well?"

"As far as the Germans are concerned, definitely, and as far as the Armistice Commissions are concerned, we do not exist, we are clandestines. As far as Vichy is concerned, we are a semi-official but secret agency answerable in the usual way to the General Staff. So, do we have an understanding?"

"In principle, yes. But I will have to take soundings among my comrades."⁵⁰

This was the inception of a fruitful relationship, albeit one that was short-lived. It is interesting to note how 'el Padre' was accepted by Ponzán's people. Catalá remarks:

"He was an officer that ... was more of a pal, a workmate, with no authority complex, kindly, and he also had the measure of us. He briefed on the status of his agency. They had just been defeated and trampled by our common foe. They had no budget and there was a spectacular dearth of money. As far as we were concerned, all the better for that as it made us more independent."

In October 1940, Ponzán, the rector of Toulouse University (Dr Camile Soula), who was also an Intelligence Service agent, Dr René de Norcis, Professor Friedmann and the Bulgarian linguist Sergi Georgiev met up in a house in the city. Every one of those in attendance belonged to the groups opposed to the German invader and at the meeting they decided to escalate the rate and severity of operations targeting the enemy.

Against this backdrop and with the Germans unstoppable in Europe, the contacts persisted: and cooperation began with other networks and agencies such as the Belgian *Sabot* line, the Polish Secret Service and the British *Pat O'Leary* line, with which Paco was in contact from March 1941 onwards, although, sticking strictly to the facts, initially it was known simply as 'the Organization'. The latter had started out thanks to Captain Ian Garrow, freshly escaped from a prison camp. He set to work to assist the escape from French soil of the greatest possible number of his own countrymen, and to avert their falling into the clutches of the Nazis or Vichy's *collabos*. Garrow got in touch with Louis Nouveau who swiftly showed that he was unconditionally behind the venture. To the endeavour, Nouveau brought not merely funding, but his own home as a safehouse for fugitives, plus another two houses belonging to friends of his and turned over to the same use. Georges

⁵⁰ *El eterno descontento*, p. 221, Joan Catalá, Jaime Cinca Editorial, Lécera, 2007

Rodocanachi's home was one of these. In addition, through a female friend of his, Madame Cathala, he made contact with the burgeoning Marseilles organization and its team of guides for dangerous border-crossings. That group was none other than the one headed by Paco. Here is Pilar Ponzán's testimony:

"My brother and his comrades had long since been engaged in that dangerous task when, through the good offices of Madame Cathala [née Elizabeth Cohen], Paco made the acquaintance of Louis Nouveau, one of the first French agents to work for what was to become the *Pat O'Leary* network. The meeting between them took place in March 1941. Nouveau was living in Marseilles where he had become acquainted with the British Captain Ian Garrow, who had just escaped from the Saint-Hippolyte du Fort POW camp for allied prisoners (in the Gard department). At the time, Garrow was the organizer on the outside of escapes from the camp in question, which held a goodly number of his countrymen and other Allied servicemen. Once they had escaped, the fugitives had to be steered towards the Spanish border and guided across. Initially, thanks to such difficulties, only the odd attempt had been mounted, but Garrow then had plans to organize an escape line. So when Garrow found out that Madame Cathala was in touch with a team of guides made up of Spanish republicans, he dispatched Nouveau to Toulouse, and the latter had a rendezvous with Paco."⁵¹

⁵¹ Letter from Pilar Ponzán to Eduardo Pons Prades, 22 March 1973

Chapter 12

The “Pat-Françoise” Line

Out of those initial meetings a vast web eventually grew. And out of that web emerged the network. The *Pat O’Leary* network was a military unit under War Office control. Its activities persisted from January 1941 to September 1944. Set up by the British army officer Ian Garrow who ended up arrested when betrayed by a policeman who was working with the network in the summer of 1941. After Garrow’s arrest, his place was taken by the Belgian general and physician Albert Guérisset aka *Pat* in October 1941 and after he was captured and was handed over to the Gestapo in March 1943, Marie-Louise Dissard aka *Françoise* was brought in as a replacement and she lent her name to the network up until the Liberation of France.

Initially tiny, the network was growing. It was already smuggling more people than gear or intelligence, so its personnel was growing. For one thing, the team of guides – including Vicente Moriones Belzúnegui, Pascual and Eusebio López Laguarda (aka *Sixto* and *Coteno*, respectively) José Albalat Ripollés, Francisco Vidal aka *Berdie*, Juan Sangüesa aka *Navarro*, Ricardo Rebola, Rafael Melendo Erviti, Amadeo Casares Colomer aka *Peque*, Andrés García Ruiz, Joaquim Querol Marza, Josep Ester Borrás or Josep Porrell Serrat, who served as guide and liaison as well, Miguel Luengo Guillén who also worked as a guide for other networks like the *Bourgogne-Brandy* or the *F2*; Agustín Villanueva or Carlos Manini (Manini had set up a smuggling network in the western Pyrenees, using guides such as himself or the Navarrese Leonardo Glaria, who would later go on to serve as a guide for the groups from the Union Nacional Español (UNE). Manini placed his network and routes at Ponzán’s disposal. Even though they occasionally served in a guide capacity, the network boasted some so-called “liaisons”. These mainly handled the carriage of intelligence or delicate gear back and forward across the Pyrenees, or as far as destinations as far away as Gibraltar or Portugal; among them Joan Catalá Balanya and Agustín Remiro Manero stood out most; lesser known were José Ferrer, Antonio Roche, Tomás Tolosana Félez or Margarita Sol. We should include Joaquín Gastón (mentioned earlier) here.

By now the network could count on routes and people-smugglers between Banyuls and Bayonne; it had safe-houses scattered between San Sebastian and Pamplona and even as far as Gerona province. Heading further south, it was more of the same in terms of liaisons and safe-houses in Barcelona, Zaragoza, Logroño, Madrid, Valencia, Valladolid or La Coruña; in short there was a vast network geared towards a huge undertaking. And since Ponzán’s people-smugglers did not supply provisions, this was the ideal moment for Manolo to show up in Toulouse, looking for broader horizons and harness the Mediterranean coastline as a back-up route (let it be said here that Juan Zafon, who working with Huet as part of the Maritime Antenna, was an old acquaintance of Ponzán’s. In fact, he was more than that, because back when the Council of Aragon was dissolved, Zafón had been arrested by Lister’s troop for being a member of the Council and was about to be tried and convicted of that. Luckily for him, Ponzán had already dipped his toe into rescuing people facing grave threats and he successfully freed him from the stalinists’ clutches.

The people who needed to get out of the territories overrun by Nazi forces had need of papers if they were going to do so. These included identity papers, safe conducts, permits to cross the demarcation line or the border; in short, all sorts of documents. There was a counterfeiting workshop in the city of Lyon and it was run by the printer Biñals. There was Agustí Centelles’s photography lab in Carcassonne and there was even a special workshop in the home of the courier Margarita Sol and her father (and fellow collaborator with the network) Miguel Sol; they lived in Toulouse. Here, let us hear from Margarita herself:

“Casares, from the Fine Arts [union]? He set up a forgery workshop right there, churning out all manner of French and German papers ... everything that one needed to move around with some measure of ease through occupied France.”⁵²

This Casares was Amadeo Casares Colomer aka ‘*el Peque*’ who married his work as guide to serving as the network’s counterfeiter. And in Abbeville, in the occupied zone, there was abbe Pierre Carpentier with his own press, which enabled him to print up a variety of documents or safe conduct papers.

⁵² *Los senderos de la libertad*, p. 104, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

Joan Català chalked the loss of the Rue Limayrac up to the huge numbers of papers being printed there, plus the large number of people who knew of the existence of such forgeries. Here is the list of items discovered in No 42, Rue Limayrac on 10 October 1942, following a police swoop targeting the Ponzán group. The list of items found at the address is short by an illegible list of a few items and documents, given that the original was in a seriously deteriorated condition.

- Wrapped in paper, a matrix for making certified copies of a British marriage certificate.
- 116 blank British marriage certificates.
- 88 blank, Spanish-language enrolment forms for fugitives, deserters and foreign political refugees each with its own photograph besides an identical certificate, signed and bearing stamps, but blank.
- 6 boxes of stamps.
- 17 entry permits for the prohibited coastal area, in German and French, 16 of them blank and one fully completed and all displaying the stamp of the Greater Paris district commander.
- A certificate attesting membership of the Spanish Nationalist Movement, blank, together with 4 stamps from 25 Spaniards.
- One birth certificate made out in the name of *Vicente Justo Servatón*⁵³. Seemingly phoney.
- A numbered composter from the Migrant Labour Department.
- A bottle of correcting fluid.
- One blank Spanish safe conduct pass.
- One stick of sealing wax.
- A bunch of engraving instruments.

For its part and in the same raid, but at the premises located at No 7, Rue Godoli, the items uncovered were:

- Three 3-part stencils for printing the reverse sides of pages made using the following stencil.
- One metal stencil for the making of the triptychs accompanying the passports of foreigners visiting Spain.
- A box containing 22 seals, two of them unusable (and many of them official).
- 6 French safe conduct papers for foreigners.
- 18 Spanish birth certificates.
- 28 membership cards from *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista*.
- 22 official applications for work permits for foreigners in Spain.
- 34 residence permits for foreigners in Spain.
- 200 pages for use in the triptychs accompanying the passports for foreigners in Spain.
- 408 special safe conduct papers affording access to French and Portuguese territories.
- 49 provisional French identity cards issued by the German consulate in Barcelona.
- 23 safe conducts issued by the Civil Government in Madrid.
- 79 replies to applications for professional identity cards in Spain.
- 216 safe conducts issued by the Civil Government in Murcia.
- 65 special safe conducts issued by the Government in Zaragoza.
- Two Andorran passport sleeves.
- One Andorran passport, blank, but with stamps and signatures included.
- One Andorran passport made out to *Rafael Pérez García*.
- One Andorran passport in the name of *Josep Arnau Villarò*.
- One Andorran passport, without cover, in the name of *Francisco Agín Otal*.
- 30 sheets of paper bearing the heading "*FET y de las JONS Militia, El Pilar Tercio*."
- 4 sheets of French travel permits covering the Meurthe-et-Moselle department, one of them bearing the stamp of the Nancy Gendarmerie.
- Two blank French identity documents.

⁵³ We will come across Vicente Servatón again later, more specifically as a member of Cerrada's expropriator gangs in France after the Second World War.

- A foreign labourer identity document in the name of *Zafón Bayo, José*, from No 21 Gang, 1st Grouping. Plus a driving licence in the same name.
- Two pages from an Andorran passport in the name of *José Pérez Pons*.
- One temporary identity document from the German Consulate-General in Barcelona, possibly a forgery.
- A letter replying to an application for a work permit in Spain; complete with signatures and stamps, but without any serial number.
- One licence bearing the stamp of the 21st Foreign Labour Group (GTE).
- One pass from the Civil Government in Madrid.
- One Duralumin plate printed with a stamp-in-the-making.”⁵⁴

In order to afford even greater security to the people awaiting relocation and to actual members of the network, they could also avail of the services of the Jewish tailor Paul Ullmann in Toulouse. In the space of 48 hours he could put together any sort of uniform or suit required. Once he was arrested, his wife stepped into the breach. Over the ensuing months, she took charge of producing outfits and disguises for the escapees and others from the network, up until she herself was arrested. According to Pilar Ponzán, her brother told the tailor: “Be prompt in seeing and looking after anyone who come to you on my behalf. We will cover the costs.”⁵⁵

The network had a radio operator in Montauban keeping it in touch with the British agencies; initially this was Alex Nittelet and later Tom Groome aka ‘*Georges*’. And it was over the airwaves – usually Radio Andorra – that certain records were played alerting the network to the fact that an expedition had got through without mishap, or had run into problems en route.

They had certain support bases upon which they could rely, such as Gaston Negre’s home in Nîmes, or the Hotel de Paris in Toulouse (run by the Mongelard couple), which was the Ponzán group’s nerve centre. But in addition and also in Toulouse, there was Floreal Barberá’s apartment, María López’s or the attic in the Rue Deville where Salvador Aguado Andreut lodged. The home of Jaume Soldevilla Pich and Generosa Cortina was used as a letter drop (Jaume himself made the odd border crossing as a guide, although he normally worked for the Belgian ‘*De Jean*’ network, as did his wife). Another location we know of was the Rue des Polinaires home in which Miguel Sol Torres and his family lived. There were contacts with American Quakers in Toulouse and with the Red Cross there, with a prominent role played by a friend of Paco’s, a CNT member friend by the name of Tío, assistant to the Red Cross director Madame Cassagnavère. Through Madame Prissner who was also working with the Quakers, or, more importantly, she acted as liaison with the Jewish Fighting Organization (OJC) which, in addition to running an escape line, controlled a maquis group made up of French Jews in the Montagne Noire.

Outside of Toulouse, the Hotel Noailles and Louis Nouveau’s home were the mainstays in the Marseilles dockland. The home of Antonio Saura and Carmen Mur Arderiu was the safe house in Lezignan. In addition to Ausencio Fernández, the Bueno family and the Villa Tallada were significant collection points and starting-points for border crossings in Banyuls-sur-Mer. And the list goes on: in Saillagousse, there was the Cayrol family; in the little Pyrenean village of Porte, there was Leopold Safont Suñé; in Lille, there was the Fillerin family; in the Dordogne there was Madame Arnaus; in Normandy, Jacques Wattebled or a vacant apartment in Narbonne. In Perpignan another of the networks key locations, the man in charge was Gregorio Castanera Mateo (yet another of Ponzán’s Aragonese assets who as the manager at the Hotel des Ambassadeurs, a stop-over and refuge for those facing problems); in addition to Castanera, the team there was made up of the Pelipos, father and son, by Francisco Sala Tolo and Antonio Roche who served as liaison with the city of Barcelona. Bear in mind here that there was that vacant apartment upon which Huet, ‘*Conxita*’ and Ángel Soto could call at No 7, Avenue de la Garé. In Canet-plage there was, on the one hand, the Font restaurant run by Antoine Font, and the Hotel du Tennis, run by Monsieur and Madame Lebreton.

⁵⁴ *Passeurs d’espoir*, Guillaume Goutte, pp. 121-123, Editions Libertaires, 2014

⁵⁵ *Republicanos españoles en la Segunda Guerra mundial*, p. 319, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1975

On the other side of the border, we also find a tightly-knit network of safe havens. These included the Hotel Paulet in Les Escaldes (Andorra), run by Agustí Filip and his wife Pilar; or the Mercader family's home in the capital of the Principality (Andorra). Other support bases could be found in Ribes de Fresser, Campdevanòl and Banyoles; in Figueras, there was the Font family; in Vic the Rosell family; in Berga the La Lluna bar run by the Freixa-Casamartina family; in Barcelona, there was the Piera family, the homes of Ginés Camarasa and Saturnino Carod Lerín; in Valencia, the homes of José Anta Rodríguez at No 8 Calle Mateo Escrivá and of Miquel Piqueras i Anta; and finally, in Zaragoza, there was the Cano family living at No 6, Calle Buera.

And we must not forget that they even had a cushy number for very important people. This related, quite simply, to a member of the Brigada Político Social, playing both sides and making money out of it. Paco used to pay him for intelligence, without placing the organization at any risk, of course; among others, this agent saw to the passage of the man in charge of the entire network, none other than Pat O'Leary himself (the Belgian general Albert Guérisset). That agent was none other than the informer Eliseo Melis, who met his end gunned down by an anarchist action group in Barcelona in 1947.

Allow me to insert here a short description of how the support bases operated, or, to be more specific, the one in Berga, by way of example ... During 1940, and at the suggestion of Josep Ester, a comrade got in touch with Jaume Freixa Malé. Freixa was the owner of the La Lluna bar, along with his wife Teresa Casamartina Estrada. The bar sat at No 4, Paseo de la Industria in Berga (Barcelona) and was the perfect cover. A discreet conversation took place to see whether it might join the escape lines as a support base as escapees were moved closer to Barcelona. Setting aside any trepidation, the location selected was ideal as it was a regular meeting point for servicemen, Civil Guards and local Falangists. In addition to the bar's extensive premises, there were another two storeys to the building, plus an attic. On the ground floor there was also a store-room and a rear exit, perfect for ingress and egress for folk hiding out on the upper floors without arousing suspicions. The Freixas came on board.

In the La Lluna bar, people passing through (usually in batches of 6 or 8) could not only find somewhere to rest up and sleep but they also had access to hot food, washing facilities and clean clothing (more than well received after the long trek through the mountains) or advice on how to order a train ticket to Barcelona in Spanish. The average length of a stop-over was two or three days, but some groups spent a week in hiding in the building. The groups always arrived under cover of dark, coming down through the Oveja trails in the Cerdanya or from Andorra.

But the bar-owners were not on their own in taking on clandestine activities; there was also a sister-in-law, Assumpció Rivera Anglada, who looked after the preparation of meals; plus the other Casamartina sisters – María, Claustre and Ramoneta. It was Jaume that handled the delivery of the group as far as the station; he would have ensured in advance that on the night in question the streetlamps in their wake had been turned down or smashed. They headed for the Pont de Pedret and from there followed the road as far as the Rosal estate and the station. There, Ramoneta would be waiting for them, having made her way there by bus and she escorted the escapees by train all the way to Barcelona. Once in Barcelona, they proceeded to the Gran Vía and from there made for the Calle Urquinaona where the British embassy was located. At which point Ramoneta would give the signal and the group would scuttle into the building.⁵⁶ The network had the wind in its sails ...

In the arduous task of avoiding the loss of casualties to the Francoist machine it was not all plain sailing. On 14 October 1942, Vichy's Special Police Squad mounted a round-up in Toulouse in a first ever dismantling of Ponzán network safe-houses, by raiding the Rue Limayrac premises. Those premises had been used as an operational base. Among those arrested were Paco Ponzán and his sister Pilar, the brothers Pascual and Eusebio López Laguarda, operating as guides for the organization, as were Vicente Moriones Belzúnegui and José Albalat Ripollés. Also arrested were Amadeo Casares Colomer from the forgery team, Miguel Chueca Cuartero, specializing in propaganda, and Juan Zafón Bayo from the Maritime Antenna. Similarly arrested was María López, the partner of Tomás López aka *el Maño*, because some of the gear used in the counterfeiting of papers used by the network had been stored in her home. Most of those picked up were sent to the Le Vernet

⁵⁶ All the information regarding the La Lluna bar and the Freixa-Casamartina family has been lifted from *L'Erol* No 123, spring 2015, "Bar La Lluna de Berga", written by David Freixa and Rosa Serra.

concentration camp, from which they managed to secure their release thanks to some orders forged by '*el Padre*' and presented by men posing as gendarmes. ... Robert Terres looked after his own.

In August 1942 Floreal Barberá was entrusted by Paco with overseeing fugitives' transit through Spanish territory and quickly beefing up the arrangements close to the border line. As we know already, the area close to the border was not only under close surveillance but one also needed a special pass to travel through it. Barberá then made contact with an Aragonese by the name of Gracia who worked as the boss of a goods train covering the Port Bou-to-Gerona line. Thanks to this new connection, the refugees were loaded on to a carriage which was then boarded up. Once the goods reached the environs of Gerona, the train would make a "technical" stop, the boards would be let down and the escapees alighted in an area where it was a lot easier and less dangerous to move around. From there, it was only a short distance to Gerona and in that city they could travel on to Barcelona using normal means of transport.

If we go by Pons Prades's writings, it looks as if one of the houses used as a support base for the network during those years was the one in which the Sabaté family was living in France. During 1943, they had arrived in the Perpignan area and had rented a house in the village of Eus, very close to Prades. Pons Prades also tells how the first outing to Barcelona made by '*el Quico*' was made that year and again it was the fruit of the contacts and connections that *Quico* had with members of the network, the most significant of them being '*el Murciano*'.

Then again, when I first started to think about committing things to paper, one of the first questions that stuck in my head was how come Huet's name does not feature either in Pilar Ponzán's book or, above all, in Antonio Téllez's. The more I have gone over and over the matter, I came up – I reckon – with the answer that maybe it was because he was overlooked and initially invisible. As in any other business conducted under the radar there was a need for caution and the utmost secrecy. Insofar as possible, it called for compartmentalization, so that in the event of potential infiltrations or captures, the entire edifice might be protected from the full impact. On the one hand, Pilar lived cheek by jowl with part of the overland team, to wit, the guides, whilst she was aware of a fair number of the network's collaborators; but of course, the maritime team was set up somewhat later on and, besides, its operational base was quite far away from Toulouse. Maybe Pilar was not sufficiently in the know when it came to knowing who made up the Maritime Antenna and was content knowing that Juan Zafón and Lucía Rueda (with whom she worked longer) were part of it and had no need to know who else was in the mix. In fact, in her book, the only person making any specific reference to the antenna and Huet was Floreal Barberá and then only in the appendix at the end.

A while after framing the paragraph above, I came upon a letter from Pilar mentioning Huet and the Maritime Antenna, suggesting that she knew something about them. For my own part, I cling to the belief that maybe she was not fully briefed on the matter, which is why she did not spend a lot of time on the subject nor explore it in greater depth. As final confirmation of this, an exhaustive reading of Pilar's book put paid once and for all to any doubts that I had, so over now to Ponzán's sister and some allusions to one of the seaborne expeditions:

"It must have been 12 or 13 October 1942 [she is referring to *Operation Rosalind*, mounted on the night of 11-12 October]. I don't recall the exact date. I believe that neither Ponzán nor the lads [Pilar is referring here to Ponzán's guides, normally described simply as '*los chavales*'] were supposed to have any hand in that operation, being over-burdened as they were with overland trips. Pat organized it and carried it out using his agents, Louis Nouveau in particular. There was no question but that it was a triumph for him and for the escape network that carried his name."⁵⁷

But what about Téllez? Because Téllez relied almost entirely upon information supplied by Pilar and by Robert Terres in the writing of his book on the network. But, as we also know Terres had always striven to hide his reliable sources and in '*el padre*'s' book, Huet does not get a single mention. So I was going crazy for a while in my quest for weird and unknown reasons for keeping Huet a secret, when the most likely consideration is that this was simply good practice in the network's under-cover operations: remember that there was also his unassuming nature, which accounts for the matter of that '*el Murciano*' nickname.

⁵⁷ *Lucha y muerte por la libertad, 1936-1945*, p. 154, Pilar Ponzán, Tot Editorial S.A., Barcelona, 1996

Chapter 13

Land of a Thousand Trails

The Pyrenees, coming or going, constitute the land of a thousand trails. And even though freedom did not always lie on the other side, issues at least appeared to be slightly less urgent and folk could breathe a little more easily. In this chapter we shall try to establish the network's most used trails, whether for the smuggling of people, intelligence, gear or whatever was needed to change country.

As remarked previously, the various persons who cooperated with the network made it their business to gather together folk who needed to get across the Pyrenees and to steer them initially to Toulouse, Ponzán's main headquarters, from where all trails left. The two major routes left from that city. The first went via Foix and the destination was Andorra. On arrival in Foix, a group bound for the Principality of Andorra could choose between the Ax-les-Thermes to Puerto de Fontargent route and eventually arrive in Soldeu. Or it might opt for the French town of L'Hospitalet-pres-l'Andorre and then on via Pas de la Casa, Soldeu and Les Escaldes, or, alternatively, Tarascón de Ariege. If it plumped for Tarascón, there was also a chance of its peeling off in the direction of the Valle de Arán. From Andorra it might head for La Seo de Urgell and then on to Adrell where it could catch public transport or opt for the Sierra del Cadí trails, in which case it would travel via Gosol and on to Los Rastos de Peguera and, finally, to Berga.

The second route was via Carcassonne, on to Narbonne and the finishing line in Perpignan. Once in Perpignan, the guides and their clients had a range of options on offer. Option number one was to use Banyuls-sur-Mer as a way-station, before climbing through the Col de Banyuls and then downhill to the villages of Vilajuiga or Garriguella in Gerona; a second route headed towards Palau del Vidre or Banyuls-des-Aspres; a third set out for Ceret, Saint Laurent de Cerdans or Arles-sur-Tech; finally, the main and most commonly used route was the one that led into the Cerdanya and the cross-over triangle made up of the localities of Osseja, Saillagousse and Bourg Madame.

Once in the Cerdanya, the most commonly used trails were the ones that ran between the Pico de Dorria and El Puigmal, or the one that ran between the Coll de Lió and the Pico de Finestrelles; both of these would drop the group off in Collada de Toses, which location would continue to be used by anti-Franco guerrillas over many years. Once on Spanish soil they could press on towards Ribes de Fresser, Ripoll or Campdevànol, or they might prefer the Berguedà district, where the destination was, first, Castellar de N'Hug and then Berga itself. Frequently they could count on help from Spain's railway workers in delivering their clients as far as Barcelona. Their destinations were the Allied embassies in Barcelona, Valencia or Madrid, or reaching Gibraltar, intending either to skip across to Africa to enlist with the forces of Free France, or to move on to London to rejoin the various Allied armies.

Earlier, I mentioned the part played by Carlos Manini. He was one of the wild cards used by the Ponzán network when it needed to smuggle someone through the Atlantic coastal area. The chosen crossing points on the border there were Dancharia, Iduskimendi or the Pico Orhy area in the Navarrese Pyrenees.

Chapter 14

All that glisters is not gold

We are not about to enter here into analysis of the actions and ideals prompting the people who led, or were involved in, the various escape lines throughout the years of the Second World War, as there would be no end of variety there. Whilst some lined their pockets, others were idealists and still others were working on behalf of their governments, but they all had one thing in common; each and every one of them was working to smuggle folk with problems out of dangerous territory, in addition to others who may have been in lesser peril, whilst at the same time they tried to deliver these people as best they could to their destinations once they had left hostile territory behind them. Did I say *all*? Well no, not *all* of them; seemingly there was the odd exception to the rule. Let us turn now to one of the dark tales that disfigure every war.

Let us hark back a little to the spring of 1943, although perhaps we might go a little further back than that, to mid-1942. It was at around that point that a customs official working in the Bourg-Madame (Puigcerdà) post began to suspect a number of odd caravans of army lorries belonging to the (demobbed) French army. Those caravans, made up by at most six Berliet lorries and now bearing plates indicating that they belonged to the Public Works Agency, caught the attention of customs officer Parent who, as he walked around the suspect vehicles, reached the conclusion that the mysterious goods being transported by them were quite simply people. Their papers – the French ones as well as their German permits – were in order and their destination was Andorra.

A brief aside here, if you do not mind. Would it be normal for a French customs official to get a bee in his bonnet over some lorries passing through his sector of the border with all their papers in order? Would it also be normal for Parent's doubts to be brought swiftly to the attention of the head of French counter-espionage in Perpignan and not to that of the Nazis? Well it must not have been that out of the ordinary, if we start from the fact that the customs official was, among other things, one of the most effective people-smugglers of the AKAK escape line set up by the British. And also habitually worked hand in glove with the Spanish maquis based in Llo, led by Josep Mas i Tió, in respect of people-smuggling as well as sabotage operations, or in trading intelligence. Parent was also one of the few customs officers with communist leanings not to have been purged. His knowledge of the mountains was behind not just his living in the area but also his fondness for hunting, which afforded him some knowledge of the trails followed by his quarry but generally unknown to regular hikers. With this background of course Parent had not escaped the notice of '*el Padre*' and his agents, even though I cannot say when they first began to work in concert. Right, following that aside, let us get back to the trails.

As the appearance of strange motorcades began to be replicated, the agent put in a report and one such report came into the possession of Robert Terres who was in charge at Travaux Ruraux (TR)⁵⁸ post No 117, meaning that he was in charge of counter-espionage in the Perpignan area. After the reports were examined, a meeting was arranged in that city. Present at that meeting were '*el Padre*', customs officer Andre Parent, Eduardo Pons Prades (he being in charge of the Spanish guerrilla groups), Manolo Huet (as head of the Maritime Antenna, member of the Pat line and agent of Terres) and Joaquín Gálvez Prieto (interpreter with the No 2 Montpellier Regional Group which supervised a lot of the GTEs in the area, including the 422nd, mentioned earlier); the latter spoke perfect French and German as well as his own mother tongue. Gálvez also served as interpreter for the 105th GTE based in Uson-les-Bains in the upper Aude valley, just a stone's throw from Andorra. As luck would have it, the caravans of Berliet lorries also passed that way and both Galvez and the guide '*Comprendes*' had sighted them more than once.

Even though Huet had offered himself as a volunteer to go off and gather intelligence and, if need be, teach someone a lesson, '*el Padre*' handed the assignment to Gálvez. It was the interpreter who would be spending Holy Week in Andorra trying to get a lead from among the Andorran smugglers and people-smugglers. And he

⁵⁸ The TR or *Travaux Ruraux* were the heirs to the counter-espionage (CE) posts answerable before the war to the Pyrenean Studies Bureau (BEP) which was wound up in the wake of the French defeat in 1940. Thus, under the supervision of teams of agronomic engineers, they relaunched their counter-espionage efforts towards the end of that year. The 117, or TR 117 in the text, was the post located in the city of Perpignan.

must have discovered something as he forwarded a detailed report to Terres, albeit that we are unaware of its contents. But a quirk of fate saw the surfacing in the Uson-les-Bains district of a Jew who had been shot at and was in a very dire condition. He was found by a band of Spanish guerrillas and Gálvez and his comrade Medrano took him in hand, caring for him on GTE premises until he had somewhat recovered. The injured man was moved a little later to Carcassonne, where he was to be operated upon by Dr Joaquim Trías Pujol. This doctor was to make a name for himself with his work for the resistance and years later would carry on offering treatment to the libertarian maquis in Catalonia. The doctor removed a bullet from the man's left collar-bone. Once he had recovered, the Jew was moved to Toulouse and that is where his story really begins.

The man in question, whose name was Rosenthal, was a Coblenz-born chemical engineer and here is the interesting point: he was along on those mysterious caravans. Rosenthal was part of the cargo being moved by those Berlier lorries; in fact, his sister and parents were too. The engineer had managed to get his family out of Germany in late 1942 and was now trying to extricate them from France. In fact, his wife and their daughters were already living safely in the United States. Through a variety of contacts, they had made it as far as the Francoist embassy in Paris where a certain 'Don Antonio' was to see to it that they reached Spain via Andorra, in return for a substantial sum of money.

Rosenthal himself recounted his odyssey: they had been two days on a train travelling from Paris down to Perpignan. German checks during the trip had been cleared thanks to the Spaniard escorting the batch of a dozen and a half fugitives. He would display a document and point to those travelling with him. Whereupon the checkers moved on. In Perpignan they were to stop over at the station bar until nightfall, whereupon they would be collected by a lorry, believing that it would ferry them as far as Andorra. Shortly after that, it was joined by a further three lorries and the caravan moved out.⁵⁹ His lorry carried the four of them, who were German, the remainder being all Dutch.

As dawn was breaking and near to a farmhouse well off the highway, they begged for a meagre breakfast and were left locked up inside the lorry. They spent the entire day inside until night fell and visibility waned. Whereupon they were on the move again. After a while, they made another stop, with several batches climbing down off all the lorries; they were then informed that they would be entering Andorra on foot, under escort from some local guides and, after a short while, would finally reach safety. At which point, the screenplay changed: several bursts of machine-gun fire echoed through the night, felling a number of utterly discomfited fugitives. Rosenthal was lucky to have been bringing up the rear of the group and was only hit once, which made him collapse into the undergrowth and left him sprawled out there. The chemical engineer bided his time with bated breath as the caravan's organizers set about looting from the dead bodies and burying them in shallow graves in a nearby drainage ditch. They did not realize he was missing and it was that that saved his life. That and using strips from his short to staunch his wound. He waited until darkness fell and visibility was poor before stepping over to the ditch to discover that he was the only one left alive and that his family would never be reunited in the United States. After that he started trekking downhill until the sun came up again, when fear made him hide in a sheep pen. It was there that he was found a few hours later; fortunately for him, this was not by the smugglers but by a team of Spanish guerrillas from the 105th GTE.

And now, having set out the facts as recounted by Pons Prades in his book *Los senderos de la libertad*, let us talk about our doubts. If we read *El marqués y la evástica* by Rosa Sala and Placid García-Planas, and search through the archives of Pons Prades himself as catalogued at the National Archive of Catalonia, a different version of events crops up: or maybe this is just supplementary information that arrived a little earlier than the version set out above. The cast is the same, although the name Rosenthal is not mentioned.

In this second version, 'el Padre', through the good offices of the owner of a restaurant in Tarbes at which he was a regular visitor, gleaned his information about the so-called "trade in Jews". The restaurateur readily introduced him to one of the smugglers involved in the matter.

Claiming to have a batch of fugitives ready to cross into Spain, 'el Padre' and Huet arranged a rendezvous with the people-smuggler; a rendezvous that the fellow was not expecting to turn out as it did because, to borrow Pons Prades's words, they "cooked" the suspect. Both Terres and Manolo were hard nuts operating in harsh

⁵⁹ *Los senderos de la Libertad*, pp. 147-148, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

times with no room for sentimentality. The smuggler broke and told them all about how the incident had gone, how it could all be traced back to the Francoist embassy in Paris, a set-up by the so-called “cultural attaché” there. People in difficulty came to the embassy and in return for the promise of a passage to Spain were stripped of their cash, jewellery and other valuables. In the report held at the National Archives of Catalonia at least two mentions are made of the “demarcation line”(being the line separating occupied France from the supposedly free Vichy France) – placing the happenings before November 1942 which is when German troops occupied the whole of France. The Germans were assured that these people were under the protection of the Francoist embassy. In the report, the train journey ended in Tarbes or in Ax-les-Thermes. Once there, the refugees were stripped of any remaining assets, on the grounds that the next stage of the trip would be made on foot and the lorry set off in the direction of the border after dark. Normally, during the second night’s travel, they were abandoned to their own devices and left completely disoriented and well removed from their starting-point. A range of testimonies from libertarian smugglers from the time, working for different networks, are agreed regarding the executions of runaways in the mountains. And not only them; I have here an extract from an interview with André Parent, customs officer, taped by the University of Toulouse as part of a project called *Smuggling routes via the Upper Cerdanya and the Ripollés*. Sure, it is a harsh testimonial but it was war-time and everybody had the gloves off:

“I could not stick those who were double-dealers, first going along with the Germans and then claiming credit for having helped Jews to get away. I know of some who, once they had paid for their passage and up in the mountains, killed them, with no witnesses around. They had just robbed them of whatever they were carrying and began all over again or handed them over to the Gestapo which was paying 10,000 for every Jew. Looking for proof of what they did, I befriended one of them, hinting that I too wanted in on this very lucrative business. Sometimes they would say: Hey, come the spring there’ll be more than one outing ... and they would laugh.

And then the time came. I killed a number of them, without a second thought. I was the judge and up in the mountains we had no need of courts. We settled our differences between ourselves, with no need for courts or magistrates. Corpses used to turn up, but only rarely was it not known who had murdered them. I could name names, if you like ...”⁶⁰

And the price could always go higher if the individuals concerned were particularly sought after by the German agencies.

With both versions now on the table, let us move on to the next chapter of the story and the unmasking of the alleged “cultural attaché” at the Francoist embassy in Paris.

⁶⁰ *Contrabandistes de la llibertat*, p. 142, Assumpta Montella, Ara Llibres, Barcelona, 2009

Chapter 15

Don Antonio

'El Padre' then decided to dispatch Manuel and another two of his comrades – one of them Manuel Soto Ortiz – to Paris. Again we have two versions of what happened. In the first, with them went Rosenthal whom they had promised to get to New York in return for his identifying the attaché: in the other version no mention is made of the Jewish chemist. Huet promised to move heaven and earth to get his hands on the attaché, albeit that he would abide by the formalities, something that Terres had pointedly asked of him, since this was supposedly a Spanish diplomat they were taking about.

Here again the two versions diverge, if we go by the version offered in *Los senderos de la libertad*, on arrival in Paris a watch was kept from the terrace of a bar across the street from the Spanish embassy and on the second day the surveillance paid off. Don Antonio appeared, with a young man in tow. The pair were tailed to a plush residence. Rosenthal was to tail Don Antonio and Huet would go off to see Laureano Cerrada to secure some phoney papers for the Jew. Later, on a further visit to Don Antonio's home, and as they gazed at the name-plates to find out which was his floor, they came upon a name-plate that read: *Antonio Granero Rondaño*. Huet knocked at the door and it was opened by the young man who had been accompanying the attaché; he was bundled out of the way and told to sit down and pay careful attention. 'El Murciano' opened his jacket to display his pistol and looked menacing. The young man, a Jew from Alsace by the name of Kapp, offered no resistance and answered his questions. He admitted that Don Antonio was a journalist from Madrid who was engaged in rescuing Jews and posing as the cultural attaché. Manolo readied himself to wait for the arrival of the fellow and in the meantime searched through the apartment which was filled with supposed gifts from rescued Jews as well as with cash and paper money from several countries. Besides the cash, he was to confiscate the odd letter that looked interesting to him. The wait dragged on as he spent the night waiting for the journalist to return home. Given his absence, he made up his mind to drop in at the Spanish embassy, although there too no one could say where he was.

The story came to a strange conclusion. In one of the confiscated letters there was reference to new premises for the "delegation" in Toulouse and the two Manuels – Soto and Huet – made for the address. The premises on the outskirts of the city comprised of a house set in a wood plus a warehouse. Inside the building they came upon a Spaniard in his thirties and a young Frenchwoman. Given the young man's cocky attitude, the Manolos were not slow to produce their guns, disarming the man who went by the name of Leandro de Pablo; that and other interesting details came to light following the interrogation to which the couple were subjected. Remember that Huet could be very "persuasive" when the need arose. This Leandro turned out to be a member of the squad under the command of Colonel Chamorro, operating chiefly in the area around Pau.

Allow me to digress here slightly. Colonel Chamorro was Juan Chamorro Chamorro, army colonel and head of the *Segunda Bis*⁶¹, which position he took up in the Spanish secret services of the day. That agency had not been set up until 1936, meaning that he became a specialist during those years when it was anything but refined. Refinement was introduced through the cooperation of specialists dispatched to Spain by Nazi Germany, whether Abwehr personnel or Gestapo personnel; the latter did as they pleased in Spain and perfected the *modus operandi* and, of course, the interrogation practices of those apprentice secret agents.

It turned out that the cultural attaché was César González Ruano: if we are to credit the reports drawn up by the Germans whom Rosa Sala and Placid Garcia-Planas came across during their researches, they wrote him off as a "nasty adventurer". They found that during his time in Berlin he had been passing himself off as a *marqués* and, while in Paris, lived off black market dealings, pimping and trading in safe-conducts; apart from that, a

⁶¹ *Segunda Bis* was the shortened name for the Land, Naval and Air Force Intelligence Services. It was the Spanish military intelligence and counter-intelligence agency. It was attached to the Second (or Intelligence) Sections of the respective headquarters staffs. It was set up during the Spanish Civil War and stayed active up until it was overhauled and transformed into the new intelligence services under the designation CESID (Superior Defence Intelligence Centre), which in turn would give way to the CNI (National Intelligence Centre). During 1992-1998 it remained active, in air force circles at any rate.

variety of leads and reports came to light, which '*el Padre*' put to good use. Officer Leandro de Pablo was then removed to a guerrilla camp, and was never heard of again, or at least so Eduardo Pons Prades had it. Although it may well be more realistic to think that he vanished straight out of those new premises, knowing the Manolos and knowing that there was no need, nor was it easy or safe moving around a France under Nazi occupation with a kidnapped Spanish agent riding in one's car or stuffed into the boot. As for that young Frenchwoman, she was dispatched to Pau to brief Colonel Chamorro on what had occurred.

In the second version, Rosenthal does not get a mention and Don Antonio does not appear at any point. The plan was for Huet's group to kidnap him from the outset, and later force him to sign a confession regarding the trafficking of Jews, before then putting a couple of bullets into him and dumping his corpse at the gates of the Francoist embassy along with a copy of his confession. Fortunately for the sham attaché, no matter how hard they looked for him, he was nowhere to be found. Where both versions agree is that they stumbled upon Kapp, Don Antonio's lover, and kidnapped and interrogated him. They found out that González Ruano was being held by the Germans, who had mistaken him for a member of the resistance ... Here again the dates do not fit, as is noted in that book by Rosa Sala and Placid García-Planas, as the journalist's arrest by the Germans dates from June 1942 and does not match the dates of the lorries. The very next day, '*el Padre*' had one of his agents who had a flawless command of German draft an anonymous letter denouncing the supposed Spanish official and his profiteering from escaping Jews. Subsequently, the Gestapo cleared up the mix-up that had led to his arrest, but, thanks to the anonymous letter, declared César González Ruano *persona non grata*. It seems that he was in the French capital up until October 1943, so maybe the two stories do marry up.

By way of an after-thought to this chapter, it should be said that Pons Prades wound up in the company of Gonzalez Ruano at Camilo José Cela's apartment in the mid-1960s. They spent some time chatting there about their days in Paris and it seems the journalist remarked that he had managed to emerge, smelling of roses, from the Gestapo barracks in which he had been held due to his physical resemblance to a member of the resistance. What prompted his swift release was that a homosexual SS officer took a fancy to him. Pons Prades remarks that, had Manolo Huet ever been briefed by him that Don Antonio had been traced to Madrid, then '*el Murciano*' would have hot-footed it there in person and paid him a courtesy call ... So he chose instead to spare them both any issues and left things as they were.

Chapter 16

The Same Story with 40 years' Hindsight

Time turns everything rotten, as the old punks would have it ... Or perhaps not. What is that all about? Well, very simply, we are going to see shortly how a story can differ ... the same story, but with the benefit of rather more than 40 years of hindsight. Once again, we have two versions to choose from. The older one as recounted and put in writing in the years 1949 and 1950, and the more modern, or at any rate younger one, committed to writing in the 1990s and published in 1996. The sources are essentially the same, namely, Pilar Ponzán's testimony and her brother's papers. But as she herself says in her book, much has been lost due to the inexorable passage of time and because it was not put in writing earlier. Both her account and Téllez's appeared just a few months apart in 1996 and although Téllez's is more comprehensive and contains quite a bit more information, it was heavily influenced by the text, sources and data provided by the former.

So what can the other version be? Well, nothing more nor less than an encounter with Federica, comrade Sancho. During 1949 and 1950, Federica Montseny was busily collecting and writing memoirs on the tough times experienced by Spanish libertarians in exile in France. In her book *El éxodo, Pasión y muerte de españoles en el exilio*, she deals with the matter of the prison camps, the escape lines and the labour companies, as well as the anti-Nazi resistance, making use of lots of testimonies. In the section dealing with the escape lines she highlights – how could she not? – the efforts of the Ponzán network and bases herself primarily on the extensive testimony of Ponzán's sister. Back to Pilar then, albeit that I cannot say if she was the only first-hand source involved or whether there was some additional testimony used.

Anyway, enough of the preamble and let us get down to brass tacks. On 1 April 1943 Eusebio López Laguarda aka 'Coteno' was arrested in Toulouse railway station; he had been waiting for a contact who had previously been arrested. Taken to the Gestapo building, he was swiftly interrogated and tortured. After many hours under torture and in a moment of respite during which he found himself alone with just one guard, he capitalized on a momentary oversight to punch the German and leap from a first floor window. He managed to make his way to the home of a comrade and fellow network collaborator by the name of Francisco Javier Miguel Aznares aka 'el Largo', who rendered first aid. In the morning he ensured that the remainder of the network was put on alert. *Coteno* stayed in the home of 'el Largo' until he had been supplied with fresh papers and recovered as best he was able. We are also told that the sundry compromising documents that he was keeping in his (closely watched by the Germans) Impasse Calais home were retrieved once the Germans withdrew their diligent informants.

So much for Téllez's version, which I have somewhat condensed; as usual Téllez gives the names of the protagonists of the episode and offers us details such as place of detention, the reasons why he was detained and the arrest of the other contact. He also specifies the location where 'Coteno' was storing sensitive documents and that these were recovered. But now let us take a look at the older version of the matter. Over now to Federica:

"One day, 1 April 1943 to be precise, in Toulouse's Bar Colombette, one of Ponzán's men, whose name corresponds with the initials S.O., was arrested by the Gestapo and the French and Spanish police. He is still alive and I do not have the authority to give his name in full."

She recounts how he was taken to the fearsome local headquarters of the German police, the various forms of torture to which he was subjected and how they did not get a word out of him.

"In the early hours of the morning, seizing upon his guards' being distracted and having fallen asleep, he successfully leapt from a second-floor window and by five o'clock arrived, covered in blood his body bruised from the beatings and pop-eyed at the home of a comrade. The latter was not a member of the group, nor had he any connection with the *Pat O'Leary* network."

Whilst there are a few obvious differences between the two versions thus far, there are more to follow. Federica's version goes on to mention a runner's being dispatched to Lyon to alert the network, to S.O.'s relocating to the Ariège, to a safe location and the subsequent search for a woman who was charged with alerting the other networks for which Ponzán and his guides worked that 'Coteno' had been captured.

"In addition, in the house in which S.O. was living and which had been painstakingly searched by the Gestapo, there were some very important papers, address lists, phoney French and German documents and a considerable sum of money. No one could get near the house because it was guarded night and day by the German police. The documents were secreted in the walls and some others in the false bottom of a table. Money, lists and documents were salvaged thanks to another French woman who, a few days later, simply rented the room left vacant by SO who had been jailed and then gone missing, without her arousing any suspicions on the part of the landlord or the police who kept up the watch on the apartment, waiting for someone to show up whom they could arrest."⁶²

Let me start by stating that S.O. was Salvador Ortega. That was the name on the phoney papers that Eusebio López Laguarda was carrying on him and which Federica zealously concealed; actually, given that she was writing in the late 1940s, sticking to his initials was the least that she could and should have done. The two versions are at one regarding what matters, the arrest, torture, escape and the recovery of the sensitive materials. As for the rest, it is not my intention to endorse either Téllez or Montseny as they may well be complementary versions of the same story. What I do intend to do is demonstrate how the passage of time effects a slight alteration in method. Federica knew of certain odd details that stuck in her memory and which she released in confidence, such as where the documents were hidden and how they were retrieved. Tellez was more methodical and over the years when he was looking into the network, a lot of the people involved were not able to speak up, so he was obliged to rely more on older documentary records and whatever testimonies were still around. And if it was Pilar from whom he got the history, it looks as if she had already forgotten some of it. In fact, in her book she leaves out any mention, as she centres on her brother's arrest, which occurred a short time after *Coteno's*. There are some people possessed of photographic memories and capable of recalling the tiniest details despite the passage of the years unfortunately, most of us are not so blessed. The passage of time simply poses memory issues and places obstacles in the path of those of us striving to recover memories ... yet again, we feel like we have come along too late.

⁶² *El éxodo. Pasión y muerte de españoles en el exilio*, pp, 158-159, Federica Montseny, Galba Ediciones, Barcelona, 1977

Chapter 17

Bad Times for Waxing Lyrical

In previous chapters we mentioned something about the infra-structure, members, informants, organizers or some of the places where the *Pat O'Leary* escape line was operational. We remarked upon its successes in smuggling people, intelligence, gear or straightforward disinformation. Now for some more detail, taking into account how harsh the times were for plying certain trades. The fact is that trying to and accomplishing the rescue of so many folk from the clutches of the Nazis, forging documents, ferrying intelligence or 'sensitive' items in defiance of the weather, the enemy and the chosen locations (this was the height of the Second World War and the enemy comprised the Nazi army or Francoist army, the Gestapo, the *Segunda Bis* or the BPS and occupied France) did not hold out the prospect of great success in the risky undertakings engaged in by the people who sustained the network. In recent chapters we have touched upon some of the casualties, betrayals or bad experiences they encountered throughout their time in service. And these were not the only ones.

On 23 January 1943, the guide Agustín Remiro was arrested in Portugal in possession of substantial compromising information and handed over to the Francoist forces three days later. Tried before a council of war in Madrid on 27 April 1942, he was sentenced to death; not that Remiro blithely accepted that and he managed to escape from Porlier prison, only to be tracked down on the street and gunned down. A bullet in the head finished him off.

In late 1941 Joaquín Querol and his comrade García (almost certainly this was Andrés García Ruiz) were arrested in Perpignan because of their people-smuggling. Querol was tortured and jailed for seven months, only to be dispatched to Germany after that. Luckily for him, he managed to escape from the train in which he was being transported and after a 13-day trek he crossed the border and entered Spain surreptitiously.

On 8 December, in the town of Abbeville in the occupied zone two important agents from the network – the Australian Bruce Dowding aka *Masson* and the abbé Pierre Charpentier, who was in charge of counterfeiting activities in his zone – were arrested. Placed in Loos jail in the city of Lille, both were subsequently transported to Germany and beheaded in 1943. Of those arrested in the Rue Limayrac raid in October 1942, Juan Zafón was deported to Germany in 1943. Fortunately for him, he was able to escape whilst en route to the "death camps" and made it as far as Bordeaux and vanished. We will run into him again in the insurgent summer of 1944, on the streets of Paris alongside Manolo Huet.

On 3 February 1943, Miguel Sol Torres was arrested in Toulouse. Initially he was jailed and was then deported to Germany and finally executed by a bullet in the back of the head on 25 April 1945. Also in February 1943, the Toulouse Gestapo searched the Hotel de Paris and even though nothing was uncovered they arrested the couple Augustine and Stanislas-François Mongelard, the hotel managers, who wound up being deported to the Nazi death camps. She made it back; he did not.

In Paris that March one of the main players in the network – Jean de la Olla – was captured and viciously tortured before being shipped off to the death camps. He managed to survive but by his return he was a broken man, afflicted with TB, missing two fingers from one hand due to torture in spite of which they had not been able to make him talk.

That same month, in Toulouse, it was the turn of '*Pat O'Leary*' himself and the tailor Ullman to be arrested. The Jewish tailor suffered a dire fate as nothing more was ever heard of him, which unfortunately points a finger at the crematorium ovens. As mentioned previously, his wife stepped into his shoes and she too was arrested a few months later and deported to Germany and gassed in one of the camps there. As is commonplace in such cases, we do not even know her name any more than the names of other women doubly forgotten about. Albert Guérisset was processed through the Gestapo's sinister headquarters, a number of French prisons and then was deported to Germany, where he sampled several camps prior to his liberation by American troops from the feared Dachau camp in April 1945.

And if that news was not bad enough, there is a sort of a law that runs the world that says things can always get even worse. Ponzán was rearrested on 28 April 1943; luckily he was arrested by the French police. This time, however, something went awry. Ponzán did not get out of prison and remained in the custody of the

gendarmes, but the Gestapo was closing in dangerously and, with the passage of time, it found him. Finally, just a few days ahead of the liberation of Toulouse – on 17 August 1944 to be precise – some 50 prisoners were removed from the Saint Michel prison in the city in lorries, guarded by German soldiers and Gestapo personnel. Some 25 kilometers further out, in a wood beside Buzet-sur-Tarn, the caravan pulled up and the prisoners were ordered to alight from the vehicles. After that, bursts of machine-gun fire rang out and after that there was a strong stench, first of gasoline and then of burning flesh. And so Francisco Ponzán – *Vidal* inside the resistance – the man who had devoted himself to rescuing so many but who could not himself be rescued – met his end. It should be emphasized that Ponzán never went armed, which made the arresting of him easier. Manolo view on this score was as follows:

“When faced with rabid dogs like the fascists who understand no language save the language of force, you cannot glide through the world brandishing a libertarian catechism. You must go better armed than them and beat them to the draw. If he insisted ongoing unarmed, Ponzán should have agreed to being protected by some armed comrade, as we urged him on more than one occasion. Because otherwise you are a goner ...”⁶³

In the early hours of 15 May, near Usat-les-Bains, guide Miguel Luengo Guillén was mowed down by a German patrol when caught unawares on the Orzoloc bridge.

On 17 May Robert Terres was arrested by the French police after it was discovered that he had had a hand in the escape from Le Vernet of Ponzán and his men. Luckily for Terres, with help from two Yugoslav ex-International Brigaders, he managed to escape from prison. That same month, Floreal Barberá was also arrested and placed in Saint Michel prison in Toulouse; Thanks to the intervention of the Red Cross, he was transferred after a month to the Noe camp from which he walked free six months later.

The owners of the Hotel du Tennis in Canet-plage, an important support base near Perpignan – Solange and Fernand Lebreton – were arrested in mid-July 1943 and deported to the death camps in Germany. Solange was held in Ravensbruck and managed to survive; her husband, placed in Sachsenhausen, was not so fortunate.

In October that terrifying year of 1943, Elisa Garrido Gracia aka *Manica* was arrested in Toulouse. Born in the Magallon district on 14 June 1909, she subsequently relocated to Barcelona. With a background in a libertarian family, she soon joined the CNT unions. In July 1936 she set off for the Aragon front to serve as a female militiaman. Once the civil war ended she crossed into France and she and her fellow anarchist partner Marino Ruiz de Angulo settled in the Hautes Alpes department. Come the German invasion of France, they started working with the escape lines, specifically Ponzán's, in which Marino served as a liaison. Elisa was arrested by the fearsome Gestapo and remained in its clutches for weeks without end. She was later imprisoned in Saint Michel and on 30 January 1944 she and another 958 women were deported to Germany and sent to the Ravensbruck camp. She was sent to work in a factory making shells where she carried out numerous acts of sabotage. Thanks to a Red Cross prisoner exchange of female deportees for German POWs, she was freed in Denmark from where she was able to get to Paris.

But the month of October had more in store: the Gestapo showed up at the Villa Tallada in Banyuls-sur-Mer, arresting the Bueno family. Miguel Bueno Cid was deported to the camps and perished in a gas chamber in Mauthausen in 1944. The remainder of the family – his children José and Alfonsina Bueno Vela – and Alfonsina's husband, Josep Ester Borrás, suffered the same fate. Fate in a manner of speaking although they could consider themselves lucky that they managed to emerge from the Nazi death camps alive.

That October also the crackdown struck the Perpignan team as the Pelipos and Francisco Sala were picked up; Sala wound up in the Mauthausen camp, which he managed to survive and was liberated in May 1945.

On 2 November, the guide José Albalat Ripollés, freshly back from Spain and unaware of the previous month's events, was arrested in Villa Tallada. The Gestapo took him to Paris where they tortured him mercilessly before committing him to Fresnes prison. He was eventually deported to the German camps before being liberated by the Allied armies. Ausencio Fernández and Rafael Soto (it should be said that Pons Prades identified the later

⁶³ *Histoires de la clandestinitat*, El coleccionable, *Les cadenes d'evasió, 1939-1944*, No 4

as a 'plant' in the libertarian network, albeit that this claim has thus far not been confirmed nor refuted) were captured in the same location.

In late 1943, in Paris, the Gestapo arrested Gerard Vogel aka *Gilbert*. He was deported to Germany and interned in a death camp from which he re-emerged in a dire physical and mental state.

In March 1944, during a mission on Spanish soil, Amadeo Casares Colomer was arrested along with Pascual López Laguarda. The former was released on 22 December 1945, whereas the latter served a lengthy prison term after he stood trial for espionage. Included in the same indictment as Pascual and tried alongside him was José Anguila Guiset but we do not know if he was a member of the network as well, albeit that everything seems to suggest that he was. In August 1944, the Gestapo raided the Buciet home of Carlos Manini and placed him under arrest; in a different house, three Spaniards barricaded themselves inside and returned fire and Manini exploited the resultant confusion to leg it and take to the hills. Carlos made good his escape but those three Spaniards finished up dead.

To conclude this rush of bad tidings, and finish this chapter on a wry smile, let us end with the case of Joan Català Balanya. During the years that he worked for the network he was arrested on no less than four occasions, but that was 'routine', given the activities in which he was engaged; the surprising thing is that on all four occasions he was to wind up escaping: "I was born free and enjoying living freely. If they captured me, I would escape. It was not my fault. Prison was not for me. It was no place for me."⁶⁴ Arrested for the first time in Cádiz in May 1940, he was dispatched to Madrid and placed in the El Cisne prison, from which he escaped on 25 November. In April 1941 he was arrested again in the Estación de Francia in Barcelona whilst escorting two American aviators. Within days he had legged it from the remand prison in Barcelona after two Civil Guards removed his handcuffs to deliver him to the judge. His next arrest also occurred in Barcelona in August of the same year and there he bumped into two old acquaintances, superintendents Polo and Quintela. They committed him to the Modelo prison and this time things took a nastier turn but there was still a chance; on Sunday 23 December 1942, while Mass was being said, Català seized his chance to scale the wall and despite a bad fall that damaged his foot and spine, he steeled himself enough to be able to knock out a guard, make it as far as the street and melt into the crowd. On his last trip to Barcelona, with his mission accomplished, and being en route back towards Andorra, he was arrested again close to La Seo. He himself put this down to treachery by "somebody" out to make a name for himself. Removed to Madrid he was this time placed in the Carabanchel Alto prison. And in March 1947, scaling the walls again, remembering his spine which no longer hurt him, he gazed at the wall and reckoned that this one was higher ... Everything turned out well for him and for his spine: on 1 April he crossed the border into France. But there were more shocks in store for this professional escaper. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested for "unlawful border crossing" and put in prison in Toulouse. At which point Robert Terres stepped in again, pulling certain wires as was very much his wont; he had a word with certain people and Català found himself back on the streets. The refrain may well be grating a little by this point, but *'el Padre'* looked after his own.

⁶⁴ Joan Català in conversation with Xavier Montanyà, taken from <https://www.vilaweb.cat/mailobert/pg/14/2427109/honor-joan-catala.html>

Chapter 18

'El Padre' Looks after His Own but ... who Looked out for 'el Padre'?

Robert Terres was arrested by the Germans on 26 January 1943. On the following morning, he reached the Austerlitz station in Paris under escort of two German guards. He was held until 18 March. During the interval between those two dates, there was a vicious contest between, on the one hand, the Schutz Staffel (SS) interrogators who knew that Terres was an important player in the TR 1117 Perpignan espionage and intelligence station and Terres himself on the other. Plainly, given that 'el Padre' was working for the French puppet government, he was supposedly under an obligation to collaborate with the Germans rather than with the resistance. And that was the role that he strove to impress upon the Nazis, by releasing spent or not very important information, keeping "his Spaniards", especially Paco Ponzán – a prize the German agencies lusted after – under wraps. In the end he came through the episode unscathed but had promised to operate as a double agent, passing phoney intelligence to the British, trying to track down Ponzán and keeping the Axis agencies au fait with everything. After a few meetings with the Abwehr's Dr Ritter and the more and more unmistakable failure of Terres to play ball, the only option open to Terres was to seek safe passage to Algeria. On 6 May, at yet another meeting with the German agent, a question was asked that tilted the balance:

"Terres ... Any news of Ponzán? I'd love to get my hands on him."

"No. Not a thing."

"When Lacasa goes off on his mission, I'd love him to find me some intelligence regarding someone rather out of the ordinary. I think he is a Frenchman, acting on behalf of the dissidents manipulating the Spaniards on Algiers's behalf."

"What's the name, Herr Doktor?"

"I only know his nickname ... they call him '*el Padre*.'"⁶⁵

And so, not long after that, on the 17th of that month, Terres was picked up in Toulouse and wound up committed to prison in Evaux-les-Bains and later, the one in Castres. It was from this latter prison that he managed to escape on 16 September that year and wound up in hiding in a safe house in the Pyrenees. A month after that, he received the green light to move on to North Africa.

Terres was able to link up with one of Paco's guides specifically Ricardo Rebola. They met up in the Hotel de France in Lannemezan, from where they set off for Perpignan the next day, 14 November: their next destination was Banyuls which was, as we know, very close to the border: '*El Padre*' was disguised as a workman in used overalls and wearing a beret. Over to him now for his account of how the trip went:

"I followed Ricardo through the icy night. My pocket was weighed down by a heavy calibre revolver. He was blithely carrying a machine-gun. Leaving Banyuls by the mountain trail, there was always the risk of our running across a German patrol.

Five o'clock in the morning and still pitch black. Contrary to how I remember it, the trail had not been all that tough. The fact is that we had chosen, not the shortest trail but the least wearisome.

'Aha!- he informed me. 'The border is behind us now. We are now in Spain.'

'Already! So we can ...'

'No. Not yet. We have a lot of ground still to cover before we can rest up. I know a mountain shepherd who will tip us off about the Spanish patrols. Let's get a move on!'

Three hours later, day broke timorously. All of a sudden, Ricardo grinned at me:

'We're there. The shepherd's hut is very close by. I'll track him down Give me your revolver. I have a hiding place hereabouts where I always stash weapons. You stay here and try to snatch some sleep [...]

⁶⁵ *La red de evasión del grupo Ponzán*, p. 326, Antonio Téllez, Virus Editorial, Barcelona, 1996

It'll be midday soon – Ricardo stated after rousing me. – I've seen the shepherd. Everything is going swimmingly. The Spanish patrol passed through very early on today and there's only one a day. We can press on and reach Figueres at nightfall without hurrying. But first we'll have a bite to eat: the shepherd let me have some tortilla and wine' ... There, amid the majestic peaks of the Pyrenees, I tucked into what may well have been the best meal in my life.

With a spring in our steps, we started downhill, sticking to the trails and all but throwing caution to the wind. Vichy, the Germans, the Gestapo ... the memory of them all had faded from my mind.

Out of the blue, at a bend in the trail, some 20 metres away from us, three carabineers loomed, training their rifles at us.

'Halt! Hands up!'

We had anticipated everything except for a second patrol. Should we make a run for it? It was out of the question. They would mow us down like rabbits.

Compliantly, I stepped forward with my arms raised, Ricardo following after. Without setting down their guns, two of them stepped up to frisk us quickly, whilst the third trained his rifle on us. They found nothing on us."⁶⁶

The pair were taken under close guard to the carabineer post in the border settlement of Vilamaniscle. Since the post had no proper cells, they were held overnight in the basement of the building in which the post commander lived. Fortunately for the two fugitives, the premises must not have seen regular use in that capacity because after a short search they came upon an iron bar that they used to force open a sturdy door to freedom. By the following morning, already in Figueras, they caught a train as far as the capital of Catalonia on the morning of 17 November.

But that was not the end of *'el Padre's'* adventures. He, who had put so many men and women in touch with guides to smuggle them smoothly as far as Barcelona, did not have such an easy time escaping. There was nothing untoward about the rendezvous with Ricardo in the Barrio Chino, even though the guide was accompanied by another comrade. After a short stroll through the *barrio*, a fresh issue arose: again, let us look to Terres's account:

"'Police! Papers!'

I had no papers. Running away would have been pointless. There were two of them, although I could not see the second one. I could only feel the barrel of his gun whilst his colleague was patting me down.

My guide Ricardo and his comrade had vanished just in time. In any case, their papers should have been in order – and there I was, alone, with the police dragging me away amid the lights, the hubbub and revelry in the Barrio Chino ...

My head was spinning but I heard the echo of a distant voice, harsh yet melodious, Ramonatxo's voice saying: 'If you ever meet up with us in Barcelona and run into difficulties, you can ask for Superintendent Polo, the head of the Political-Social Squad. He's a friend and owes me favours I did him during the civil war. Be that as it may, keep your wits about you in Barcelona."⁶⁷

And so, shortly after that, Hector Ramonatxo who was, like Terres, a member of TR 117 and the main liaison with Barcelona took a quick phone call from Superintendent Pedro Polo. Somewhat sardonically, the latter asked after a cousin of his by the name of Puig; Ramonatxo, who knew some Latin, quickly caught on and replied in the affirmative, after which Polo released the cousin and asked them both to display somewhat greater caution in future. In a final flourish, it needs to be said that from then on, at the French special services'

⁶⁶ *La red de evasión del grupo Ponzán*, pp. 328-329, Antonio Téllez, Virus Editorial, Barcelona, 1996

⁶⁷ *La red de evasión del grupo Ponzán*, p. 330, Antonio Téllez, Virus Editorial, Barcelona, 1996

headquarters in Barcelona's Calle Muntaner, Ramonatxo started referring to him as '*Tonton*', which is the French for 'Uncle'.

A few weeks later and without further mishap, '*el Padre*' arrived in North Africa safe and sound after sailing from Malaga to Algiers.

Chapter 19

The Liberation of Paris and First Contacts with *La Nueva*

It would have been sometime in May 1943, more or less, when Picard (*'Gilbert's'* father-in-law), seconded to the prefecture in the Basses Pyrénées department and holding down an important role in the underground travelled to Pezenas for a meeting with Huet. The situation had changed as the Gestapo had had wind of the involvement of both *'el Murciano'* and *'Conxita'* in the escape lines and they needed to act with the utmost urgency as they had been found "officially compromised". It was put to them that they move to Spain, pronto, but Huet had turned this down, as it was tantamount to jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire. Whereupon Picard came up with another way of their escaping detection. The idea was that they would go off and work in Vienna, no less, travelling on phoney documents as free French labourers, through the German labour bureau in Pau; passing themselves off as just another two out of the thousands of French citizens who were working in Austria and Germany at the time.

And so, in June 1943, Manolo and Segunda Montero headed off to Vienna. There they found work in a munitions factory, Manolo as a lorry driver and Segunda as a kitchen hand. They entered into a one-year contract and shortly after that were in touch with French saboteur groups, which, as Huet himself stated:

"We had a few adventures there as well since the French workers included a number of very well-organized sabotage teams. Whose efforts were, so to speak, facilitated by the fact that the German workers, normally older, did not seem to be overly diligent either as they could see that the war was being lost."⁶⁸

Regrettably we have very little information regarding the year spent in the Austrian capital, but what we do have includes this:

"There, together with French workers, Huet organized the sabotage of war materials. In particular, by mis-sizing the sliding – plexiglass – roof in the cockpits of German fighter planes, which was achieved by removing some fine strips of material from the sides of the roofs which derailed them from the metal guides."⁶⁹

Contract complete, more or less a year later, *'Gilbert's'* father-in-law brought him back, to Paris this time. They put that year to good use, improving their command of the language and now we had a Manuel Huet who spoke Castilian, Catalan, French and could get by in German and Arabic. So much for all the subsequent cant about those uneducated anarchists ...

In June 1944, Manolo and Segunda headed back to Paris, a city that was shortly to mount an armed uprising against its German occupiers. During the months they spent in the French capital after their return from exile in Vienna, Huet regularly hung out in Spanish libertarian circles. He had old acquaintances in the city who had been arriving there in dribs and drabs; they included Joaquín Blesa aka *'Quimet'*, Liberto Ros, Olegario Pachón, Juan Zafón and Lucía Rueda and an old familiar face from the Poble Nou FAI, Laureano Cerrada, who, if Pons Prades is to be credited, he had visited before when he (Huet) showed up with Rosenthal to obtain papers for the latter. For quite some time Cerrada would be the main player in the little libertarian exile world. For one thing, he as the organization's most powerful counterfeiter, churning out all sorts of documents, German or French, for his CNT or FAI comrades, for groups of resisters or the escape lines. Another of his priorities was getting his hands on as much armaments as he could (they were being set aside during the war) with an eye to their future use in Spain. But let us not get ahead of ourselves. For the time being they were in the occupied capital city of a country under occupation, with all of the hindrances and difficulties that that entailed.

The call for an uprising in the city, a call issued by the National Resistance Council was answered at 11.00 a.m. on 19 August 1944. With the aid of the Paris Liberation Committee, the city rose up in arms against the German invader. Fighting erupted across the city and a lot of Spanish exiles were in the thick of it. By the 19th, the existing strikes on the railways, telephone service, posts and telegraphs, newspapers and radio sectors gave

⁶⁸ *Los senderos de la libertad*, p. 103, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

⁶⁹ *Exiliados. La emigración cultural valenciana (siglos XVI-XX)*, Various Authors, (edited by Manuel García), Generalitat of Valencia, Cultural Department Valencia, 1995

way to a general strike. Allied units were nearby and this spurred on the resistance within the city. The local French Forces of the Interior (FFI), under the command of International Brigader Rol-Tanguy were mobilized on the following basis:

“1. All FFI forces are to patrol Paris and the P1⁷⁰ region from this day forth at twelve o’clock. 2. All the requisite vehicles shall be commandeered in order to guarantee the patrols’ mobility. 3. Itineraries and the frequency thereof shall be so arranged that the patrols can render mutual assistance should the need arise. 4. Public buildings, factories, general stores and communications nerve centres of every sort (posts, telephone, telegraphs, stations, etc.) are to be occupied militarily, wheresoever the forces needed to do so are available. 5. FFI forces are to marshal all public order personnel who are to be provided with an FFI arm-band. Bear in mind that success often hinges upon the numbers of personnel available, which is why mass recruitment is to be carried out immediately. All appropriate persons should be incorporated into the FFI, thereby carrying out the attached General Mobilization Order, which should be printed and distributed by all available means in the P1 region. The mission of the FFI in the metropolis is to open us access to Paris for the victorious Allied armies and to welcome them. *Signed:* Colonel Rol-Tanguy regional commander.”⁷¹

Paris rose up against the invader and she fought. The Germans still held their barracks and official buildings and knew that if they could but hold out for a few days the insurgents would run out of ammunition and would have to surrender.

On the night of the 24th, after a race against the clock, troops from the Second Armoured Division (or 2DB) under the command of Colonel Leclerc entered the capital as bells tolled throughout the city: to cries of ‘They’re here!’, No 9 Company, made up almost entirely of Spanish republicans driving half-tracks and commanded by Captain Dronne passed through the Porte d’Italie at 20.40, more or less and, after some skirmishing, headed towards the square at the Hôtel de Ville.

A tearful, cheering Paris welcomed these liberating troops. Whilst none too sure as to who they were. They were allegedly a French unit, but all its equipment was American and as they fraternized with the men, the latter were speaking in Spanish. In any event, what mattered was that the Allies had liberated and recaptured Paris.

But things were not as simple as all that. Luckily for the hopeful populace of the ‘City of Lights’, they were unaware of just how many troops had made entry into the city. For one thing, they were also unaware that Captain Dronne and General Leclerc had defied the orders of their superiors and that it was thanks to that fact that the captain’s column had reached the French capital.

That column comprised of just No 2 and No 3 sections from No 9 Company aka *La Nueve*, along with their officers. They were joined by No1 Section from No2 Company of the 501st combat vehicle Regiment plus another section from a sappers’ battalion. A total of two jeeps, 18 half-tracks plus 3 Sherman tanks. An odd sort of an army to capture the largest city in France and wrest it from the Nazi war machine.

At 20.45 hours, the column reached the Porte d’Italie. The command vehicle, a jeep with Dronne in charge was followed by the remainder of the meagre victorious forces. There, an Armenian by the name of Dikran volunteered to steer the troops to the Hôtel de Ville.

There was no resistance of any significance and the troops made rapid progress. They crossed the Seine via the Pont d’Austerlitz without mishap. At 21.22 that night the column pulled up outside the Hotel de Ville the very nerve centre of Paris. Their vehicles fanned out to repel any potential counter-attack.

The night passed without incident and we listen now to the testimony of Lucía Rueda:

⁷⁰ P1 being the demarcation laid down by the French Forces of the Interior and incorporating the departments of Paris, Seine, Seine-et-Oise, Seine-et-Marne and Oise; it was under the command of former International Brigader Rol-Tanguy.

⁷¹ *Republicanos españoles en la segunda guerra mundial*, pp. 405-406, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1975

“We – which is to say my partner Juan Zafón, another two comrades, Libertad and *Conchita* [Segunda Montero], Manolo Huet and myself completed a stroll around the Place de la République where the ‘Guadalajara’ and ‘Teruel’ armoured vehicles were posted. The former was crewed exclusively by Extremadurans.

Well, as it turned out, all of a sudden heavy machine-gun bursts erupted, creating a frightful panic. People threw themselves to the ground and took cover behind the tanks. We, being rather more used to it, immediately realized that we were dealing here with ‘*pacos*’ [snipers]. As the square was strewn with people, the armour was unable to budge. The crews shouted out to one and all to let them through. But when people are in the grip of fear, they heed no one and had Huet and Zafón not stepped in, I do not know what would have happened as the bullets were still whistling past. Scanning the surrounding buildings, it was I that managed to spot the location that the gunfire was coming from. It was emanating from a sort of attic that capped the Les Magasins Réunis department store on the corner of the Place de la République. And the Faubourg du Temple. No sooner had I gestured at the location of the ‘*pacos*’ than Huet and Zafón set off at a run, jumping over people and trampling one or two of them for sure, as they rushed towards the store. We followed them, as I knew that they were both unarmed and, in truth, I was wondering what sort of crazy move they were about to make. Because, knowing them both very well, I knew that I could not put anything past them ... and, as you will see, I was not wrong.

On reaching the doorway of the house next door, I saw Huet wrest a rifle away from a lad who had sought the shelter of the doorway:

‘Look, kid, give me that, for it is of no use to you!’⁷²

And, without wasting a second, he darted upstairs to the roof, with Zafón following. Huet said to Zafón that as he was unarmed, he should follow at a distance.”⁷³

Let us stick with the dash upstairs and hear the testimony of Juan Zafón:

“Reaching to door, Huet put his boot to it, calling upon them to surrender. He let out such a holler that it must have struck home with the Germans, since they stopped sniping there and then. I should point out that scarcely had we stepped on to the roof than Huet made to load his rifle, at which point he realized that the weapon was useless as the bolt did not work. Huet having spent a year in Vienna he had a few words of German. Through the door a strange dialogue then began:

‘Americans?’ the Germans asked.

Huet’s answer was that no, they were not Americans.

‘British?’

‘No, not British either.’

‘French?’ they pressed him, with more of a tremor in their voices.

‘Not French! ... We are Spaniards!’

‘Spanish?’

‘Yes, Spanish. Come on now, out of there and be quick about it.’

Before I go on, I must confess that when I saw that they were opening to door, I thought they were going to kill us where we stood, as they were armed with a state-of-the-art automatic rifle. The moment the door opened, Huet cast his own rifle to the floor and in the blink of an eye he had seized

⁷² In Catalan: *Va, nano, dona m’això, que a tu no et serveix per a res!*

⁷³ *Republicanos españoles en la segunda guerra mundial*, pp. 300-301, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1975

the automatic weapon from them. And I grabbed a rifle. And we all started down the stairs: we two and five Germans. Huet led the way and I brought up the rear, with the five prisoners between us. You cannot imagine the cheers as we appeared in the doorway on the street. We were assailed by question after question. Huet simply replied: 'Spanish refugees! We're Spanish refugees!' And we tried to force a passage through towards the armoured vehicles to hand the Germans over to Leclerc's men. Out of the blue, a bunch of French men and women, after cursing and spitting at the Germans, turned on us. Clamouring for us to hand them over to them. Using our rifles, we tried to fend them off. But it was to no avail. They knocked Huet and me down and dragged away the five Germans, barbarically lynching them a short distance away. Some spectacle! No wonder they had not wanted to give themselves up to the French! Now I have no clue as to why it occurred to those wretches to snipe from the attics, rather than go into hiding and let the storm pass ..."⁷⁴

And the bells of Paris rang out. First a few of them, with the rest joining in gradually. Shortly after that, the entire city was ringing out its liberation and the streets filled with emotional people. All that was needed now was for the remainder of the division's troops to arrive unless the Germans caught on to what was facing them, namely, a contingent of no more than 200 men and a bare twenty vehicles. The following day, the rest of Leclerc's troops showed up and General von Choltitz surrendered.

The liberation also led to fresh encounters with old friends long forgotten. Some were in the resistance; others were with No 9 Company; the hard times faded in the wonderful moment of falling into one another's arms. Olegario Pachón stumbled upon Miguel Campos on board the 'Ebro'; they had not set eyes on each other since back in 1938 on the Lérida front. Which was where Pachón aka 'el Extremeño' had rescued 'el Canario' [Campos] from a serious wrangle with the authorities in charge of the battalion in which they were both serving. Bullosa, a crewman in the same half-track, soon recognized several of the civilians surrounding his vehicle (all members of the 26th Division or erstwhile Durruti Column, like himself) among the crowds of Spanish refugees packed into the square outside Paris's Hôtel de Ville on that night of 24 August. Exiles popped up once the rumour spread that the Allied unit that had just entered the French capital was to all intents and purposes made up of Spaniards. There was Liberto Ros, Joaquín Blesa and José Mariño: they had been separated after losing the civil war and were now being reunited when a different war was about to be won.

My friend, the historian Miguel Sanz, the son and grandson of guerrillas, sent me a press clipping that is a perfect closing to this chapter. It offers us something of an update on the contacts established during those frenzied days in the French capital. The testimony in question comes from Manuel Pinto Queiroz, known in *La Nueve* as *Manuel Lozano*:

"We signed on with the Leclerc Division in the belief that after France we would be liberating Spain. Everybody in my company was ready to desert with all their kit. Campos, in charge of No 3 Section, made contact with the Unión Nacional guerrillas fighting in the Pyrenees. But the Unión Nacional was under the thumb of the communists and so we had to drop the idea ... Had the communists not been so predominant, then we would have defected with the entire company, and not just our company, but all the other battalions in which Spaniards were serving. We had thought of everything. With our lorries loaded up with gear and gasoline we might have made it all the way to Barcelona. And then who can say if the history of Spain might not have been different ..."⁷⁵

Now down to business, of which there is plenty going on in war-time as well as places freshly recaptured from the enemy. And if there are two people who never let an opportunity go a-begging when it cropped up, they were Laureano Cerrada and Manolo Huet. The organization is very well endowed in terms of human assets but the husbanding of them leaves something to be desired, so, without further ado, let us tackle the matter.

It was the summer of 1944. An American NCO of Puerto Rican extraction – fellow called Pastor (the son of a Spanish anarchist who fled to Puerto Rico in the wake of the Tragic Week in 1909) – showed up at the

⁷⁴ *Republicanos españoles en la segunda guerra mundial*, pp. 301-302, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1975

⁷⁵ *Bulletin du CIRA de Marseilles*, No 29-30 "Les anarchistes espagnols dans la tourmente, 1939-1945", p. 175, 1989

organization's premises seeking news of a friend of his father's. The NCO, noticing the straits in which his father's co-religionists were operating put a plan to them. That plan consisted of robbing his unit's payroll officer. Pastor spelled out the fellow's routine and time-table and the rest was child's play. Cerrada, Huet, Manuel Soto and another comrade jumped the officer and his two-man escort in a wooded area through which they had to pass, near to the barracks where they were billeted. They disarmed them, gagged them and left them tied up among the trees and relieved them of both the cash they were carrying and the car in which they were travelling. Not that that was to be the last time they worked together because, seeing how well everything had gone.

Chapter 20

Tales of *La Nueve*

For those who may not be aware of it, the end of the Spanish Civil War saw thousands of civilians and servicemen gathering in Alicante in hope of boarding a ship and leaving for exile. Fascist troops wound up blockading the port and the Italians captured the city which became one enormous rat-trap. The last ship out of the port was the *Stanbrook*, filled to the gunwales with passengers; on board that vessel we find some of the members of No 9 Company, including Amadeo Granell who would serve as a lieutenant with *La Nueve*, or the libertarians Abenza and Moreno. These people did not head for France; the vast majority of them headed for the coast of North Africa and the main destination was Algeria.

Let us start our anecdote collection by saying that initially the unit was not *La Nueve* but rather the Chad March Regiment raised in Algeria and made up mostly of soldiers from sub-Saharan Africa and known as *tirailleurs*. Even before that, they had been the *Corps Francs*. If we probe even further back, we find that many of the Spanish republicans who would serve in the unit came from the '*Stanbrook*' and from other vessels and were interned in labour and POW camps. And lo and behold when the 2nd Armoured Division was raised in 1943 under French officers but an integral part and under the orders of the Americans, the latter banned colonial troops from service in the division. Leclerc's strenuous objections were ignored on such far-fetched pretexts as such blacks' being incapable of mastering the technology of modern armaments, the cold climate in Europe or straightforward out-and-out racism. A lot of those African troops were disarmed, their fresh uniforms were taken off them and they were dispatched back to their villages merely because they had the wrong skin colour. This was how their white Allies repaid them for the lives lost by their comrades and all the dire straits they had endured during the early years of the war.

Once in the army, those Spaniards clung to their customary practices. During the Tunisian campaign, on a short stop-over in Zaguán [Zaghouan], the very proper English commander of an anti-tank squad placed at Leclerc's disposal in Gabes followed up lavish praise for French unity and the general before applying as a matter of urgency for transfer to a unit made up of "God-fearing" men.

Dronne, who eventually earned the respect of the troops under his command had this to say of his men:

"They were a handful because they needed to sell the authority of an officer to themselves and easily led because once one had gained their trust, that trust was complete and absolute. Despite their rebellious affect, they were highly disciplined, their discipline being original and freely embraced. The vast majority of them were not military-minded and were even anti-militarists, but they were magnificent, brave and experienced soldiers."⁷⁶

April 1943, in the wake of the battle of Tunis. The division was banished to Sabratha between the Tunisian border and Tripoli, the aim being to stop men from deserting from the French Foreign Legion and defecting to Leclerc's corps francs. The former served under the orders of the collaborationist Marshal Pétain, whereas the latter served General De Gaulle and Free France. During the stop-over in Sabratha, some of the soldiers spent some time fishing, using the unorthodox but highly effective use of a grenade. One day, one of the grenades went accidentally astray and fell beside a bunch of French officers, giving a shock as much to the officers as to the thrower, but given that there were no casualties the matter went no further than some shouting and cursing, plus the thrower's arrest.

The 2nd Armoured Division was raised and rearmed in Temara, Morocco. We have a few odd anecdotes about the time, such as, say, the Saud incident. Saud was a monkey almost the height of a human being, who had been adopted by a bunch of soldiers and received training like anybody else. He even had his own wooden rifle, a gift from one of his comrades and formed up like all the rest when the order came to stand to attention. He would also queue up for his rations, taking a plate and the only thing that set him apart was his non-use of cutlery. At night-time they had to be ready and speedy in putting up their tents as Saud used to be in there like a flash and if he claimed a spot, there was no way of shifting him. When *La Nueve* left Morocco behind, Saud stayed behind with a family in Rabat.

⁷⁶ *La nueve. Los españoles que liberaron París*, p. 20, Evelyn Mesquida, Ediciones B, Barcelona, 2008

If it is of any interest, the 2nd DB was made up of some 16,000 men, a little over 3,000 of them Spaniards. It had 4,200 vehicles – including 160 tanks, 80 light tanks, 200 half-tracks, 36 anti-tank vehicles, 57 self-propelled guns and lots of jeeps and lorries dragging or carrying cannon or heavy machine-guns. All of this gear was American.

Temara was also where the recently acquired half-tracks were christened; the names of battles were chosen in order to avert ideological bickering and it was Lieutenant '*Bamba*' who painted the names on them as his was the best handwriting. As for the names themselves, given that there was no way that it could be called after Durruti, '*Les Pingouins*' got its name from the slang used by the French in reference to the Spaniards. '*Les Cosaques*' dated back to when *La Nueve* had arrived in England; shortly after its arrival, there was a rape incident and the female victim said that her assailant had been a man with a poor command of French. Captain Dronne then accused them of behaving like Cossacks. The men of *La Nueve* then refused to speak to or salute that officer until he apologised; shortly after that, the real culprit was found and it was none of the Spaniards. Their vehicles were also re-numbered as they were destroyed or underwent significant repairs, the name being retained, but with the numbering altered. Thus there were at least two '*Guernicas*', three '*Résistances*' and two '*Mort aux cons*.' Some underwent a change of name: '*España Cañí*' was renamed the '*Liberation*' following the liberation of Paris.

After a time in England, *La Nueve* landed on so-called Utah beach on the coast of Normandy. Its landing came two months after the first landings, between 1 and 4 August. It underwent its European baptism of fire between 11 and 12 August and took its first prisoners on the road between Le Mans and Alençon. Although it was in Ecouché that *La Nueve* displayed its real courage in combat in the tough armoured battles against an enemy serving with the notorious Panzer divisions like *Das Reich* or the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*.

As to the makeup of *La Nueve*, it needs saying that 146 of the company's 160 men were Spanish republicans, the remainder being a few French and other veterans of the International Brigades. If Captain Dronne and the odd additional member of *La Nueve* are to be believed, most of them were libertarians, especially in No 3 Section, commanded by Miguel Campos, a native of the Canaries. To name but some of the anarchists about whom we know so little, here goes: Jesús Abenza, Manuel Bullosa, Miguel Campos Delgado aka *Canario*, Ramón Estartit David aka *Fábregas*, Germán Arrué aka *Méjicano*, Manuel Pinto Queiroz aka *Manuel Lozano*, José Nadal Artigas, the alias of Fermin Pujol, and Fermin's brother Constantino Pujol (alias not known to me), Faustino Solana aka *Montañés*, Ángel Rodríguez Leira aka *Ángel López Cariño*, Federico Moreno, Martín Bernal aka *Garcés*, Alicia Vázquez Blanco, Enrique Giménez, Alfredo Piñeiro, Domingo Baños, Ramón Patricio aka *Bigote*, Pablo Moraga Díaz, Luis Argueso Cortés aka *Gitano*, Luis Quintela Ortiz, José Padrón Martín, Pablo García, Antonio Soler aka *José Caro*, Juan Benito Pérez Vallespi or Pedro Solé Pladellorens aka *Pedro Juan Castells*.

Of the 144 Spaniards who landed on Utah beach only 16 were to make it through to Hitler's Eagle's Nest unscathed. The dismal reward for all those lost lives amounted to a chess set, a set of AH-monogrammed bedsheets and lots of good wine by way of booty.

If you are wondering what this digression regarding *La Nueve* is doing in this book, your doubts will soon be banished. As indicated in the previous chapter, on the night of 24 August, old friends began to meet up again. After the liberation of the French capital, *La Nueve* was granted a few days' leave since it was not until 8 September that it was press on with its eastward progress. In the meantime, the unit would have to rest up in the Bois de Boulogne. There, in addition to visits from Victoria Kent, Juan Zafón and Lucía Rueda and many other French and Spanish people eager to meet and congratulate the members of the 2nd Armoured Division, *La Nueve* was to make contact with the regional committee of the CNT and a range of resistance groups. Out of the meetings that grew out of such contacts a startling and bold initiative was to emerge.

After two or three introductory meetings it was put to the CNT's Paris regional committee by Campos and Bullosa that a team of men be formed, kitted out with uniforms, given accreditation and placed in command of a half-track. Their task would be to follow along behind No 3 Company (commanded by Miguel Campos) and scavenge whatever light weapons, grenades and ammunition they could for forwarding and subsequent storage in Paris and its environs, for future use in Spain by some of the anarchist guerrillas fighting the Franco regime.

According to certain testimonies, the vehicle, a half-track just like the others in use by *La Nueve*, was procured by none other than Captain Dronne. Other witnesses tell us that it was Campos who secured it. I personally have no idea which of them it was, any more than I know about the bargain or deal into which they entered with the Americans in order to pull it off. Knowing something about the swapping of items and given that the Americans were paying a high price for German prisoners, in that they received from their officers commendations or furlough depending on the rank of the particular prisoner, we can get some handle on it all. To begin with, the Spaniards were handing them over free of charge, but given the possibilities on offer and very much contrary to orders they started trading prisoners for war materials or other goods. To get some idea of how this worked, let me mention a few examples: Five German soldiers brought a 20-litre can of gasoline; 10 were worth twice as much or two pairs of half-canvas boots; and 20 soldiers were worth one machine-gun. Three staff officers were worth a motorcycle and, if they were SS, a side-car was thrown in. A general was worth a jeep. Besides, there were the run-of-the-mill bonuses of tinned beef, chewing gum, blond tobacco, bottles of whisky or the occasional tyre. Truth to tell, some of the officers and generals served up were that in name only apart from the uniforms, but since the Americans were paying ... Sometimes the trade went a step further; a farmer might pay 2 hens for a 20-litre can of gasoline, or a motorcycle might be traded for a pig or two lambs and everybody went away happy. Meaning that for a half-track, they only needed to get hold of some fancy German generals' uniforms.

Once in possession of the half-track, and the day after the latest meeting, comrades García and Rosalench headed for the Bois de Boulogne. They had been selected for training and went off to familiarize themselves with the half-track; García as gunner and Rosalench as the driver of the vehicle. A few days after that, the rest of the squad joined them; the crew was completed with Joaquín Blesa aka *Quimet*, Liberto Ros Garro, José Mariño Carballada – all of them ex-members of the Durruti Column – plus Manuel Huet Piera.

And so began a surreal adventure that lasted almost eight weeks. They were issued with army papers, kitted out with uniforms and weapons and were even supplied with their allocation of toilet paper. Their vehicle was to be dubbed '*Kanguro*' [Kangaroo] and, keeping to the hindmost ranks, they set off for Alsace to grapple with the German army. Their repeated queries and misgivings were dispelled by Campos with the remark "Don't you worry about that. There are folk among the higher-ups who are on our side and don't forget, when we were in Africa with Leclerc he told us that we were fighting to liberate not just France from fascism but the whole of Europe."⁷⁷

The fact is that whether or not they eluded detection, they ran into no problems with the officers from *La Nueve*, nor any other company regarding this new armoured vehicle. We can only imagine that the ongoing incorporation of new recruits to fill the gaps left by casualties incurred in the fighting helped the '*Kanguro*' crew members to not attract that much attention, other than within their unit which was used to operating alongside them. Let us heed what Joaquín Blesa, one of those along on the expedition, tells us in his own words:

"Our presence within that unit lasted around eight weeks. We always lagged behind with the reserves and without diverging unduly from the itinerary laid down we would scour as wide an area as we could, retrieving only machine-guns, automatic rifles, sub-machine guns and ammunition. Hand grenades, no, because with their wooden cases they took up too much room. We would wrap everything in a waterproof tarpaulin and load it into the half-track. Many a time, carrying so many arms under our feet and on the floor of the vehicle, we had to make the trip with our whole bodies exposed. More than one person, at the sight of us, must have been thinking: Real brave, these Spaniards! And the fact that appearances can be deceptive kept us safe and secure ..."⁷⁸

And so the '*Kanguro*' tailed along in the rear of No 2 Section, Campos's section. When No 3 deployed, the '*Kanguro*' would make a start on its retrieval duties, without wandering too far off and not keeping so close

⁷⁷ *Republicanos españoles en la segunda guerra mundial*, p. 432, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1975

⁷⁸ *Republicanos españoles en la segunda guerra mundial*, p.432, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1978

that the others could see what they were up to. As a precaution, some of the crew slept on top of the sandbags with the weaponry, to guard against surprises: later, those same sandbags went missing until the word came down that they should be forwarded to Paris.

For the purpose of storing the weapons a number of dumps were set up and efficiently inscribed and marked on the map for subsequent recovery. At the same time, they had the assistance of Lieutenant 'Bamba' who was in charge of the Company's transport section and who had to make trips up to Paris to resupply the unit with various items. His outward trip was used to ship the arms collected by the '*Kanguro*', which were then left in the care of the CNT's Paris regional committee and serving on that committee we meet again someone who will pop up again and again in these pages – Laureano Cerrada. When the talk turns to weapons, his name will be cited again. Huet and Blesa usually tagged along on those trips, although the other four of their fellow adventurers also did. Working at all times in pairs, they made it their business to retrieve the hidden sandbags and stash the packages in a suitable location afterwards. Again, over to Blesa:

"On one occasion, off to the left of the convoy, just out past Contrexville, we bumped into a caravan of a half a dozen America jeeps with a couple of real made-in-the-USA generals. They flagged us down, surrounded us and then asked us what we were doing there. We realized right then and there that they did not trust us. They were no doubt afraid that we might be Germans in disguise. Luckily they had with them a Cuban officer, through whom the matter was cleared up. But what if they had taken it into their heads to search our vehicle! I'll admit that I was really afraid that day because we had been caught on the hop and had we fallen into the clutches of some crotchety general they might have shot us all on the spot.

A few days later, we ran into another serious problem. But this time it was within our own division since the tanks had tangled with the Germans within a bridgehead established on the far side of the Moselle river, and it fell to Campos to force a way through as other armoured sections, also commanded by Spaniards, were busy. Campos stepped up to our half-track and said: 'Right! You too, lads, shoulders to the wheel!' In truth, that did not come as that much of a surprise to us because we figured that one day or another the reserve ranks would be called upon to act and, if you want to know the truth, I reckon the six of us were delighted because the fact is that arms retrieval was beginning to get very boring. Rosalench at the wheel of the '*Kanguro*' worked wonders and García, manning the machine-gun, was no slouch either. The other four of us, machine-guns at the ready, did what we could, taking orders at all times from Campos of course, and I reckon we did not do badly at all, because, come the dawn, all of *La Nueve* sections assembled and a happy Campos told us:

'I genuinely reckon that you are in such a special position here that, damn it, I'm going to put you forward for the *Croix de Guerre* right now!' ⁷⁹

After the 'irregulars' with *La Nueve* saw action, the odd shipment of arms went ahead, on board the GMSC trucks that '*Bamba*' was dispatching to Paris. On returning from one such trip, the news was very bad. The fighting had been tough going and the company lost a number of its members, one being Bullosa. Shortly after that, Campos applied for passes for the '*Kanguro*' crew to make their way back to Paris, two at a time, and once all six were back one of the canons the unit carried with it - specifically the one on board the '*Ebro*' - would be used to get rid of the illegal half-track. It had served its purpose.

Let us now monitor something of the trajectory of *La Nueve* over the roughly six weeks during which the '*Kanguro*' and its strange crewmen served with the company. On 8 September the Division received orders to set off eastwards, the destination being far-off Strasbourg; it would form part of the column led by Major De La Horie. *La Nueve* saw some minor action between Montereau and Troyes. On the 12th, the company attacked Andelot, capturing lots of Germans and clearing the path towards Alsace and Lorraine. That may well have been the day that Blesa was talking about, when those American jeeps caught them on the hop. On the 13th there was an hour's fighting in Remoncourt and later in Velotte. The 15th proved to be a day of fierce fighting, the Moselle was crossed and a bridge-head established in Chatel, with *La Nueve* seeing action in Rocquerey as

⁷⁹ *Republicanos españoles en la segunda guerra mundial*, p.432-433, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1978

well. On 16 September fierce fighting still continued around the bridge-head. That bridge-head was in almost mortal danger when the crewmen from the '*Kanguro*' were forced to intervene and they distinguished themselves. On the 17th Leclerc gave the order for the bridge-head to be abandoned and for a withdrawal in the direction of Jorxey. On the 18th, the erstwhile bridge-head was attacked again, the fighting was ferocious and descended into the use of bayonets (what we said regarding the 16th holds true for this day also, meaning that it was on the 16th or the 18th that the under-cover boys joined the fighting). Over the course of the day, Campos's section occupied the town of Vaxoncourt. From the 19th through to the 30th of September things were pretty quiet and *La Nueve* concentrated on mopping-up activities and we suppose that the '*Kanguro*' crewmen made the most of those days of relative calm. On 30 September, *La Nueve* took over Xaffervillers and later, Menermont.

Due to the torrential rain in October, the front line was fairly stable. There were landslides and flooding which left *La Nueve* twiddling its thumbs. The rain and the mud broadly prevented the '*Kanguro*' from venturing out to collect arms as it was all but impossible to sally forth from hard surfaces. It may well have used the time to dispatch gear to Paris, using '*Bamba*'s' munitions section and its GMC trucks, or to getting arms dumps ready.

On 30 October the march to the east resumed. That day, *La Nueve* was the first to step into a mine-field and by the time it found its way out of that dangerous ground unscathed, it sank into swampy ground. November witnessed the liberation of Nancy by the Leclerc Division. On 16 November, *La Nueve* was in action in Saint Pole, where Bullosa met his end. Fighting continued through the 18th and 19th, resulting in the liberation of Cirey. It was on one of those days that Campos discharged the six-man '*Kanguro*' team and dispatched them back to Paris. On 23 November, the company finally entered the capital of Alsace, thereby fulfilling the famous promise that Leclerc had made during the African campaign. That promise was made in the Kouffra fort in Libya after the fighting that had wrested the fort from Italian forces back in March 1941: at that time the French general promised that they would not stop until they had liberated Alsace and Lorraine, which, as we have seen, they did. None of the '*Kanguro*' crew ever set foot in Strasbourg.

The various dumps that had been buried and marked were to be recovered by members of the organization once things had calmed somewhat. We will see many of those weapons in subsequent years, first shipped to secret dumps and from there, by lorry, to within close quarters of the border. Most of them would then cross the Pyrenees as packages or in knapsacks, only to finish up on the streets of Barcelona during the latter half of the 1940s and early 1950s.

To round off this chapter, let me state that to the growing losses suffered by *La Nueve* was added the disappearance in the wake of active service, of Miguel Campos in mid-December. Actually, with the passage of time his family was issued with the news that he had gone missing in battle. But, as we shall see anon, the future sometimes holds pleasant surprises in store; so much so that sometimes the dead are not all *that* dead.

Chapter 21

Cards on the Table

A change of emphasis now: let us leave Leclerc's Spaniards behind and turn back to our protagonist. I'll admit, after re-reading this chapter, that I received my grounding in lots of things from the Catholic approach, which I find it hard to shake off and, naturally, one of those things covers everything related to family, couples, fidelity and matters of the heart: as you will now see.

Manolo had a lot of good qualities plus a number of shortcomings, of course. Among the latter was his infidelity, this being regarded as a flaw should it entail deceiving someone one is alleged to love; if they are okay with it, then there is no deception and no flaw there. If we look to some of the things recounted to us in the interviews we have carried out and after a reading of Pons Prades's many papers, Huet was a rather attractive fellow, with blue eyes, affectionate, business-like, always well dressed and wont to attract the attention of women. Manolo was not put off by this and enjoyed playing the seducer. You may well be wondering what this is doing in this book, but just as I am trying to lay out the things that reflect well on him, I also have to lay out the things that may not show him in a good light.

Manolo had a great fondness for women, which is neither a good thing nor a bad one, but he married Rosa. And from the outset of the Civil War onwards, they had less and less time to spend in each other's company. The ending of the war meant that they not only did not have the time to share, but there was the distance factor as Manolo left for exile and Rosa stayed behind in Barcelona. And, whether we like it or not, the fact is that a lot of the libertarians who served as models to be imitated in terms of their moral rectitude, example or fairness, fell down somewhat when it came to equality with women. And it was a mess: a woman's place was in the home; and whilst the menfolk threw themselves into the revolution, their partners stuck to running the home and looking after the family. Familiar ring there, right? There are some things that we find hard to change as the years slip by and we men do not relish giving up our advantages or convenience. Women still face aggression in some anarchist circles, sometimes circles set up by male anarchists, and there is not always an easy solution. On occasion we may have had to look the other way, depending on the man or woman concerned: if this is going on nowadays, I can just imagine how much worse the problems with masculinity would have been eighty years ago. Be that as it may, exile in France left Manolo far from his partner and we do not know when it was that he met up with Segunda Montero aka *Conxita*.

At the eleventh hour and just when this text was all but finished, I came upon *De la Resistencia y la deportación* by the resister Neus Català, containing the testimonies of 50 Spanish women and ... what a surprise find! ... there is an entry by Manolo about Segunda Montero. As had frequently proved to be the case during the writing of this book I had been wrong in several (or all) matters and have had to scrap, re-jig and rewrite. Segunda was a young, determined, intelligent and good-looking woman. Hitherto, whatever information I had been able to gather about her said that she was born in San Sebastian, but it turns out that she was not. We got the sea wrong and the setting as it turns out that she was another of the Valencians in this story: she was born in Enguera. According to Huet's piece, she was born sometime around 1915 (whereas I, on the basis of my reading, had put her age as 6 or 7 years less than that), although she moved away to Barcelona on a date unknown. Manolo says of her that she was driven by an urge to fight tyranny and champion freedom and that she played a part in the street-fighting in Barcelona in July 1936. We know very little about her: in February 1939 her male partner perished near Figueres fighting the oncoming fascists, that she had a brother called Francisco who died in France fighting the Nazis as a member of the resistance and that she, like him, had gone into exile. Whether or not she managed to avoid being processed through the inevitable French camps, I do not know, but, be that as it may, by March 1940 she had settled in the coastal town of Sète (Hérault department). The earliest reports we have of her after her arrival there refer to her planning to leave France. One good way of getting away might have been signing on as a crew member as a Panamanian-flagged merchant vessel was recruiting. It was, as mentioned in earlier chapters, none other than the '*Dora*'. I do not know exactly when Manolo and Segunda met, but we can place it sometime between March and August 1940. Shortly after that, Huet recommended her as an assistant to the ship's captain's wife. Nor do I know when they fell in love, whether that was before the crossing of the Mediterranean or on the outings by the *Dora* or during their adventures with the escape lines, but they were never apart until February 1945. Something else set out in

Neus's book is the fact that Conxita approached the British Embassy in Lisbon, just as Huet had once done, in the aim of relocating to British territory. If we cast our minds back, Manolo had done the very same while looking for a job as an aircraft mechanic. Both applications were rejected and they both rejoined the crew of the Panamanian ship which, after dropping off the diamond-cutters, headed back to a French port. Be that as it may, in his testimony, given to Pons Prades, Manolo steers well clear of saying so and mentions Segunda was a collaborator and nothing more.

All of this is well and good, of course, but let us bear it in mind that Rosa was struggling with poverty and their ailing daughter on her own, hundreds of kilometres further south and as far as Rosita was concerned (she was not stupid) letters from Manolo were not enough. Their relationship was under strain.

Conxita was intensely involved with the Maritime Antenna and was actually the main liaison between Toulouse and Sète, meaning between the Antenna and the rest of the Ponzán network. A tireless bearer of intelligence and hostess to escapers, she was to be picked up after the March 1943 swoop when a couple of Belgian fugitives was intercepted by the Germans. The house that they had in the port district was disclosed, Segunda was trapped and it was thanks to the ploy set out in previous chapters that she managed to get the Germans to hand her over to the Vichy police. Not that that stopped her from being severely mistreated at police headquarters. Committed to Montpellier prison she was to be freed after a month or so behind bars thanks to the good offices of '*el Padre*'.

Both her and Manolo's cover had been blown by the Germans, which is why they were both sent off to Vienna on phoney French papers as volunteer workers. They both lived in the Austrian capital from June 1943 to May 1944 as their work contract was for a year. Segunda was taken on as a kitchen assistant. Also dating from that time, in some of Huet's declarations, he 'omits' to mention that '*Conxita*' was also there, with him. Once their contracts ran out, they returned to France together and Picard dispatched them to Paris. Their relationship was blossoming and, judging by appearances, they were very together. They both had a hand in the liberation of the French capital. If we go by Huet's entry in Neus Català's book on Spanish women in the French resistance, Segunda was wounded in the fighting to liberate Paris, albeit that I take issue with his version of things. Neither Zafón nor Lucía Rueda make any mention of this fact in their writings and there is also a photo of Segunda in the Bois de Boulogne after the city's liberation, showing her together with Lucía and men from Leclerc's No 9 Company, crewmen from the half-track '*Guadalajara*', with no sign of any injury. Finally, Huet claims that Segunda died in February 1945 in a Parisian hospital after her wound became infected with tetanus. And with apologies to the protagonist of this book, I have to say again that I take issue with his version of events, because, from what I have been told, *Conxita* was pregnant by Manolo and unfortunately died whilst undergoing an abortion. This was confirmed to me in an interview in Montpellier with someone who prefers to stay anonymous⁸⁰. A dismal end for such a brave young woman.

I have no intention of poring over the entrails of Huet's extra-marital affairs but, without delving into them, we also know about his relationship with the Contessa di Sestri during the time when he was in charge of arms purchases and forwarding these on from Genoa to the Côte d'Azur in France. And even Pons Prades was moved to remark how much the Contessa enjoyed 'dalliance' with '*el Murciano*'. As we know, shortly after the arms purchases, Rosa showed up in France at last and the family was reunited. If there were any more amorous adventures after that, I have made no attempt to seek them out, nor have they anything of interest to add to this story.

⁸⁰ Interviewed in a Montpellier café on 4-3-2018, this individual has chosen to remain anonymous.

Chapter 22

Dumps

If there is one thing wars ending or on the brink of ending have in common is that too many dead human beings are left on the battle-field. In addition to bodies one can also come across masses of jettisoned arms or war materials. And if there is any meaning to taking part in a war and being hell bent on fighting on, albeit clandestinely, then, if one is ready, arms will not be an issue. But one has to retrieve those arms without attracting too much attention and applying the same discretion deployed in gathering them up to the transportation of them, and there they need to be stored as safely as possible. What with the locations where these weapons were hidden and stashed in France, we know that at least some of the arms and ammunition gathered up Leclerc's No 9 Company, were stashed in a workshop in Montpellier city managed by comrade Manuel Fernández. We know too that the bombs used in the attempt to mount an air raid on Franco in San Sebastian bay were stashed in the home of another comrade in Mont de Marsan. And that, in addition to housing an illegal press, Paris's Hotel des Vosges concealed a small arsenal, as did a range of *massos* that '*el Quico*' relied upon along the border. We know also that in the Font Romeu district, in one of the level crossings used by the yellow train of the Cerdanya, looked after by some CNT comrades who were in charge of the barriers, and which was a very isolated location, arms and explosives were being stored. And there was also, of course, the *el Tartas* safe-house, when it was operational, and indeed afterwards.

But the instances cited above were not the only ones. Other libertarians fighting the Nazis as part of the resistance set to work with the same alacrity when it came to arming the anti-Franco guerrillas. As we have seen and as we have been told by Alfonsina Bueno, Ponzán himself had a hand in collecting and stockpiling weapons from Allied parachute drops. He and his group were the first not to cast away their weapons when they crossed into exile. Another of those who set about retrieving weapons was Miguel Quintana aka *Perolero*, whom many people will unwittingly remember from his role as the lovable 'old geezer' so supportive of collectivization of the land and featured in the meeting included in the movie *Land and Freedom*. Who better to explain than the man himself?

"Whenever I could I recovered war materials and held on to them for Spain. We were in the resistance, but we were bottom of the pecking order. No sten guns for us, just blows. There were parachute drops for the French in the resistance, but nothing for us. In the end we made up our minds to scurry after them and we would pilfer their weapons ... Little by little, I set aside an arsenal for use in Spain. Ponzán did the same."⁸¹

Come the end of the World War, Quintana found work with the Frères Casals who just happened to own a huge swathe of forest along the border between France and the province of Gerona, out near Prats de Molló. He settled into La Soranguera, as he dubbed that farmhouse which wound up converted for use by the libertarian guerrillas as a support base used by, among others, '*el Quico*'s' group. They even got hold of a lorry laden with American mines that weighed 25 kilos apiece, but, after talking it over, they decided not to use them and sold them on, because there was no shortage of buyers at the time.

Another example is Francisco Martínez Pérez, a FAI member from the '*Brazo y cerebro*' group and militia with the Durruti Column; after militarization of the Column he was awarded the rank of captain. Following inevitable processing in the French camps, he set up home in Pau and it was in his own home there that he stored several weapons: machine-guns, rifles and pistols. He had been handed those arms by a comrade of his from the 26th Division – none other than Joan Ventura, who had been an officer in the ranks of the French resistance and had, after the Nazis went on the retreat collected weapons in dribs and drabs.

Also in the Gard department, libertarians who had taken part in the French maquis – people such as José Fortea Gracia and his comrades – busied themselves with the same task. In his own words:

⁸¹ *Clandestinos. El maquis contra el franquismo, 1934-1975*, p. 118, Dolors Marin, Plaza & James, Barcelona, 2002

“We were gathering up lots of various materials – all sorts: pistols, bombs, rifles, machine-guns and anything else that came our way and, being well organized at national level, this was all taken by lorry to the border.”⁸²

Those lorries were no doubt from the businesses run by Laureano Cerrada and his network of arms purchases, sales and recovery.

In the Ardèche, the man in charge of building up another arsenal for the coming guerrilla campaign was Juan Pujadas Carola. He was a Blanes-born member of the FAI and a rallying point for Spaniards in the resistance in that French department. He also took part in the October 1944 cross-Pyrenean incursions. In October 1945 an arms dump hidden on the farm of a farmer friend of his in Vinezac was unearthed by the police. Pujadas was in prison for that until August 1947 when he was the beneficiary of an amnesty awarded on the basis that he was a former member of the resistance.

All these arms plus the ones bought later provided a springboard for the fight against Francoism as we shall see in the coming chapters.

⁸² *Tiempos de Historia. No hay más cera que la que arde*, p. 105, José Fortea, Fundacio d’Estudis Llibertaria Federica Montseny, Badalona, 2002

Chapter 23

Clandestine Gatherings

With Paris liberated, a range of meetings were to take place in the city. The business in hand and participants might vary, but they were all to prove of great interest. We already know the outcome of the first one as we have mentioned it in previous chapters. At that meeting we would have found Laureano Cerrada, Olegario Pachón, Miguel Campos and Manuel Bullosa, among others, and we cannot tell whether Huet and Blesa were there, but there is every chance of that. Out of it came the '*Kanguro*' crewmen and the adventure recounted in the '*Tales of La Nueve*' chapter above, plus the masses of war materials harvested.

From another, smaller ('*el Padre*' and Manolo) get-together of that time we know that French intelligence was on the brink of launching a false-flag operation. At the time, the ODESSA network was being set up and taking shape. For those unaware of what this gem was about, it had nothing to do with the Soviet port city, so allow me to adduce a little information regarding the network. Its name derived from the initials of the *Organisation Der Ehemaligen SS-Angehörigen* (SS Veterans' Organization). It appears that the network was put together on 10 August 1944 following a gathering held in Strasbourg of various Nazi bigwigs and bankers under the auspices of Martin Bormann, Hitler's then secretary. The organization was a network run and created by German agencies for the purpose of smuggling Nazi party leaders out of wartime Europe. Them and any militants that might have made their name either in terms of repression or as spokesmen for that ideology. On the one hand it supplied would-be escapers with false papers and on the other it laid the groundwork for three escape routes.

The first, known as 'The Spider' was the one that used Spain as its base of operations; from there Nazi bigwigs could move on to South America (mostly Argentina and Chile, but not overlooking Brazil or Paraguay or some other countries), or they might well prefer to stay in the Iberian peninsula. Remember that both Spain and Portugal were governed by fascist dictatorships – Franco's and Salazar's – and ex-Nazis fitted right in there. To that end the network dispatched SS Captain Karl Fuldner⁸³ to Spain: there he set up his headquarters and use as his meeting place the Madrid restaurant of the Nazi spy Otto Horcher. Another leading presence in Spain was Fraulein Clara Stauffer. Based in the sierras above Madrid, her home was a stop-over for lots of notorious Nazis whom she helped on their way, with fresh clothing without swastika markings, or phoney papers or through important connections like Pilar Primo de Rivera.

The second route was the so-called *Rat-line* or monastery route, set up with Vatican connivance. Rats and soutanes in the same vipers' nest: go figure, right? Using the monasteries so that the Nazis might pass undetected until they reached Buenos Aires.

Th third route was the so-called *Freedom Road*: what a splendid name, and all the prettier once we find out who was collaborating with it – none other than the US's intelligence chiefs. The Americans were out to recruit scientists, experts and other well-groomed rats eager to work for the USA in the Cold War.

And, in the face of all this, '*el Padre*' had the inspired idea of setting up an *Odessa Bis* network. Terres was in search of some juicy files compiled by Michel Szkolnikoff. Szkolnikoff was a Jewish millionaire, a collaborator with the Nazis and at the time he was on the run and there was no question but that he was using the ODESSA line. The creation of a phoney network was more for the purposes of sowing confusion than for any merely practical purpose of ensuring arrests and gathering intelligence. '*El Padre*' wanted Huet and his people in Spain to track down the fugitive Jewish millionaire collaborationist and that was the reason for their meeting. Although we will examine this matter in greater detail in a separate chapter.

The meeting after that took place in the summer of 1945. Again, the location was Paris. And those in attendance were Olegario Pachón, Laureano Cerrada, Joaquín Blesa, Juan Zafón, Manuel Soto, Manolo Huet and Miguel Campos – yes, the very same Miguel Campos that went missing in December 1944 on the battle-front. Apparently, he had only vanished from the army and on paper, because he was still in the fight; but this

⁸³ Fuldner, an Argentinean of German extraction, was a key player in the illegal immigration, protection and support of Nazi people like Eichmann or Mengele, say – and Croat criminals who arrived in Argentina during Peron's first government.

time as part of the organization's conspiratorial assets. The main agenda of their swapping of ideas was the fight against the Francoist dictatorship. The matter was viewed as one to be considered from within Spain as well as from exile and the star item was how to end the dictator's life. Cerrada undertook to provide the requisite papers and the money that would be needed, of course, and the weapons, of which there was now no shortage. Among the plans raised it seems there was a suggestion advanced by Miguel Campos who had it in mind to make contact with dissident elements from the Maghreb, so that the assassination bid could be mounted from the ranks of Franco's own Moorish guards. That took the biscuit. One of the upshots from that meeting was that Pons Prades made a trip into Spain in late 1945: here is his version:

"On the second occasion I arrived on 4 December 1945, with the notion of an attentat in mind this time. I entered via Andorra and moved between Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid. From there, rather than making for Asturias, I headed for Zaragoza where we had quite a few people, but they were not up for an assassination bid. In their view, then, succeed or fail, there would follow a tremendous crackdown on the prisoners in the jails [...] the heavens were on Franco's side, because, otherwise he would not have survived. And the truth is also that the attentats failed because they were organized in a hurried fashion, using poorly trained people."⁸⁴

Pons Prades's transit through Andorra was facilitated by Huet's customs officer friend and Pons Prades's trip did not finish as expected. The guerrilla was arrested near the border by Spanish military and wound up in prison. Luckily for him, a timely bribe ensured that he was set free.

Among the plans mulled over there was one that – to me at any rate – was something of a surprise. This was a plan to assassinate the dictator on one of the hunts of which he was so fond and which normally took place out by Ciudad Real. For such events, upwards of a hundred people were hired, what with spotters and shooters and of course, although the regime took especial care to steer clear of the families of reds, almost all those involved were descended from republicans. And so armed men, descended from the marxist hordes, were free to walk and act in close proximity to Franco. In the documentary *Los que pudieron matar a Franco*, Pons Prades himself remarks:

"From among the hundred shooters, it was child's play finding one or two who, in return for payment, a phoney passport and the relocation abroad of their families, might have put a bullet between the Caudillo's eyes in the middle of the hunt."⁸⁵

Another interesting occasion that we know of, involving the same participants named above, plus 'el Padre', took place a short time later. Although taken aback by the ambition of the rest of the group, given the profile of the intended target, he was also none too surprised by it, knowing many of those in attendance as he did. He pressed on with his search for Szkolnikoff and moved that the if the rest were to forge ahead with their clandestine activities inside Spain they might use any spare time to track down some trace of the Jewish millionaire. In return, he would keep them briefed on police movements and other Francoist activities as well as making them the promise that part of anything that might be squeezed out of the millionaire would be used to further the fight against Franco.

And, to round things off, we know of a final gathering in the autumn of 1946. This gathering was attended by the same line-up as before, with the exception of Miguel Campos. The stances were essentially the same as before. 'El Padre' would continue to stalk Michel Szkolnikoff and the rest were hell bent on killing Franco. Apparently, Campos had popped over to Africa to seek out his dissidents to carry out the assassination. Regrettably for the fate of Spain, we know that quite a number of attempts were made on the life of the dictator during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, with a realistic prospect of success, but in the end, Francisco Franco died in his bed.

By way of a tragic closing note, we should state that Miguel Campos was never heard from again. Two letters arrived for his family, forwarded from Casablanca in one case and from Tangiers in the other, in which he reported that everything was going swimmingly. We know too that he had the odd meeting with former

⁸⁴ *El canto del buhó*, p. 182, Alfonso Domingo, Editorial Oberón Madrid, 2002

⁸⁵ *Los que quisieron matar a Franco*, Pedro Costa and José Ramón da Cruz, Didac Films 2006

guerrillas such as Manuel Gutiérrez Vicente aka *Pierre de Castro*, in North Africa. But nothing more was ever heard of him.

Chapter 24

1940s Bureaucrats

Throughout these pages the names of some of the Spanish Libertarian Movement (MLE)'s "sacred cows" have cropped up. Where they do not crop up so much is when it comes to actions directed at the German invader or the Vichy regime's collaborators, although, given the example set earlier during the Civil War, not that much was expected of those "leaders of anarchism". So, once the hostilities ended, as they commanded the big guns, they emerged from their hiding places in order to recapture power, a power that they still deemed was rightfully theirs and they tried to steal the thunder of some of those who had been taking the fascists on.

Even prior to the end of the war, they had cried out to the heavens above and opposed those groups engaged in unrelenting activity. Groups made up of people above all suspicion, groups that have cropped up regularly in these pages, the groups of Ponzán and his guides, whom they labelled "undesirables and suspect" on account of their having worked hand in glove with the Allied secret services. Luckily for Manolo, his connection with '*el Padre*' had escaped their notice. Even so, the inevitable Federica Montseny also said her piece:

"These groups had been condemned by the organizational committees speaking for the larger faction of the organization, the reckoning being that they could and should not serve external forces standing for the general interests of the emigre community as a whole, *plus* the particular ideals and policies of the Organization of which they were members."⁸⁶

They soon set to work to discredit those who had been fighting and the issue was: How could they ensure that this did not jar with the libertarian rank-and-file, which, if they prided themselves on anything, it was their combativity? They soon came up with a solution: on the one hand the MLE had not encouraged the bulk of its members into joining the resistance, due to the way that the French had mishandled the Spanish emigres and because they considered that the world war, being a capitalist war, was none of their concern. As a result of that, a lot of libertarians joined the Unión Nacional (UN), the guerrilla groups promoted by the PCE (a party regarding which most anarchists and socialists had unhappy memories), but which the stalinists touted as a pluralist venture targeting the Nazi army. And they joined, male and female, because many of them reckoned that the right way to go was to carry on fighting fascism wheresoever it showed itself. The response from the upper echelon libertarians was to level the accusation that everyone working with the Unión Nacional was a communist and then to expel them from the libertarian movement. Indeed, after the liberation of Toulouse in August 1944, in the *Ville Rose* (as that city was popularly known) between 5 and 13 October a national plenum was held, one of the motions approved by which was that the leaders of the Unión Nacional CNT Grouping (ACUN) were to be thrown out of the Organization. If we follow the correspondence and reports kindly made available to me by Miguel Sans – the son and grandson of ACUN guerrillas – the numbers expelled ran into the thousands, so it looks as if the expulsion order applied to more than just the leaders. Miguel's grandfather was Miguel Pascual González who, among other things, was manager of the newspaper *Solidaridad Obrera* published by ACUN units during its second phase. Should the figure of thousands of libertarians seem exaggerated, in a letter from *Juanel* (an opponent of the UNE) to Juan Ferrer and dated December 1970, we read:

"In the throes of reorganizing the MLE with some comrades at the start of 1943, we headed off the Unión Nacional in timely fashion, it having already managed to suck in 5,000 of our comrades and it was threatening to suck in a majority."⁸⁷

The figure Pascual gives for libertarians within the Unión Nacional is 6,000.

After expulsion from the MLE and with the war over, the ACUN disbanded on 5 May 1945. After a protracted debate, the members of that libertarian Agrupación were readmitted into the MLE, but if we go by Miguel Pascual's testimony, things did not go all that smoothly:

⁸⁶ *Sabaté. Guerrilla urbana en España, 1945-1960*, p. 345, Virus Editorial, Barcelona.

⁸⁷ Letter from Juan Manuel Molina to Juan Ferrer, Gómez Peláez Holdings at the IISH, Amsterdam

“Time marches on and the problem is as it was on day one. Worse, given that the bewilderment of a few thousand CNT personnel has grown and the loss of many of them possibly irretrievable. The arrangement was insincere, albeit slightly disguised. There was none of the organizational influx that was called for. Readmission was on a person-by-person basis and came with a series of stipulations that seventy per cent of the Agrupación’s militants found off-putting. As for the other thirty per cent, quite a few were rejected by their respective local federations and those of us who had the pleasure of finding ourselves on the inside after several months and with our union cards in our pockets, awaiting some intolerable and meaningless piece of paper.”⁸⁸

As we can see, many of those who fought alongside the communists were unable to rejoin the CNT’s ranks. In spite of everything, expulsion did not stop many of them from continuing to collaborate with certain ventures or subscribing to the same thinking. In order to close this chapter with a wry smile, let me say only that – in her book, as mentioned earlier, *El éxodo. Pasión y muerte de los españoles en el exilio* – Federica herself praised and claimed credit on behalf of the MLE for the feats of Spanish libertarians in the maquis’s fight against the Germans. I leave it to the reader to draw their own conclusions from that.

⁸⁸ 24-page document written by Miguel Pascual in defence of the Unión Nacional’s CNT members. Archive of Miguel Sans.

Chapter 25

The Jew the Nazis did not Persecute

This cove, who has been mentioned a couple of times in this book so far, was born in the unpronounceable Szarkowszczyzna district. That town was embedded in what is today Belarus and when he was born on 28 January 1895 it was still part of the old tsarist Russia. This bird of ill omen was born Mandel Szkolnikoff. His father who was of Jewish extraction had been a supplier to the tsar's army. Mandel's meanderings around Europe started in 1923 and brought him first to Riga before he then moved on to Warsaw, Danzig, Amsterdam and Antwerp. Actually, our concern is with his time in France, especially in the years of the Second World War.

The average person might think that a Jew of Russian extraction, upon whom the French bestowed the classification 'stateless' might not have been best placed regarding the new guests who had invaded France. Nothing could be further from the truth. Mandel, who by then had become Michel, which had more of a European ring to it and was rather less Hebrew, given the times, may have been a Jew, a Russian, a stateless person or whatever was necessary, but what he was not, by any stretch of the imagination, was stupid. And what he knew was that in war-time one can starve to death, that being just one form of death among the many, or you can cut great deals if you are ready to do so. And Mandel – sorry, Michel – was more likely to do the latter than the former. So, capitalizing on his experience as a textile trader, learnt under his father, and cashing in on the textile industry launched in 1934 in conjunction with his brother Gessel, he got down to business. For one thing, he met and fell in love with a rather well-connected German woman, Ellen Tietz Schuman who had previously been the wife of another Jew by the name of Samson, whose surname she had inherited. We can find her under that surname in a range of publications and, what do you know? she was no novice when it came to black market trading. On the other hand, he started going into joint business dealings with an SS captain by the name of Fritz Engelke. If we go by the (March 1947, in Madrid) order nullifying the probate examination of Szkolnikoff's assets on the grounds of intestacy⁸⁹, it mentions some background details, declaring that it was Engelke that had introduced the soon-to-be couple:

"Elena Tietz got in touch with the – Jewish – owner of an important furrier's and entered with him into an arrangement, the terms and implications of which we need not set out here, and set up a textile business supplying textiles to the German Navy. It had not been going for long and one day the officer placed in charge of such matters by the command introduced her to one Michel Szkolnikoff, a Russian by birth, and apparently a Pole by nationality, a Jew. In his presence, the Hauptmann said to Madame Samson: 'I am a German officer and need goods for our soldiers. Szkolnikoff is greatly persecuted as a Jew but he possesses the goods – blockaded goods – and no one has a better grasp of this matter. Work with him and put him to use.' Elena Tietz applied herself to the task and, not without some difficulty, managed in 1941 to have the embargo lifted from some of the textile goods belonging to Szkolnikoff (the previous situation deriving from measures laid down by the French government which, on the outbreak of war, treated the Jews no less harshly than its German counterpart) and they were sold on for one hundred million francs, which formed the basis for the huge fortune that they appear to have built up together."⁹⁰

Through the Indian Ocean Trading Company, he entered into business dealings with the invaders, more specifically with the German navy, the *Kriegsmarine*. This was not just any old dealing, as, starting on November 1940 it sold no more and no less than 800,000 metres of canvas for uniforms, which would have been the matter cited in the footnote above. Not a bad start for a business partnership. Thanks to the captain and Ellen further contracts were signed and the number of departments with which they were negotiating expanded.

⁸⁹ In Spanish, *abintestato*, derived from the Latin *ab intestato* (no will and testament), this legal term is used for court inquiries into inheritance and the awarding of the assets where someone had died without leaving a will or where the will is invalid, whereupon the inheritance is awarded by the law to the closest kin.

⁹⁰[https://www.google.com/url?](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=jc&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiarOis3OXgAhWEz;UKHU6PDB-MQFjAEegQIABAB&url=http://www.xn-forfundacionserranosuer-mlc.es/documentos/libros_juridicos/tomo_1_5.pdf&usg+AOvVau.3dqQ3z7YcWanMh_KoyGcON)

[sa=t&rct=jc&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiarOis3OXgAhWEz;UKHU6PDB-MQFjAEegQIABAB&url=http://www.xn-forfundacionserranosuer-mlc.es/documentos/libros_juridicos/tomo_1_5.pdf&usg+AOvVau.3dqQ3z7YcWanMh_KoyGcON](http://www.xn-forfundacionserranosuer-mlc.es/documentos/libros_juridicos/tomo_1_5.pdf&usg+AOvVau.3dqQ3z7YcWanMh_KoyGcON)

Now for a couple of oddities regarding the bird concerned. Let us say that, on the one hand, thanks to his business dealings and his origins, he was arrested a couple of times in France by the Vichy police, only to be swiftly released by the Germans both times. Odder still, given that the Nazis were so much on his side business-wise, was the fact that they were to pronounce the tiny Baltic Jewish community “non-Jews” and even found them to be pure Aryans, aping the example of the Italian government. But given that Goebbels had declared: “I determine who is a Jew and who is not,” it is not for this writer to quibble. And since Monsieur Szolnikoff was an Aryan in the eyes of the Germans, but a Jew in the estimation of the French, so we shall say no more on the subject. Ultimately, suffice to say that he hosted in his home on the Champs Elysées no less than Heinrich Himmler and Reinhardt Heydrich, the two most important figures in the fearsome SS. And as *La rosa y la esvástica* tells us, a *marqués* from the Spanish embassy also popped up in his home; and given that there were no *marqueses* serving in the embassy, there is every reason to believe that this was another old acquaintance of ours and another person to be dealt with cautiously: César González Ruano aka *Don Antonio*.

On the strength of the earnings from their business ventures, he started to buy up hotels in Paris and on the Côte d’Azur. He also bought up industrial firms and turned his attention to dealing in works of art as well as gems (he must have had SS friends and Jews to fleece). It was not accident that the notaries, lawyers, administrators and bankers he used were French. Obviously the business ventures did not stop there and with friends like those it was no wonder that he dabbled in political fiddles or in reporting and disposing of competitors and resisters, as he was by then a self-confessed “collaborator”. His lack of religious, political or moral ideals was to make Szolnikoff the wealthiest man in France within three years. But no matter how perfect things seemed to be, he was finally lacking in one regard: just when everything was going so swimmingly, what did the Germans do but go and lose the war. It all began with the odd little hint, such as the Gestapo’s arrest of Szolnikoff in Paris in August 1943 while Engelke was in Germany. Upon the captain’s return, he managed to have them released as Ellen too had been arrested. But things were never quite the same again.

By then the Nazis were losing the war and this was becoming increasingly plain and so the couple started crossing the Spanish border time and again, keen to place some of their capital beyond reach. Between December 1943 and May 1944, they were to cross the border on at least six occasions. Brandishing their German passports and in their big saloons, they were spared the searches on the border. But that did not stop Major Ortega, the head of the local border force, from forwarding a report to Robert Terres.

Terres was a lot more interested in his files than in any wealth that he might have been exporting to Spain. Like any good businessman, Szolnikoff had a few aces up his sleeve to guard against any eventuality. Files listing the names of his partners and associates, French as well as German, the baksheesh payable to each of them and who knows what else. Possession of those dossiers might ensure cooperation, open doors and, above all shut many a mouth or leave those named open to blackmail when the time came. Much more dangerous than any crate-load of bombs. How many folk in good standing, how many long-term or johnny-come-lately resisters, how many Free France patriots might be named in those papers? That was what ‘*el Padre*’ wanted to know.

In May 1944 Michel Szolnikoff and Ellen stepped off the train that had just brought them to Madrid. But once again the signs and bad omens loomed and they were arrested by the police right there in the station. Among their luggage were several million gold francs and precious stones. Yet again it took the intervention of Captain Engelke to ensure their release. Later the couple moved into a leading hotel in the Spanish capital.

And so, shortly after that, another of the afore-mentioned meetings between Terres and Huet took place; that was also when they talked about launching the *Odessa Bis*, but first things first and they tried to track down the runaway in Barcelona, Madrid, the Balearics and the Canaries. Using his connection, Major Ortega, ‘*el Padre*’ was hopeful of securing the cooperation of some police commanders, with Huet helping out by circulating the knowledge in CNT circles that they were looking for a collaborationist Jew. As we know, that matter and those meetings were being dragged out. In the summer of 1945, with the war now over, the matter was revisited. Terres was still focused on tracking the Jew down and especially his dossiers, whereas Huet and his comrades were now toying with the chances of mounting an attempt on Franco’s life. In the light of which ‘*el Padre*’ let

them have their head: “Looks good to me. Let’s see if we can kill two birds with one stone!”⁹¹ He knew that with the war over, securing some measure of assistance from the regime’s own personnel would not be out of the question. Huet said of Terres: “‘*El Padre*’ was a stinker. He would portray things to you in such a way as to end up winning you over.”⁹²

And so ‘*el Padre*’ got hold of some phoney French papers, which he gave to Miguel Campos, since Campos was due to depart for his Canary Islands homeland shortly. Apart from his plotting and plans to visit family ‘*el Canario*’ was to find out whether Monsieur Szkolnikoff was hiding out in the islands, something that he had no difficulty doing. For his part, Huet set off for Barcelona, with the same mission. He would alert the CNT people and exploit his former connections as a night-time taxi driver to ferret out the information they were after.

In order to follow the chronology of the entire story, let us leave the ‘Szkolnikoff Affair’ to one side for a moment and make a few necessary introductions.

⁹¹ *Los senderos de la libertad*, p. 165, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002.

⁹² *Los senderos de la libertad*, p. 165, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

Chapter 26

Rosa Curt, the Great Unknown

Regrettably what information I have been able to gather regarding Rosa Curt over the course of my investigation is alarmingly scarce and much of it derives from interviews with Antonina Rodrigo. She came from humble circumstances and was a textile worker and even this information contradicts the information that Pons Prades gave to Kostas Floros, the Greek writer I mentioned before, author of *Kyklos Alpha*. In their interview, Eduardo was insistent that the father of 'Rosita' had bought Huet a car in return for his marriage with his daughter. What Rosa's father's economic circumstance were, we do not know, but buying a car was certainly not an option open to everyone back then.

Rosa Curt was born in 1911 and was four years Huet's junior. I cannot be exactly sure when Manolo and Rosa got to know each other, but what we do know is that they wed on 4 April 1932 in the parish church of Santa María in Poble Nou, the *barrio* in which they were living. That much is jotted in the margins of the copy of the birth certificate for Manolo that the court in Ayora sent me. I also do not have the precise date of birth of their only daughter, María (much to the annoyance of Manolo who was hoping for a son) although I do know that she was born in 1933. As we know, Manolo did not spend too much time with his family during the three-year long dispute in Barcelona city. Huet and his lorries crossed the border in February 1939 and stayed in France; furthermore, as he was known to the police as an anarchist activist, he could not go back to Barcelona without putting his life in danger. But Rosa and her daughter remained in the city; in fact, María developed serious back problems that impacted on her mobility and left her stiff. Rosa had been deeply in love with Huet, according to Antonina Rodrigo who had been very friendly with the pair of them, but that all began to change after the end of the Second World War.

Manolo was in Barcelona on a couple of occasions on clandestine missions and apparently he dropped by the Poble Nou house regardless of the dangers involved, either to visit with his wife and daughter or to leave them some money, which was what they needed most, although not a lot, because what they loved was having him around the house. During the war years he also wrote letters to Rosa and would send her money from time to time.

Unfortunately, and this is something going on at the present time in libertarian circles, we are still inclined as a rule not to take our *compañera* seriously, whether they be our life partners, our partners in struggle for our beliefs and Manolo was no exception there. If we look at the number of women that took part in some of these struggles, then, at a minimum and taking as our example the guerrilla struggle, one of the areas of which I have better information, around 2% of participants were women, and not because they would not or could not do the same as their male counterparts, but rather because the latter always stood in their way. Be they communists or anarchists, the most outrageous macho arguments were offered as to why they should not take to the hills and take up arms. But they seemed to be fine as couriers or auxiliaries for whatever parties or trade unions they saw fit. And the upshot of this? Nearly 50% of women were auxiliaries and many of them were more deeply involved than the men. Another inequality being that history is written, for the most part, by us menfolk and we almost always talk about them. Unfortunately if we check the name index at the end of this book, there is a glaring disparity. Finally, I can only apologize for my own part for the meagre presence of women in this book. That said, back to the protagonists of this chapter.

María's illness compelled her mother to make numerous trips between Poble Nou and the Sant Pau hospital, a journey that she had to make on foot. It was a lengthy trip and one with a lot of attendant costs, although she had the occasional help of Rosa's brother; the girl would be laid out on a table, or carried on shoulders and they would tackle the slopes between the two points, making the return journey carrying the girl on their backs. Rosita's meagre income meant that she could often not afford the tram fare. What with their separation, her ailing daughter and the knowledge that Manolo was not just a very good-looking man but rather given to chasing skirts, and, being a survivor, was never short of cash. His dereliction, bordering on forgetfulness, was conjuring up a layer of resentment in Rosa that she could never quite shrug off.

We can be almost certain that it was in 1947 or 1948 (albeit that we do not have the exact date) that the family was reunited in France. We can only imagine that Manolo stumped up the fares and made the arrangements whereby his wife and daughter crossed over into France. Thanks to the memoirs of Enric Melich and the interview I had with him in March 2018, we know that Rosa and María were in Cerbère when he made their acquaintance and were holidaying there. Shortly after that, he got to meet Manolo, striking up a firm friendship with him and, judging by the things he told us during the interview, he must have met Huet in 1947 or 1948.

Once reunited on French soil, the family settled in Toulouse. María was also very resentful towards her father although, luckily for her, the medical attention she received in France was able, I won't say to put paid to her ailment, but at least make life for her much more bearable. Even so, she never forgot all that she had been through and that she had never known a normal childhood, never been able to play ...

The improvement in her medical condition allowed her to grow into a beautiful woman who eventually married a Jewish fellow by whom she had two children; the couple and their daughters relocated to Andorra.

After that, Manolo tried to make up for his long absences to Rosa and was very affectionate and attentive and spent more time with her, albeit that in my view he never quite pulled it off. What we can say is that the couple stayed together up until the 1980s, when Manolo had the accident that cost him his life; so we shall be seeing Rosita again in some of the experiences Huet went through in the 1950s and 1960s. And, as announced at the start of this chapter, I do not know what became of Rosa after she left for Andorra, whether her later years were happy ones, where or how she died and indeed what her second surname was. Another battle lost to our memory.

Chapter 27

The Gang

I now propose to delve a little deeper into Huet's comrades from his affinity group. They have been popping up throughout the preceding pages and we shall be seeing more of them in the chapters to come. He became acquainted with them all during the turbulent days in the *Rosa de Foc* [Barcelona] in the late 1920s and early 1930s: but with the passage of time, out of all the folk with whom he shared careers, upsets, spent gunpowder and gasoline, out of them all, only a chosen few remained, making up the gang.

Let me start with Josep Vidal Coma aka *Vidalet*, born in Barcelona in 1915. From a young age he was active in the CNT in Sant Martí de Provençals, in the woodworkers' union. At the age of 18 he was arrested in the Paseo Colom in connection with the January 1933 uprising and sampled imprisonment by the state. He was caught in possession of a pistol and ammunition as well as a bomb; among the many also arrested that same day were Antonio Ortiz, Jover and García Oliver. After an attempted mass break-out from the Modelo in Barcelona on 13 December 1933, with several inmates making successful getaways, 26 of the 59 escapees, including *Vidalet*, were rearrested. In the end he was freed under an amnesty in April 1934. The next report we have of him records his detention in July 1935 in a swoop from which Manolo escaped; that was in the thick of the transport union dispute. After helping to see off the rebels in July 1936 and a follow-up visit to Valencia, we then find him working at the Damm brewery before he eventually joined the 26th Division (formerly the Durruti Column). Precisely when he was transferred to the 7th Motor Transport Battalion we do not know, but he finished the war as part of that unit, sharing the rigours of No 1 Company with Huet. We referred earlier to his early days in France as well as to his having been arrested in September 1940. After being arrested by the gendarmes, he was sent to the Le Vernet d'Ariège camp. And his misfortune did not end there, as he wound up being deported to Africa with another 444 prisoners declared undesirable aliens by the Vichy government; again, Antonio Ortiz was one of that number. Assigned to the Djelfa camp in Algeria, he suffered all the climatic rigours of North Africa whilst working on the construction of the Trans-Saharan railroad. In 1944 he managed to make his way back to Europe and turned up involved in the fighting during the uprising and subsequent liberation of Paris, back in the company of Manolo and others from his group. He married Rafaela Mas and held positions of responsibility in the Paris CNT, not that that stopped him from doing the occasional "errand" with Manolo. Josep Vidal died in Paris in 1996.

We also have a few things to say about the Soto brothers. Let us start with Manolo Soto. He was born in La Union in Murcia in 1893 where he worked as a baker, active within the 'La Primitiva' Workers' Society. In 1918 he moved to Barcelona with the rest of his family, which is how he was able to take part in the famous February-March 1919 strike known as 'La Canadiense'. In November that year, being on the run he was arrested and stood trial for incitement to rebellion and bullying. Arrested with another 130 comrades and placed in the prison ship the '*Barceló*', he was then moved in January 1921 to Tarragona in preventive custody. Later he worked on the docks in Barcelona as well as for the Mateu Company. A tireless recruiter for the CNT (as a delegate of the metalworkers' union) and for the FAI, he was part of the confederal defence cadres. Come the advent of the Second Republic, we find Manuel Soto in Santa Eulalia del Hospitalet where he launched the CNT's Amalgamated Trades Union and was elected as its president. In 1933 he was actively involved in the uprising that January and was forced to move away due to his being a wanted man and he wound up in Poble Nou; whether it was at this time that he met Huet, or whether they had been thrown together in earlier operations and revolts, we cannot say. In March 1934 an explosives factory, complete with stockpile, was discovered in his home: furthermore the police insisted that the stockpile was supplying explosives and inflammable liquids to a variety of groups for use in the dispute that the transport union was waging against the tram company. For that and acts of sabotage he was sentenced to 18 years in prison but was freed from prison thanks to the Popular Front's victory. After the crushing of the revolt in Barcelona city, he took charge of the Poble Nou defence commission, after which he was made barracks inspector, until stood down following the dissolution of the antifascist militias. On returning to Hospitalet he served as a town councillor before being forced to leave for exile in 1939. He then sampled his share of the French camps: Manuel passed through Bram and Gurs and later was assigned to the inevitable Foreign Labour Companies (CTEs) and was posted to Oleron in Charente Maritime as a baker. Once France had been liberated, he remained active in the CNT and in the SIA

(International Antifascist Solidarity). With the passage of time he settled eventually in Bonniers and died on 21 February 1976.

As for Ángel Soto, let us say that he was born quite a few years after his brother, on 29 July 1912, to be precise, in La Unión and, like Manuel, moved with the family to Barcelona in 1918. Following his brother's example, he started work at a very early age and shortly after that joined the CNT. Active in the 1933 uprising, he finished up under arrest and was jailed. In 1934 he was arrested again after he found in Poble Nou, in the house where his brother Manuel was living and where an important bomb factory and stockpile had been unearthed. Apropos of that, we know that, on 24 March, after putting a tail on him for a time, the police entered the isolated house on the Calle Prevensals, behind which sat the Girona Foundry and there they arrested both brothers as well as discovering and seizing a significant workshop in which were found:

"A 500 gramme packet of potassium chlorate, a 100 gramme packet of sawdust, a 200 gramme batch of sulphur, a 100 gramme packet containing a mixture of various substances, a 50 gramme packet of rosin, a 1000 gramme packet of coal, a 300 gramme pack of mercury, a 1000 gramme packet of nitric acid, 700 grammes of sulphuric acid, 400 grammes of glycerine, 150 grammes of ethyl alcohol, a 100 gramme packet of caustic potash, an earthenware pot, some tweezers with paraffin sticking to them, a set of precision scales, a 750 gramme funnel with a spanner, various measuring jugs and utensils used in weighing, one small sieve, a mortar, three measuring buckets, a mechanical grinder, 6 graduated test tubes, a rubber hose, 6 empty bottles, 6 small earthenware beakers, a 1000 gramme glass vessel, a bottle containing, it seems, inflammable liquid, a 300 gramme pack of gunpowder, a steel saw, one large earthenware mixing bowl with 12 test tubes, a thermometer, a curved steel pipe 15 centimetres in diameter, one Smit jerrycan ready to hold explosives, 80 150-gramme sticks of dynamite, a demijohn containing 4 litres of gasoline, 309 detonators, 2 primed spherical bombs with the necessary fuses, 6 pistols of a variety of makes and calibres, one revolver, 20 magazines fitted with ammunition, 26 clips of armoured shells for a rifle, 203 rounds of different calibres for a short arm, 2 metres of thick cable, 110 metres of fuse, a crate of absorbent cotton for inflammable substances, a range of tools and locksmith's instruments, a 300 gramme steel pipe, a laboratory chemistry manual, various recipes for making explosives, a 1500 gramme pulley and an exercise book recording cash revenues and the outlay required in the purchase of materials, weapons and munitions."⁹³

After the civil war broke out, and the fascists had been seen off in the Catalan capital, the younger Soto set off for Aragon as a militiaman with the Durruti Column and was later incorporated into the 26th Division, with which he crossed into France in February 1939 when the war ended. After that it was an endless litany of camps: La Tour de Carol, Mont Louis, the Le Vernet camp and Septfonds and in late 1939 he was eventually drafted into the Foreign Labour Companies (CTEs). Under the German occupation he lived in the Agen area and after the liberation he headed for Paris. Once there, he found him active in the CNT and FAI and then, eventually, in the 1980s, he settled in Perpignan where he died on 12 July 2002.

Unfortunately, as regards Joaquín Blesa aka *Quimet*, we have very little information. Although his name pops up at various times in these pages, he remains a complete unknown. I have two photographs of him and there is a great likelihood, although no certainty, that he was active in the action groups during the early 1930s. Once the fascists had been thwarted in Barcelona, he served in the Durruti Column and later with the 7th Transport Battalion, No 1 Company, alongside Manolo, taking part in various episodes recounted in this book. Not knowing for sure, I cannot even be certain about his second surname. Luckily, shortly before this book was in its final draft, I discovered that Blesa was in the 26th Division's 119th Brigade. That prior to the war and in Barcelona he worked in the offices of the well known defence counsel of anarchists, Eduardo Barriobero⁹⁴ from

⁹³ *La Vanguardia*, 25-3-1934

⁹⁴ Eduardo Barriobero y Herrán, a republican with anarchist leanings, was born on 28 July 1875 in Torrecilla de Cameros in La Rioja. Lawyer, writer, public speaker, publisher, philosopher and educationist. Throughout his career he distinguished himself by defending trade union victims in the courts (many of these were of a libertarian turn of mind) and was repeatedly jailed for so doing. He was a regular contributor to reviews and newspapers. During the civil war he placed himself in the service of the CNT and was put in charge of the Courts Office of Catalonia and served as a prosecution counsel for the Republic. After May 1937 he was targeted by the communists. Shot by the Francoists on 7 February 1939.

La Rioja and was taken seriously ill during his time in the Argelès-sur-Mer camp at the beginning of 1942. This latter titbit leads us to the inescapable conclusion that he must have been arrested a short time before in one of the swoops on Huet's and Ponzán's people. We can also place him in Toulouse along with Liberto Ros, Mariño and other 26th Division veterans in mid-1943, by which time Huet and Segunda were in hiding in Vienna. Along with his fellow 26th Division comrades, he moved up to Paris in spring 1944 and they were to have a hand in the liberation of the city.

Chapter 28

“La Nuri”

“Nuri” was a young Catalan woman recently discharged from a sanatorium in the Alps. One of the many women of every nationality who, once the war was over, found herself jobless and destitute. Her father went missing in the underground fight against the Germans in France; her mother was elderly and with two younger offspring to look after. In order to raise a little money, she worked as a prostitute so that her family – well, I am not sure we can say that they got on, but at least did not perish along the way.

After a short while she met another young exile, Joanet, a Catalan like herself, and since love is impervious to poverty or hard times, they quickly fell in love. “Nuri” did not lie to him and told him how she made her living and Joanet did not fly off the handle or at any rate, maybe he did, but his anger was directed at the world and not at “Nuri”, so he attempted to thrash out an arrangement with the Moroccan pimp who was her controller.

Joanet, who worked as a painter, came to a deal with the Moroccan, who allowed her to retire in return for a large sum of cash. Over the course of a year and in spite of restrictions, Joanet would pay him so much each month. During that time he was, through an uncle of his, bidding for a contract in Venezuela, so that once his *compañera* was a free agent they might move away and settle over there. But as misfortune loves company, once the year was up, the pimp brought up the fact that he himself had two partners and those partners had decided to bump up the buy-out fee. And the new price? Another year’s work. But the couple, in the belief that they were now free agents has applied for their passports and, whether from nerves or thoughtlessness, Joanet had not managed, when speaking with the pimp, to hide the details of his trip to the Americas. Unfortunately for them both, criminal connections successfully brought the passport applications to a standstill.

Luckily for Joanet, who came from the Poble Nou *barrio* of Barcelona, Huet was a good friend of his father’s and one day the young man decided to confide in Manolo, knowing that Manolo had a more than well-earned reputation as an action man from the FAI. Joanet set out the situation in which he found himself and they could devise no way out. Manolo did not hesitate, for the youngster’s sake but also because of his friendship with the young man’s father.

As a first step, thanks to his connections in the resistance and quite possibly pulling strings with ‘*el Padre*’, he tackled the issue of the stymied passport applications and soon promised to sort out that particular issue. Later, Huet told him: “And now to deal with these characters as they might still create headaches for you!”⁹⁵

As we know, Huet had spent a portion of his military service, coinciding with the end of the Moroccan campaign, in North Africa and, as he put it “had learnt to speak Arabic.”

And so Huet decided to keep an appointment in Joanet’s place, to pay off the first of additional monthly instalments. The rendezvous was a bar near Les Halles and all three Maghrebis turned up for it. And in walked Manolo, but in strange garb, dressed like Padre Blanco of the Benedictine Order which wears a white soutane and operates in North Africa. Beneath his soutane was a loaded parabellum and two of ‘*el Murciano’s*’ comrades – without soutanes but also armed – were posted outside the bar. Huet introduced himself and the Moroccans were taken aback in that this priest had shown up instead of Joanet. The ‘priest’ told them that the lad was staying outside, with an uncle of his who was in a wheelchair (the uncle would be paying off the fee in total, thereby settling the debt once and for all). He also stated that the uncle wanted to see them as he did not quite trust his nephew and there was a large sum of money involved.

Initially the pimp was suspicious and asked which part of Africa the missionary had served and the phoney Padre Blanco replied that it was Morocco. His next question was whether he spoke Arabic. Huet then replied in that language, which was followed by a sort of a Moorish chit-chat. Since being able to speak in one’s native tongue whilst abroad always creates confidence, the three Maghrebis stepped out into the street after Manolo. No sooner had the latter reached the street outside than he stepped to one side and, as he drew his gun, he

⁹⁵ *Episodios Nacionales Siglo Xx*, p. 8, Eduardo Pons Prades. Unpublished text.

called out to his comrades to “let them have it”. After a few short seconds of confusion and gunshots, three lay dead on the ground and Padre Blanco’s soutane was discarded in the trash a few streets further off.

On returning to Joanet’s house, specific orders were issued: “Shake a leg. Go pick up your passports tomorrow and leg it. Okay?”⁹⁶

Later, Chief Inspector Borniche, the top police commander in Paris noted that the cold and chilling execution in his memoirs, meaning the three Arabs, signalled the beginning of many more score-settlings between Paris underworld figures. These incidents dated from the winter of 1945-46.

⁹⁶ *Episodios Nacionales Siglo XX*, p. 9, Eduardo Pons Prades. Unpublished text.

Chapter 29

“Operation Saccharine”

Which brings us to January 1946 when Manolo Huet was in Barcelona city. The reason behind his trip we do not know, but knowing what ‘*el Murciano*’ was like and seeing what had prompted those underground gatherings held in Paris since the summer of 1944, we may rest assured that he was not wasting his time. Laureano Cerrada (of whom much more in the forthcoming chapters) needed personnel as he had begun work on preparing a stroke in Paris to fill his coffers. He scrutinized the matter, picked his target, worked out how to transport the cash and when thoughts turned to the team to carry it all out, he soon remembered his comrade from the Poble Nou FAI, having been pleasantly impressed by how he had handled himself when dealing with that US Army payroll officer. Through the organization, he made contact with Huet. And the chosen target? A Crédit Lyonnais cash van.

Whenever possible, he relied on militants who did not live in the location chosen for the raid, so that on the one hand they might not be recognized by locals and, on the other, might revert quietly to their “normal lives” after the event.

Once ‘*el Murciano*’ received the call, he quickly returned to Paris and arranged a meet with Laureano. According to Huet, Cerrada had it all planned out but, even so, asked for a week to go over everything, leading Manolo to wonder if Laureano did not trust him. Manolo’s response, was as curt and direct as the question: “Right, either we do it my way or you carry out the robbery yourself whenever you like...” In the end, Cerrada gave in and they arranged to meet one week later. After that interval there would be another meeting and the former railway worker [Cerrada] asked:

“- Right, are you clear on everything?

- Look, I’m going to need three cars, not two; two for the hold-up and another one with a driver, to wait for me in a nearby street. And after the bags are loaded aboard, the driver of the third car will take off with the comrades and I, on my own, will take charge of the proceeds so that I alone will know where we have taken the money. Instead of four men, I will need six. And you’ll have to supply me not just with six sub-machineguns but with the same number of tear gas grenades. Okay? We will handle the share-out later – 75% for the organization and the remaining 25% for us
- Custom has it that the organization gets 90%.
- That was in Spain. Here we have a lot more outlay. We have to give the comrades enough money to clear out of Paris as soon as they can and try to rebuild their lives as best they can.
- What? ... And might we know the reason for so many cars, so many personnel and all those guns?
- Very simple, Cerrada. I’m going to arrange things in such a way that people will be greatly impressed and not a single shot gets fired. I want this to be a clean hold-up in every regard

...”⁹⁷

Huet left out of the raid the comrade chosen to act as driver, reckoning that he was too nervous and later he stood down another two. All were given their due rewards. And he cautioned the rest of them: “This thing has been scrutinized in detail to ensure that it goes well. Anybody who puts a foot wrong will have me to answer to and you should know that in matters like these I am not joking. So if any of you does not want to take part in the hold-up, you still have time to back out.”⁹⁸

The raid went off perfectly. When the van showed up, the guards inside, the driver and his companion were neutralized and the same was done with the ones in the back of the van once the doors were opened. Two men transferred the bags to the cars parked opposite, all without fuss or raised voices. Anything dropped was recovered by Manolo once they had withdrawn. It was all over in three minutes. Later, they swapped cars and

⁹⁷ *Los senderos de la Libertad*, p. 172, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

⁹⁸ *Los senderos de la Libertad*, p. 173, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

Huet made off with the cash in the last car. Part of the swag from this robbery was used by Cerrada to buy the Norecrin light aircraft that was to be used in the attempt to assassinate Franco in San Sebastian in 1948 during the yachting regatta in San Sebastian bay.

If we go by Pons Prades's various publications, the next move on the chessboard of post-war Europe related to investment of the other portion of the cash raised by the Paris hold-up. Cerrada switched focus and dispatched Manolo to Genoa as he had contacts there with some dissident communist partisans who had taken possession of a large batch of weapons and were ready to sell them on. Besides the hard cash raised in a variety of hold-ups, it looks as if some of the payment was to be made in the form of saccharine: hence the name of the operation. Cerrada had always had a roguish fondness for giving his operations names.

And how had such a quantity of saccharine been come by? It needs saying here that the port of Marseilles had, for quite some time, become one of the key locations through which the US army imported all manner of items. All such materials were used to supply its many units based close to that city on the Mediterranean. We know from previous chapters that Cerrada and above all Huet had their connections in the city, among the dockers, stevedores, hauliers, etc., as well as in the outlying districts of the city, so they soon spotted their chance. Over now to witness Santiago Blanco who worked in the docks there for a while:

"There were hundreds of us drivers. Our work consisted of shifting the army's supplies from the quays to the various camps within a 100 kilometre radius. We would show up at the lorry park and be allocated a lorry, with orders to report to the quay indicated. On the quayside our lorries were loaded up with all sorts of goods. With our lorry loaded up we would set off, unescorted and unmonitored, for the location indicated on the pertinent bill of lading. This being Marseilles! this sort of practice necessarily sparked criminality, scandals, mysterious disappearances and massive thievery. The Americans were out of their depth and desperate. Lorries, drivers and goods were all going missing on a daily basis."⁹⁹

Given the Americans' *modus operandi* it is not hard to imagine how several tonnes of saccharine could have gone missing. The fact is that from Nice (as there was no way of running the stolen goods back under the gringos' noses again) the goods were loaded on to boats for onward shipment to Genoa and once there, and unloaded, the same vessels would bring in the arms purchased from the former partisans. Later those arms finished up near Marseilles. As a rule, the loading and unloading went smoothly as the Italian customs and the French ones had generally been bribed.

That brings us to March 1946 and the Italian city of Genoa. A swanky mansion, the 'Villa Arcadia' was rented there, right on the coast and it was to serve as the headquarters from where Manolo would oversee the purchases and shipments; and it looks as if the owner of the villa, the Contessa di Sestri, was charmed by Huet's particular panache and enjoyed dalliances with him during his visits to Genoa.

Once the ships had been reloaded, they made for the Côte d'Azur. Coming shore between Nice and Marseilles, the crates were then loaded on to a small fleet of lorries that Cerrada had laid on with one of his front companies and they were ferried to Marseilles, Toulouse or Perpignan. Later, those arms were stashed in clandestine warehouses for future use in France and, above all, Spain.

We are going to track a dozen crates which, under Huet's watchful eye, were already in Perpignan, their next stop being hiding places in the Cerdanya and northern Gerona. The organization had mobilized several of the action groups and its guides to deliver the arms to their destinations. According to Manolo, this was the gear that was to be moved across the border: "The crates' contents consisted of two hundred sub-machineguns, a hundred-odd pistols and revolvers of varying calibres, some three hundred hand grenades, half a hundred packs of 'plastique', detonators and lots of ammunition. Plus a dozen comprehensive first-aid kits."¹⁰⁰

We do not know the identities of the other groups implicated in the cross-Pyrenean transfer, but we do know one of them. And this is the first time that we will find these two names – Huet and Francisco Sabaté Llopart

⁹⁹ *El inmenso placer de matar un gendarme. Memorias de guerra y exilio*, p. 508, Segundo Blanco, Cuadernos para el diálogo, Madrid, 1977

¹⁰⁰ *Historia de la clandestinitat. La guerrilla rural llibertaria* part 2, No 16, p.315

aka '*el Quico*' (possibly the best known of the libertarian anti-Francoist guerrillas) – mentioned together. We know that '*Quico*' had worked with Ponzán's people back in 1943 so it is possible that they became acquainted earlier, but they were definitely in cahoots in this particular operation. Sabaté's group was guided by Ramón Vila Capdevila also known to his guerrilla comrades as *Pasoslargos* and to the forces of repression as *Caracremada*. A hero of the French resistance, he subsequently became the last anarchist maquisard slain with his weapons in his hands on 7 August 1963. And they say the civil war lasted only three years! The remaining comrades from the group were Antonio Malpica Ramos, José Gay, Aurelio Martí and a certain 'José', of whom we know nothing beyond that forename. In addition to ferrying arms to prearranged locations, the group had another specific assignment, namely the elimination of the 'plant' Eliseo Melis. In April 1945, the MLE leadership had made up its mind, after lengthy debate, to sort out a festering issue. And end the life of the traitor Melis once and for all. And a few months later they entrusted the task to Francisco Sabaté.

On 21 April, the group slipped across the border via Coustouges. With the exception of Aurelio Martí, they were all veterans. Most of the gear was for delivery to a safe house in Banyoles: they dropped it off at a location previously marked in the mountains for collection by a runner who would have to deliver it to the town.

The groups, the final destination of which was Barcelona, would split up in that town in Gerona province and would catch the bus in separate batches. Antonio Malpica, Aurelio Martí and 'José' set off first on the morning of 25 April and before the second batch – Ramón and José Gay, that would have been – could set off, an incident wrecked their plans and blew the libertarian guerrillas' cover.

After a quiet meal in one of the taverns in Banyoles and capitalizing on its being a local holiday, which jelled with their plans to proceed without attracting attention, '*Quico*' and José, strolling on ahead in lively conversation, were asked for their papers by a couple of Civil Guards. If Téllez is to be believed, one factor that may have tipped off the Civil Guards was that their papers had been issued in Logroño, yet these 'Logroño' types had Catalan accents that made heads turn. In view of the objections from the accosted pair, and as Ramón Vila looked on attentively as he followed at a distance, monitoring developments, Vila spotted one of the Guards draw his regulation weapon and threaten the couple after '*Quico*' and his companion refused to accompany them. Ramón, alarmed by this, sidled up to where they were arguing and, resorting to the gun that himself was carrying, felled Civil Guard José Godó García with a well-aimed shot and left him dying on the ground. Vila and José Gay promptly took to the hills, turned around and headed back towards France. Meanwhile, Sabaté managed to slip through the police cordon around Banyoles, being disguised as a farmer and travelling on foot, making for Barcelona, where he arrived the following day, 2 May. As a result of these developments, the group decided against carrying out the elimination of the traitor and high-tailed it back in the direction of Gerona.

Chapter 30

The Problem With Thinking That You Are Something

Getting back to those clandestine gatherings, little must have emerged clearly from the enquiries made in Spain. And so shortly after that, in the autumn of 1946 to be precise, at another meeting in Paris, at which only Campos was missing, Terres briefed them on an interesting piece of news. On the previous 17 June, a peasant in the province of Madrid had stumbled upon a semi-charred corpse that the Spanish police had identified as Michel Szkolnikoff. Terres could not quite credit the whole story, so he stepped up his search and zeroed in also on Ellen Tietz whom he did not trust one bit. By that time, Robert Terres had quit the secret services, meaning that the confirmation of the demise of the Nazis' former collaborator reached him very belatedly. He also discovered who had been behind it – four members of French intelligence.

It seems that in June 1945, the French secret service had made an attempt to get Szkolnikoff back to France. It also looks as if he was none too keen on that idea, so they kidnapped him, interrogated him and apparently were close to talking him round when the Jew-rebranded as an Aryan ended up losing his life. They then loaded his body into the Hotchkiss that they were using as their means of transport and headed for the border. Out near Guadalajara, in the vicinity of El Molar to be precise, they tried to get rid of the corpse by setting it on fire. Again 'seemingly,' it was later discovered by a peasant who alerted the authorities. According to a report by the Spanish secret police, the corpse displayed, among other things, a skull fracture. To put the tin hat on the whole thing, the brother of the deceased – one Gessel, or on this occasion Gregorio – was called in to make the identification and was hurriedly re-expelled from Spain after doing so. The French historian Pierre Abramovici, author of a life of Szkolnikoff, highlighted the inconsistencies and irregularities in this identification and cited a number of oddities. For instance, during his stay in Spain, the Jewish collaborationist had obtained Argentinean nationality, Argentina being a much sought-after destination for Nazi rats when they needed to disappear through networks such as the ODESSA network. He also discovered that, oddly enough, there was a bank account in Buenos Aires in the name of Michel Szkolnikoff and that it remained active until 1958. And as we know, the best way of going undetected when somebody is searching for us, is to go to ground so that little by little the questions peter out. As it is not this book's intention to support or refute conspiracy theories, let us get back to our subject. Besides, by a stroke of luck I came upon a document sent by 'el Padre' to Pons Prades, with a summary of the affair. As we know, Terres had been, until quite recently, with the French secret services, so that if there is one thing that could be said of him, aside from his having good collaborators, it was that he was well informed. Here I reproduce the text of his summary:

"The Szkolnikoff or Sozolnikoff Affair Summarized"

Stateless Jew residing in Paris, arrived in Spain and settled down in May 1944 on a Nansen passport; bearer of, among other things, a special safe conduct pass from the German authorities. Arrested in Irún for importing gems and capital. Released following intervention by the Germans; the gems remained impounded. Estimated value, some 800 million of the francs of the time.

On his release, he booked into the Hotel Palace in Madrid, securing, thanks to the German embassy, a permit enabling him to carry on with his dealings in gems, gold and capital independently but under German supervision, the Germans still looking out for his interests from France.

After the Allied landings, he persisted in his dealings with utter impunity. He was assigned residence in Madrid and felt under threat when linked with "Nazi treasure" as Szkolnikoff is the owner in France of a huge real estate fortune covering dozens upon dozens of buildings. He had been the trusted henchman of the SS even though he was an Israelite (sic) as well as a genius in matters of business.

In 1945 the French special services took an interest in him and decided to kidnap him on Spanish soil.

A commando was dispatched to Spain for the purpose. The kidnapping occurred on 8-9 June in the El Molar district where Szkolnikoff was trying to leave a building as he apparently did not feel safe in Madrid.

He was betrayed by a friend of his, Katz, who laid the groundwork.

The kidnapping was carried out by three men, agents of the French secret services, under the protection of the French diplomatic corps. Szkolnikoff put up a fight, in light of which he was injected with an anaesthetic with an eye to his being smuggled clandestinely back to France. Due to the impact of the anaesthesia, the businessman lost his life, the kidnapping went awry and his car with the corpse inside, was set ablaze to simulate accidental death.

The body was badly charred. Remnants of documents and of the car survived, and this allowed the Spanish police to reconstruct the facts and they ended up arresting two of the members of the commando.

Helene Samson (Ellen Tietz), Szkolnikoff's wife and partner, of German extraction, was alerted and arrived to identify the body.

It will be interesting to know if the body is buried in El Molar and if any memory of the matters persists in that locality."¹⁰¹

With the passage of time, we know that Michel Szkolnikoff's body has indeed been buried in the non-Catholic section of the El Molar cemetery, where, during the 1970s, Pons Prades uncovered his headstone beneath a thicket of weeds. As for the memories mentioned by Terres, if ever there were any locally, they had evaporated by the time that Eduardo showed up there.

Subsequently, up popped one Ajzik Szkolnikoff who insisted that he was Michel's father and who claimed his inheritance, together with his other son, Gessel/Gregorio. This Ajzik turned out to be an inmate in the prison in Madrid and had obtained from a court in Caspe an order declaring him heir "*abintestato*", shortly after which, in early 1947, he pursued an all-round intestate order in Madrid. To finish off on this matter, Ellen Tietz then put in an appearance, refusing to go without her share of the bounty and produced a handwritten will made in Monaco, as reprinted here:

"This is my testament.

I disinherit my wife, family name Tchernobilska.

As my general and universal heirs, I appoint:

- 1) Ellen Samson, family name Tietz
- 2) Olga Kasakevitz

I bequeath 20% of my fortune to my three siblings. I appoint Nicolas Blanchet as my executor with the fullest powers, including possessory title.

Insofar as possible, I wish no amendment to be made in anything to the guidelines that I have bestowed upon my business group, with my executor to be consulted in all matters as he is also the repository of my ideas and projects.

Written, dated and signed by my own hand in Monaco, 7 January nineteen forty-four.

Signed: Michel Szkolnikoff

There is a line stricken out which reads: In usufruct for life.

Signed: M. Szkolnikoff, 7 January 1944."¹⁰²

In actuality, the assets being contested were very modest because, at the time of Szkolnikoff's "alleged" death, he was carrying jewels to the tune of some 5,000,000 pesetas and drove an Alfa Romeo motor car. All of the assets impounded by the French state were a different kettle of fish and would drag the courts in France into one of the most protracted trials ever mounted in the country. First they needed time to unearth his entire web of companies, hotels, apartments, stooges, etc., and then even more time to dismantle them.

¹⁰¹ Pons Prades Fund, ANC

¹⁰²

In November 1947 Terres and Huet made another trip to Spain on phoney papers (albeit that '*el Padre*' travelled under his own name) but posing as foreign pressmen. Covered by Major Julio Ortega who was still serving on the Irún border, the two friends spent months in Spain on the trail of the Szkolnikoff files. Terres went to Madrid, intending to meet Ellen Tietz, Manuel Soto went to the Canaries intending to locate Miguel Campos, or at any rate, obtain news of him, but as we noted in our chapter on the clandestine gatherings, nothing more was ever discovered regarding Campos. To cut a long story short, let us say that with the passing of the years, whilst they were never able to trace the Szkolnikoff files, they did discover a few things, among them the fact that Szkolnikoff's collaborators included Paul Carbone – yes, Paul Carbone, the head of the Marseilles mafia as we mentioned before. He had been using Carbone to seize control of many of the luxury hotels and buildings on the Côte d'Azur during the Nazi era. The very same Carbone who, on Michel's instructions, had put those Antwerp diamond-cutters in touch with the owners of the '*Dora*' so that they might escape from Europe. Such are the quirks of life. Manolo had also been, fleetingly, a pawn in the games of the Jewish magnate. In the end, years later, Terres discovered that Michel and Ellen had had a daughter. Their heiress lived in Paris and he contacted her to confirm his suspicions that the papers he had been looking for had never left Paris. A notary had made them available to her when she reached the age of majority. We know that Terres had long been pondering the writing of a book on the matter, but I have not unearthed any mention of its having been published. Be that as it may, by the time he had come by this information, most of the persons who might have been affected by the book were already deceased.

Chapter 31

Laureano and his "Sección Fomento"

Right, let us be clear: the real protagonist of this chapter is not going to be Manuel Huet, although he will crop up now and then; here the big cheese is somebody else who has briefly appeared in earlier pages. We speak of Laureano Cerrada and we shall dwell for a moment and focus on him, because his life has more than enough to sustain this chapter, an entire book, or several books.

Laureano Cerrada Santos was born in the little village of Miedes de Atienza in the province of Guadalajara on 18 October 1902, if we go by what the internet tells us. He soon moved away to Barcelona city where he served an apprenticeship as a road-mender and where he discovered "the Idea".

In 1931 we find him as a watchman at the Calle Aragón railway halt, posted there by way of punishment due to his active participation in one of the rail strikes. He made the acquaintance of Antonio Ortiz from the woodworkers' union and stashed some "gear" for him on railway premises until such as it might be needed. In 1935 we find Laureano as a switch operator in El Clot.

In July 1936, he was involved in the fighting around the Atarazanas barracks and the Captaincy-General: once the fascist soldiery had been routed on the streets of Barcelona, Cerrada and his comrades took over the Estación de Francia. Laureano took charge of the Railway Administration Central Fund and was elected technical delegate for tracks and works by the CNT, the POUM and the UGT.

During the incidents in May 1937, the fight for power in Catalonia ended with a ferocious armed clash between communists and Catalanists on one side and anarchists and the POUM on the other, the upshot being that the CNT was ousted from the Generalitat government and the persecution and defamation of the POUMists. The last libertarian nucleus to demobilize was the Estación de Francia where Cerrada had moved an armoured train on to a siding and trained its guns on the Generalitat. Such armoured trains had been a brainwave of Cerrada's and they were widely used as artillery cover or as special transports for the anarchist columns on the front line between Catalonia, Levante and Aragon.

One of the things he had a hand in during the war in Catalonia was the founding of and assistance rendered to children's colonies. Having witnessed the ravages inflicted by fascist air raids on these, as well as on the cities, and given that such raids also involved the Italian air force based in the Balearic islands, Cerrada had suggested to the FAI that, for deterrent effect, they should fire missiles at the Vatican. An anarchist of his acquaintance, by the name of Queralt, was a specialist in ballistics with the Republic's navy and he would be in charge of the operation. But it looks as if the FAI rejected the suggestion.

After the loss of Catalonia, Laureano and thousands of republicans mustered along the French border. His first act upon crossing the border via Port-Bou was to hand over to the trade union in charge of the railways in France, the fund containing the Spanish railway workers' solidarity and social aid monies. He spent the first few months in the infamous camp in Argelès-sur-Mer before being relocated that June to the one in Agde.

In 1940 we find him working in a foundry in Chartres and later, following his arrest by the Germans, he was dispatched to the Atlantic coast to help with the fortification of the Atlantic Wall defences. Some time after that he moved to Paris, by which time he was a member or leader of a group of resisters specializing in raiding and robbing German powder-stores and arsenals. One we know of was a raid in Orléans (Loiret) from which would come the bombs that were used in the future attempt to assassinate the dictator Franco in San Sebastian Bay. We also know of two arms thefts in the Place de la République where Cerrada had one of his stashes of gear (even then it was known that the best place to hide something was right opposite whoever was looking for it). Moreover, the group specialized in forgery. Cerrada got his hands on a small press, a vital tool for copying on a grand scale. They soon set about counterfeiting ration coupons and identity cards, German travel permits or safe conducts for use either by Jews, fugitives from the Obligatory Labour Service (STO) or compatriots in difficulties with the German authorities. Prominent in the counterfeiting team were several French women, among them the painter and artist Madeleine Lamberet who was responsible for many of the forgeries and watermarks, or her sister, Renée. Alongside them there was the renowned libertarian May

Piqueray. It looks as if the group must have started to arouse suspicions and the Gestapo managed to arrest Laureano who was able to escape just as they were about to send him to a German concentration camp. Another of Cerrada's activities, since he had access to printing presses, was churning out both propaganda and libertarian newspapers from September 1944 onwards when he began to publish *Solidaridad Obrera* from Paris; it was to become the most important and best-selling libertarian newspaper. He also produced *Cultura Ferroviaria*, a 4-page monthly bulletin regarding the railway sector in exile.

We still have our doubts as to who it was that first introduced Cerrada to the world of the counterfeiter. On the one hand some say it was Madeleine Lamberet, whereas others say the British secret services who had previously trained the members of the Ponzán network or the subsequently anti-Francoist guerrilla Miguel García García aka *Ferrer*. Laureano's specialty included documents, passports, ration cards, work contracts, etc.

But his world was turned upside down when the plates used in the printing of pesetas turned up. Although some argue that it was Italian partisans that delivered the plates to Paris and handed them over to the CNT's Northern Regional, I am sticking to a different version. If we go by the evidence offered us in Irene Lozano's book *Federica Montseny. Una anarquista en el poder*, we are told there that following the liberation of Italy, members of the Malatesta-Bruzzi Brigade (as I have discovered myself) from Milan happened to mention to Spanish anarchists that they had come by an unexpected find. What they had stumbled upon was nothing more nor less than the various plates used in printing Spanish currency, the famous peseta. They had been found during a raid on the Società Calcografia & Carte e Valori company in Milan, which is where the currency was being printed. Later, the version that came to be agreed among those writing on the subject, was that these plates had been stolen from the mint in Milan. But in the original references, the company is named and on the internet one can even view the proofs that were cropping up at the time.¹⁰³ The news reached the man best qualified to make maximum advantage out of them, none other than Laureano Cerrada, the then secretary of the CNT's Paris regional committee and, according to Luis Andrés Edo, who came to know him well: "He was driven by an 'intuitive culture' fuelled by the need to see his schemes put into practical action. He had great powers of imagination and analysis."¹⁰⁴

And so Laureano took off for Italy and Milan off his own bat, along with a couple of comrades and he made contact with Umberto Marzocchi. Marzocchi had belonged to the Italian group attached to the Ascaso Column and had previously procured arms for the libertarians through a Belgian connection, as had Huet. After arriving back in France, Marzocchi found himself back in the front lines, thanks to the German occupation, but this time as a member of the Del Río Battalion, made up mostly of Spanish libertarians and operating the Ariège department. In the end, after France was liberated, he had gone back to his own country and joined the aforementioned Malatesta-Bruzzi Brigade. So Cerrada, Robla, Marzocchi and some other comrades made their way to the Società Calcografia & Carte e Valori premises, from which the Spanish authorities used to commission some of their paper currency and they brought the plates back to Paris. Here allow me to include one of the notes Irene Lozano has regarding the Italian printings:

"In his book *Los atentados contra Franco*, Eliseo Bayo recounts the Cerrada episode and the theft of the plates but, according to him, the plates were those for the 50- and 100-peseta notes. However, according to the information from Ignacio Martínez from the Bank of Spain's Press Office, the Italian firm of Coen & Cartevalori produced 1- and 2-peseta notes in 1937 and 1938. By 1940 the firm had changed its name to Cartografia e Cartevalori and was issuing bills of a higher denomination. In a document from the Bank of Spain's Investigation Branch, it is noted that when, years later, Cerrada was detained in France, he was caught in possession of 'plates prepared for the printing of counterfeit Bank of Spain bills in the denominations of 25 pesetas, issue date 9 January 1940 and the 500-peseta series with an issue date of 21 October 1940.' These, no doubt, were the plates that Cerrada obtained

¹⁰³ <https://www.numismaticodigital.com/noticia/7137/Articulos-Notafilia/Las-emisiones=de-Calcografia-Coen7-Cartevalori-I.html>

¹⁰⁴ *La CNT en la encrucijada, Aventuras de un heterodoxo*, p. 133, Luis Andrés Edo, Flor del Viento, Barcelona, 2006

in Milan after the downfall of Mussolini. The document makes up part of Cerrada's police file. (AHN, Fondos Contemporáneos, Ministerio del Interior, EXP. H-25403)"¹⁰⁵

Now let me reprint an unpublished text sent to me by the historian and fellow researcher Amadeo Barceló: the text was written by the Aragonese Ramón Rufat and is very hard on Ponzán as well as some of the members of his group and, above all, on Laureano Cerrada, about whom he – Rufat – makes the following remarks:

"What Peirats denied, Cerrada owned up to, albeit only after his own fashion; because he was a man who even when giving had an eye to his own business dealings. He used to dispatch or support the men that came down to Spain to 'organize' or lay the groundwork for 'attentats', but he always kitted them out with short-sleeved jackets and bandoleers bereft of cartridges. The men that Cerrada sought out for such tasks, very much in agreement with Esgleas's committee at the time, were men who had served in the '*Libertad*' Battalion that mopped up the Germans in the Pointe du Grave and who, now that the war was over, were wandering around undecided as to whether to be 'CNT' workers. Their preference was to pose as '*faísta*' militants from a FAI that Peirats himself said that, back in its heyday in Barcelona, could not attract more than a couple of dozen people to its meetings and now, in Toulouse, the clan led by Cerrada was holding gatherings of upwards of six hundred, all of them courageous and ready to take on all comers."¹⁰⁶

Later we shall see some of the affairs in which Cerrada engaged with ex-combatants from the battalion cited.

But it was not serving as secretary of the CNT's Paris regional committee that was the wind beneath his wings, it was his appointment as secretary of the CNT-in-exile's National Committee's Sección de Fomento (Promotion Section). How was he going to promote, conjure resources and boost the growth of an organization that was already large? Well, the plates for Spanish paper money were certainly helpful and his own experience in the field of counterfeiting too, but, that said, why not widen the focus? Those plates gave a huge boost to the opportunities open to Cerrada's network as he already had the equipment, materials and personnel specializing in forgery. A lot of very different ideas crossed his mind. Among these, of course, was defraying the organization's costs, helping out comrades with problems or funding a range of cooperatives and other ventures. But he had his sights set much higher than that and reckoned that hampering the Spanish economy or sinking it altogether by flooding it with phoney pesetas was not such a bad idea.

It was at that time that Cerrada threw a life-line to one of the organization's "damned", none other than Antonio Ortiz, the one-time leader of the Ortiz Column. Surrounded by allegations of lining his own pockets and communist persecution, Antonio had been forced into exile in France while the civil war still raged, after he was stood down from command of his column. He crossed into France with Joaquín Ascaso and a dozen more militants, accused of embezzling the Council of Aragon. Both Ortiz and Ascaso came within an ace of being bumped off on the orders of the CNT which accused them of being traitors.¹⁰⁷ But Cerrada knew how valuable Ortiz was and had no hesitation in recruiting him to his team. Ortiz was to suggest the creation of a sort of guerrilla training school which in the end was not proceeded with. And we will be seeing him again in the 1948 attempt to assassinate Franco.

At the National Plenum of the CNT-In-Exile in 1947, it was agreed and endorsed that 100-, 500- and 1000-peseta bills would be counterfeited, with Cerrada being in charge of actioning this as Fomento secretary. Out of this grew the myth that Laureano was out to sink the Franco regime through the circulation of forged bills. As he said himself, these were used solely to fund resistance against the dictatorship. Allow us here to pass

¹⁰⁵ *Federica Montseny Una anarquista en el poder*, p.317, Irene Lozano, Editorial Espasa, Barcelona, 2005

¹⁰⁶ *La vida clandestina del movimiento español en la época de 1939 al 1951, Volume II*, pp. 223-224, Ramón Rufat, Paris

¹⁰⁷ Justo Bueno was commissioned to travel to France with the intention of murdering both Ortiz and Ascaso. He found Ortiz in Marseilles and put poison in his coffee. Bueno was not at all committed to the task assigned to him and used too small a dose. Also, when Ortiz got wind of what was happening, he made straight for a doctor to have his stomach pumped, thanks to which his life was saved. Information lifted from a letter from García Vivancos headed "The fight goes on. Versus indecency cynically posing as the source of all purity of principles. To former sergeant Antonio Ortiz."

comment on the phoney bills, which have not been talked about a lot and which Edo touches upon in his book *La CNT en la encrucijada. Aventuras de un heterodoxo*. As we can see from the date, 1947, we need to keep it in mind that the Second World War had ended less than two years before and the manufacturing and technology sectors had not quite fully recovered. And what do we mean by that? That even though Cerrada and Verardini and the latter's experts had dabbled in reproductions and counterfeiting and had achieved great things, what was missing was the raw materials and primarily the paper. The paper used in the counterfeiting of peseta notes in 1947 was not the right sort, because, basically, the requisite paper could not be found in France as yet. The suggestion that they wait at least two years until the right paper became available, the immediacy of the fight against Franco and the dearth of funding for proceeding, led to the rejection out of hand of any thoughts of putting things off for a while. Consequently, the bills were printed on paper that fell short of specification. Faced with that set-back, Verardini and his squad came up with an alternative suggestion, as he explains here:

"The point was not to resort to the *modus operandi* of exchanging bill for bill separately, but rather, using the appropriate contacts, to harness the services of the Mint which had branches in every country, devoted entirely to regenerating the circulation of bills, discarding the ones that were not up to scratch. This *modus operandi* consisted of switching the defective bills for counterfeit ones. This was an operation carried out by shipping such bills to a crematorium. The personnel involved in the substitution demanded a cut of 20%-40% in whatever country. In Spain under the dictatorship too, according to the professionals consulted. It was an operation that was not carried out at one fell swoop; instead, a given quantity was worked out and it would be dealt with little by little, on a day-to-day basis."¹⁰⁸

But the criticisms drawn by the initial counterfeiting operations were down to the fact that certain officials used them to kit out the groups that were crossing over into Spain and there was no expectation that the outcomes would improve.

The profits reaped by the Sección de Fomento began to be spent on a range of things: cooperatives of comrades were subsidized, families with members jailed or executed were given assistance and funding was even channelled into the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) in the late 1940s for specific purposes, as Félix Likiniano remarked.

¹⁰⁸ *La CNT en la encrucijada. Aventuras de un heterodoxo*, pp. 134-135, Luis Andrés Edo, Flor del Viento, Barcelona, 2006

Chapter 32

The Tartas Guerrilla Base

The '*Mas Tartas*' will be a name familiar to anyone with any grasp of the history of anarchists in the guerrilla war against Franco. It is a building located just a few kilometres south of the little French town of Palau de Cerdagne and neighbouring Oveja. It is a lonely spot some 1,200 metres above sea level in the midst of the Pyrenees, positioned strategically five or six kilometres from the Spanish border. A perfect jumping-off point between Puigmal and the Collada de Toses, through which the action groups making their way to Barcelona customarily passed. This one-time monastery planted in the middle of dense woodland, was purchased on the organization's behalf by its Sección Fomento, headed by Cerrada. The purpose behind the acquisition was to establish not just a transit and support base for the guerrilla campaign, but also somewhere to stockpile arms and explosives to service it. The purchase must have been made in late 1946 or early 1947. In his 'novel-ized' story of Cerrada, César Galiano notes that by the time of the abortive attempt in Franco's life in May 1947, it was already under CNT control. To give 'Tartas' the appearance of normality, it was leased to CNT member Justo Domingo aka *el Maño* who looked after its upkeep and ensured that it looked like just another farmstead in the area. In late 1948, although we cannot give a precise date, Justo's place was taken by Emilio Anto and he and his wife Mercedes Roa took over the running of the mas.

The first reference we can locate to the base dates from April 1947 and *Plan 1st of May*, so-called. The CNT had had word that Franco was intending to visit the mining basin in the Upper Llobregat. Fifty libertarians were selected and marshalled in the mas; the gear for the operation was supplied by Laureano and included, among other things, sub-machineguns, rifles complete with sights, grenades, mortars, grenade-launching rifles, etc. The guide was Ramón Vila. A search was made for where a mine might be placed and when the mines went up, they would open up with mortar and machine-gun fire. The proximity of the border allowed at the same time for a speedy withdrawal.

After confirming the dictator's presence, the group set off from 'Tartas' under cover of dark. After trekking for several hours and travelling across mountains almost 2,500 metres above sea level and with mist egging them on, some members of the sizeable group started to lag behind, unbeknownst to the rest of the marchers. At one point, Domènec Ibars who was bringing up the rear of the column glimpsed a number of silhouettes behind him. He instantaneously wheeled around and, in the belief that it was a patrol of border guards, he fired his sub-machinegun. The persons unknown responded to his fire. After a brief gun-battle, they realized their fatal mistake. The shooters were part of the group of comrades and, because of the mist, they had become separated from the remainder of the column and, using the gunshots as their guide, they were trying to catch up. From which point onwards, the real guards sprang into action. They mounted a search, without quite knowing for what nor what had just happened. But a heavy exchange of gunfire in the mountains even triggered intervention by the army, given the Caudillo's imminent visit and so the group, three days after it had set out, crossed back over the border and returned to base.

In December 1947, 'Tartas' took delivery of a huge shipment of arms and explosives and *Quico Sabaté's* group was one of those chosen to ferry some of this gear on to Barcelona city. While they were biding their time in the former monastery, bad luck precipitated events. The pin came loose from a grenade that was being handled; the guide with the group, Mariano Puzo, swiftly grabbed the device and scuttled over to one of the windows in 'Tartas', meaning to hurl it away. Just as he was opening the latch, the grenade went off, seriously injuring him. Puzo lost his left forearm and the thumb off the other hand; another piece of the shrapnel was to injure Rafael Ballester in the knee.

On 24 July 1948, the 'mas Tartas' was subjected to its first search by the French customs agency with an officer from the Police Judiciaire in tow; Justo Domingo and the guide/guerrilla Ramón Vila were discovered inside the base. Apparently, the two Spaniards acknowledged that they were storing arms meant for the anti-Franco guerrillas and were placed under arrest and taken to the cells in Bourg-Madame. That same afternoon, an ordnance officer, escorted by a patrol, detonated some of the arsenal, having declined to take it away due to the poor state of some of the explosives. Even though no full inventory was taken, police reports contained the following list:

Three sets of binoculars.

One 9mm Smith & Wesson revolver

One P.38 9 mm revolver, with one clip and seven cartridges

One American C.S. 9mm carbine, with clip

One 9mm Thompson sub-machinegun, with clip

Two 9mm, unmarked America sub-machineguns, with two clips

Four Sten sub-machineguns with six clips

One wireless transmitter with two sets of earphones and two batteries

One compass

Two cases of French, German, British and American grenades

One case of Gomme A dynamite

Two cases of British plastic explosives

One case of grenade pins

Two crates of German-made infantry cartridges mounted on articulated belts

One crate of slow fuses, explosive fuses, detonator primers and safety matches¹⁰⁹

Ramon claimed responsibility for the arsenal which came from maquisards in the south of France and Justo Domingo owned up to storing them. Both were brought to trial in Perpignan in July and given two-month prison sentences. Both this conviction and others that came later might appear short given the gravity of the matters concerned, but remember that a lot of these cases cast a shadow over former members of the French Resistance; hence the minimal sentencing.

In the wake of that discovery, the French police started to drop in at the monastery regularly. On 4 June 1949, 'Tartas' was subjected to a fresh search: this time they caught the new farmer, Emilio Anto, along with Ramón Vila, Manuel (the youngest of the Sabaté brothers) and the Italian Elio Ziglioli. Among the arms discovered that time were a machine-pistol, a carbine, twelve sub-machineguns, twelve pistols, 2,000 cartridges, 146 detonators as well as various explosives. The first two named were given three-month prison terms, with the remainder of their comrades received two-month terms.¹¹⁰ At the start of April 1950, Ramón was arrested again in 'Tartas' and was caught in possession of a sub-machinegun and on this occasion got another three months in prison for improper border-crossings and illicit possession of weapons.

Among the various groups that used to frequent the mas, we might list Facerías's, *Quico's*, the *Los Maños* group, or Massana's. The usual guides were Massana himself, Ramón Vila, Jesús Martínez aka *el Maño* or, up until his accident, Mariano Puzo. They smuggled across not just guerrillas but also some CNT bigwigs such as José Peirats on the odd trip into Spain. A lot of CNT delegates and representatives were also included among the 'Tartas' clientele, as was an inevitable number of couriers whose cover had been blown and who had had to flee to France.

From 1952 on the reckoning was that the base's cover was well and truly blown and the use of it was to be wound down. On some date between 1965 and 1996, the farmhouse was stricken by a fire cause unknown, that left it in complete ruins.

¹⁰⁹ *Ramón Vila, Caracremada. El darrer maqui català*, pp. 66-67, Josep Clara, Rafael Dalmau Editor, Barcelona, 2002

¹¹⁰ *Ramón Vila, Caracremada. El darrer maqui català*, pp. 83-84, Josep Clara, Rafael Dalmau Editor, Barcelona, 2002

During 2003, together with several friends, we retraced the first route taken by Massana's group and some days after that dropped in the notorious 'Tartas'. There we ran into an elderly Spanish republican who was compiling information about the life of García Lorca and he told us that he had rented the former monastery in 1963. It was that very year that the Civil Guard killed Ramón Vila; meanwhile, the ageing exile was busily restoring and cleaning up the building when, in a hidden cellar, he stumbled upon an unpleasant surprise. Among the ruins and still hidden he came across nearly two tons of aged explosives and other gear in a dire state of preservation. Given that discovery and once he had recovered from his shock, he scuttled off to alert the gendarmes to get them to haul it all away. The fellow was a friend of the present-day owners, a French family that was refurbishing the old building and he was there because they had invited him for dinner.

Chapter 33

The Perpignan Group

This chapter deals with a rather little known group of individuals. They were not an action group and as a rule did not bear arms, although virtually all of the weaponry of those groups passed through their hands. They were not mountain guides, even though they were familiar with all the trails and picked up groups in the hills. They were people tasked with making things easier for others in a tight spot, insofar as they could, or for fugitives, or others who operated as couriers or within the guerrilla war, or anyone arriving on behalf of the organization. If the chosen transit area was via the province of Gerona, Roussillon or the Vallespir, the so-called Perpignan group knew about it and was tasked with making sure things went off without a hitch.

As I searched for information about this group, I came upon just one explicit reference to the work they did: it comes from Juan Busquets aka *el Senzill*, a guerrilla from the Massana group. But allow him to explain:

“The Perpignan group was made up of experienced and responsible comrades, keen, like all the libertarian exiles, to fight the fascist regime. The better to grasp and clarify certain aspects, remember that Perpignan was one of the Organization’s main transit stops, the mainstay for entry into or exit from Spain. The group bore a heavy responsibility: one of its aims was to place weapons and explosives drawn from all over France into safe-keeping. But its mission was not confined to storing weapons: its activities were a lot more wide-ranging. Sometimes there might be someone arriving, wounded, from Spain, or someone on the run from the Francoist police and so on. Without any great funding they grappled with tricky situations. They had to stretch that funding to wrestle with difficult situations. Furthermore, they were all working to earn a living, so organizational activities represented additional efforts. I reckon they deserve to be remembered for that reason alone.”¹¹¹

The membership of the group included Mariano Puzo Cabero, Francisco Soler Ciercoles, Eulalio Esteban, Andrés Clavero Flores or Florencio Gallego; later on, José Poblà, Jordi Gonzalbo and Jeanine Valet joined in. My main source of information was Mariano Puzo, a former militiaman with the Ascaso Column, courier between France and Barcelona in the early 1940s, which task he combined with a bit of smuggling, which also brought him headaches if arrested by the Spanish police. Later he was in the French resistance as part of a group in Saillaguse (Pyrénées Orientales department). Once the Nazi occupation ended, he served as a CNT guide and finally as a member of Sabaté’s group and Facerías’s. In the previous chapter we spoke of the accident with the grenade in ‘Tartas’ and the horrific consequences he suffered. But Mariano was undaunted and carried on with his missions, albeit with a different emphasis now, as part of the support group. He carried out those tasks over many years since, by the early 1960s when Defensa Interior started up, Mariano and his comrades were still blithely carrying out the work they had been doing for so long.

Naturally, Mariano was a great friend of Manolo’s. When they became friends I cannot say, but their friendship lasted until the day they died. When I interviewed Enric Melich, he commented to me that Huet had a ring of informants in Perpignan, headed by Puzo. They passed on information to the Inter-continental Secretariat regarding comings and goings, potential support bases, houses to be avoided, the movements of both gendarmes and *Segunda Bis* personnel and anything that might have caught their attention in the border area.

But such information was also forwarded to Manolo and he passed it on to, say, the groups led by *Quico* or by ‘*Panxo*’ Massana. Furthermore, as mentioned before, *el Murciano* was one of the people in charge of moving weapons up to the border. Mariano was one of the people entrusted with taking delivery of them and hiding them. Puzo and his people passed information concerning the border on to Manolo up until the crushing of Francisco Sabaté’s group in the winter of 1959-1960. If we dig deeper for information about Mariano, his name seems linked to the collection of the wounded from the border, whether by private vehicle or ambulance, depending on the severity of the injuries. On the same basis, the injured would be ferried to organization houses or to hospital where, thanks to certain connections, they might sometimes treat comrades without wind of this reaching the gendarmes. Oddly, according to the Francoist police, Mariano lived at No 48 rue de

¹¹¹ *El Senzill. Guerrilla i presó d’un maqui*, p. 62, Joan Busquets. Jose Ester Borrás Study Centre, Berga, 2008

l'Anguille in Perpignan and his flat-mates included none other than one Ramón Vila Capdevila, CNT guide par excellence and renowned CNT guerrilla.

For the purpose of writing his books, Antonio Téllez promptly contacted what was left of the Perpignan group. And said of Francisco Soler that he missed nothing regarding what was happening on the border. He, and Francisco and Mariano toured the entire Roussillon area, visiting the locations where *el Quico* had pursued his activities or lived.

Let us close this chapter with Eulalio Esteban, who was not only one of the Perpignan group's most active members but had taken part in the cross-Pyrenean invasions back in 1944 and managed to emerge unscathed from them. He served with the 9th Brigade which saw action in Salardú, as had Antonio Téllez. What I do not know is if he was with the brigade back when it was fighting the Nazis in France's L'Aveyron department.

Chapter 34

The Whole World Our Homeland

As we mentioned in the chapter entitled *Operation Saccharine*, the MLE conspiratorial machinery had looked to Italy as a source of arms. Here I ought to say that this is a dead end for me as I was unable to unearth any information about it. Luckily, the invaluable collaboration of the Italian libertarian historian Gino Vatteroni changed all that.

In the wake of the initial purchases made in 1946 and given their success, the Spanish anarchists deepened their contacts with the former partisans from the Coduri Division. This was a pluralist unit, the ranks of which, even though made up mostly of *garibaldini*, also included socialists and communists in sizeable numbers. And it was some of those communists, drawn from the Zelasco Brigade who, after the conclusion of the war, were to retain and sell on to Spanish anarchists some of the arsenal they had built up.

Besides, I just love it when a plan comes together. Both Eliseo Bayo's book *Los atentados contra Franco* and César Galiano's *Laureano Cerrada. El empresario anarquista* mention the arrest of Laureano Cerrada near Ventimiglia, where he was passing himself off as a general. The check mounted by Italian customs officers dates from May 1947 and if we credit these sources, Cerrada was carrying a significant number of phoney passports, as well as cash. Laureano had not – to my knowledge – set foot on Italian soil since the liberation in Milan and his subsequent procurement of those Spanish paper money plates. So what was our counterfeiter doing crossing the Alps again? Now that we are in possession of somewhat more information, the pieces start to fit together.

During that busy month of May there were two attempts made in Catalonia on the life of Franco the dictator. The first came when the great man came ashore in Barcelona of 17 May. In waiting for him there was the '*Los Anonimos*' group, just beside the Columbus statue. The second attempt was scheduled for the 20th. It was relying on arms, funding and phoney papers from Laureano Cerrada. It involved a large 50-strong guerrilla team which was to mine the highway and, after setting it off and once the motorcade had been halted, it was to be finished off. The location selected was close to the mines in Sallent where the genocide was due to pay a visit and which was not too far from the border when it came to withdrawing to safety. Both attempts failed. For anyone keen to learn more about these matters, I can only refer them to Eliseo Bayo's book as cited earlier.

But turning back to Italy, which is now our main focus. For less than a year past, Huet, and to a lesser extent Carballeira, had been shuttling backwards and forwards to procure weapons to cater for the Spanish libertarians' guerrilla war. As we mentioned in the chapter on '*Operation Saccharine*', Genoa and its adjacent coast was the main base of operations. The sellers proved to be ex-partisans, dissident communists from the Zelasco Brigade. The gear consisted of German and Italian weapons seized by the partisans. Payment was normally in the form of cash and goods pilfered from the US army in the port of Marseilles. This time it looks as if the payment the Italians asked for was also rather illegal, because in addition to cash, what they were after was a big pile of phoney identity documents. Phoney papers? No problem. That is what Laureano Cerrada was there for.

But on this occasion something went awry. An alleged support group for Spanish republicans in exile collected materials for forwarding by way of aid. In the coastal town of Mola di Varazza near Genoa a motor-boat (name unknown) was in dry dock for repairs and was to be used to carry those materials.

But somebody got wind of this being no NGO. The police were tipped off in late April. An anonymous phone call alerted them to suspicious movements, even more suspicious individuals and a boat. And so the police opened an investigation into a potential smuggling offence. Shortly after that, suspicion having fallen upon the boat, it had put out to sea.

On 16 May there was a second call made. The unnamed informant insisted that the boat had weighed anchor and seemed to be bound for Cavi di Lavagna. Someone had an interest in the operation's not going well.

On 21 May, Superintendent Calabria and a number of officers arrested ex-partisans Bruno Pellizzetti aka *Scoglio*, Luigi Pessina and Bruzzone da Mele in Cavi di Lavagna. The ensuing interrogations bore fruit and the

detainees revealed where the gear was being stored. When the police went to the location, a separate break-water beside the sea, they uncovered a number of crates. When these were opened, surprise! surprise!, they contained guns. Among the seizures, they found six sub-machineguns of varying makes, one Breda heavy machine-gun, four crates of machine-gun ammunition, a variety of munitions, one 45mm mortar, two anti-tank guns, five crates containing 300 hand grenades, nine rifles, three Fiat sub-machineguns and an American[-sourced] Bren gun, among other things. They also found two American inflatable dinghies ready to ferry the gear out to the boat. Now to wait for the arrival of the mystery boat. Shortly afterwards, a dark silhouette was outlined against the sea darkness. A boat was approaching, about 15 metres in length. Then there were three green light signals from the boat. Calabria and his men briskly replied. First, some flares were sent up and then they scurried on board one of the dinghies, flanking the boat that was sitting a short distance from the shore. The speed of the police action startled the crew which was quickly rounded up by the security forces. Among those arrested were two Italians – Igino Dolci and Ugo Pellizzetti – and a Spaniard, one Manuel Huet Piera.

During a search of the boat Manolo was found in possession of 13 phoney passports and letters asking for cooperation with the Spanish exiles. Plus claims that they were part of the Spanish resistance, for which the weapons were intended.

And now back to the border and Ventimiglia. If we go by what Bayo wrote, the day after the incident in Cavi di Lavagna:

“Two strange individuals were arrested in the narrow passes near Ventimiglia. One of them tried to pass himself off as a general and was treated with the utmost respect by the carabinieri. Laureano Cerrada was everywhere. With some swagger he refused to explain his mission to the carabinieri and insisted that he be brought before their superiors. Their commander ceremoniously saluted the “general”, inviting him to dinner and had no clue that Cerrada was carrying in his suitcase several hundred false passports and a not much smaller number of 10,000-lire notes.”¹¹²

It was never known any too clearly what Cerrada was up to in Italy with a batch of phony papers and, most likely, in the company of his inseparable companion Luis Robla. But now we know. On the one hand, he was there to pay for a shipment of arms and on the other, and this is what made it necessary for him to be present for that payment, was that he was probably there to bribe certain people in connection with the upcoming court case involving Huet and his team. Back to Bayo’s book, for it is Luis Robla himself who provides us with a key to the puzzle:

“For instance, when we got back from our trip to Italy, made in order to recover a significant arms cache, we learnt from the newspapers that Abd-el-Krim was due to come to France. Cerrada came up with the idea of kidnapping him and, on behalf of the libertarian movement, negotiating independence for Morocco.”¹¹³

In fact, Abd-el-Krim was given permission to live in France in April 1947, albeit that his first stop was in Egypt in May the same year. The dates tally exactly.

If we go by the minutes of the meeting of the Coordination Section of the MLE held in July 1947, we find the following reference to recovery of materials:

“The overtures made in Italy looked promising and, had the planned operation gone ahead, it would have been one of the most fruitful ventures in terms of the quantity of the equipment, followed by the financial boost. The comrades, the membership will already know of the set-back suffered: the Organization immediately dispatched a delegation to Italy to secure the release of the comrades involved whom they were trying to embroil in a “vulgar and straightforward deal” between arms dealers. The delegation made the destination of the afore-mentioned gear plain – it was to be passed over to the Spanish resistance to further the fight against Franco on behalf of the liberation of the

¹¹² *Los atentados contra Franco*, p. 84, Eliseo Bayo (Plaza y Janés S.A., Editores)

¹¹³ *Los atentados contra Franco*, p. 139, Eliseo Bayo, Plaza y Janés S.A., Editores, Barcelona 1976.

Spanish people. The matter was left in the hands of the Italian lawyers, who were of the impression that the prospects for the compromised comrades in the case were good.”¹¹⁴

The trial took place in 1950. After various enquiries had been made and statements taken, those indicted on a charge of arms-trafficking were given very light sentences. Some of them, indeed, were acquitted.

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the Co-ordination Section in exile for 19 August 1947, in Toulouse. Exile Section, archives of the Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo.

Chapter 35

The Transportes Galicia S.A. Company

The Galicia haulage company was another of Cerrada's brainwaves. He dispatched Luis Robla to Spain for the purpose: he was to be the front man, but the plan was to resurrect the CNT's Aragonese Regional Committee and, with that in place, set up a network of crossings and bases for the libertarian guerrilla effort. Manuel Rodríguez Ureña travelled with Robla as the FAI's delegate; besides, he was a mechanic by trade and he fitted the bill exactly. Once Robla had settled in in Zaragoza, there was no better way of moving around the country unnoticed than by setting up a haulage company. And so he set to it. The first move was to acquire some lorries and an army auction hall was a good place to do that; out of it came the two 10-ton Studebakers¹¹⁵, with which they set to work. The vehicles cost 400,000 pesetas, the bill being paid by the Sección de Fomento of course. The next step was to hire a haulier comrade to live locally: this turned out to be the Galician José González Feijóo aka *el Americano*, who was given a quick run-down on what Cerrada and Ramos had in mind. The third step was to rent some premises, consisting of a garage, workshop and living quarters upstairs lest they attract attention. According to Luis Pérez Berasaluce – an expert in the guerrilla war in Jaén – just one lorry was purchased and the premises were rented, 222,000 pesetas being forked out.¹¹⁶

Once the firm had lawfully been established and the premises and lorries secured, they turned to the CNT's Aragonese organization for drivers and mechanics. And then the trips started. Manure was brought to Valencia, or fruit was shipped to Zaragoza, or machinery delivered to Bilbao. The business was booming, it was legal and the profits were rolling in. Soon it was on to more serious business. The lorries' beds were adapted with false bottoms in which to move documents, counterfeit money, propaganda, arms and even personnel, whether as passengers or to keep an eye on targets. Some comrades newly arrived from France soon stepped in as replacements for some of the Zaragoza-based team. Besides, connections and safe houses were being accumulated for future use by groups who would be infiltrating from France.

Another of Robla's aims in Zaragoza was to lay the groundwork for "Operation Panic". This related to the physical elimination of both the city's governor and the archbishop of Zaragoza: the latter soutane-wearer went by the name of Rigoberto Doménech Valls and among other trinkets he had been awarded the Grand Cross of the Imperial Order of the Yoke and the Arrows. Yes indeed, "another completely a-political luminary of the church of the poor". The assassination team would use the lorries to escape to safety after their attack and would hide in the cavity beneath the false bottom, under a layer of sirrio, [sheep shit] previously ordered. While the plan was being thrashed out, the lorries were used to transport Cerrada's counterfeit pesetas, which, most of the time, were exchanged, but sometimes were used to swamp certain areas with paper money and dismay the authorities. And then, just as everything looked like it was working to perfection, something put a spanner in the works.

In May 1948 a briefing plenum was held in Madrid, attended by Robla and Rodríguez Ureña; apparently, the crackdown visited upon the libertarian movement in the wake of the break-out from Ocaña prison on 8 May, hit some of the people in attendance. Robla went unnoticed as he was dressed like a businessman and received a tip-off from Baltasar Hernando. He wasted no time in getting offside. After the arrests made in Madrid and the information extracted by the BPS during subtle interrogation sessions, the crackdown spread to both Barcelona and Zaragoza. In Zaragoza, one of the sites raided by the goons from the BPS was none other than the headquarters of the haulage firm. A round-up in Zaragoza that August ended with the arrest of 27 libertarians, among them *el Americano* and three of the firm's mechanics; Manuel Rodríguez Ureña, who had come down from France, José Medina Royo from Rioja and Zaragoza resident Pablo Aranda Yus. Something else that took me aback was seeing among those charged one of those old hands who had built up a record over time – none other than Leonardo Glaria. Glaria had served as a guide for Carlos Manini's group which had

¹¹⁵ A quick glance at the internet to look for a picture of these vehicles brought me to Studebaker lorries – 2.5, 3.2 and 4.6 ton models – made for army use during the Second World War. I found no 10-tonners or maybe I did not search for long enough. I therefore assume that the vehicles in question were 4.6-tonners.

¹¹⁶ *Cuando los maquis*, Addendum No 3 with the accompanying CD, Luis Pérez de Bersaluce, Talleres Editoriales Cometa, Zaragoza, 2018.

worked hand in glove with the Ponzán network. He showed up later helping the UNE in the same capacity and later still guiding the CNT action groups operating in Navarra from Urepel. In this instance, Glaria was charged with numerous border-crossings and with having, along with Luciano Navarro Alegre and Manuel Pola Lanas, brought down five sub-machineguns, three pistols and the requisite ammunition, hiding them in the Tauste area. Writer Luis Pérez adds to this list with another two comrades, both from Rioja – Zorzano from Agoncillo and a certain Marino from a town out near Logroño. In the Jaca-born writer's recent book, the arrests in Zaragoza are explained as the result of information obtained by the BPS in the wake of Raúl Carballeira's death. Thus it was BPS members from Barcelona that showed up in Zaragoza to check out the address of Concepción Esteban Casorrán, who was the MLE's contact in Zaragoza. But there was more to the story than that: after the initial arrests made there, the police got wind of an action group's being due to arrive shortly. On 15 July, the first of the members of that group, who turned out to be Jacinto Mas Colomer¹¹⁷, was arrested and after he had been interrogated and subjected to the attendant forceful methods, he gave away the whereabouts of his comrades, whereupon Antonio Navarro Velázquez and Clemente Gregorio Serrano were also detained. The police also came across a receipt made out to Navarro, referring to two 40-kilo crates forwarded from Barcelona. Inside them were found sub-machineguns, explosives and other weaponry. Whether the three members of the action group's presence had something to do with 'Operation Panic' or some other objective, we cannot tell.¹¹⁸

The council of war sat on 15 June 1949. The three indicted employees of the haulage firm were sentenced to prison terms of 12 years plus one day, as was the team which had ferried the weapons down to Tauste, except for the Riojans who must have headed for the Logroño area and dodged the crackdown. Luis Robla also managed to give it the slip and thanks to the phoney papers provided by Cerrada, he first caught a train to Pamplona and then, from there, using some of the organization's guides, crossed the border to safety. Here we reprint an excerpt from a newspaper report of the arrests:

"What happened was that dogged active surveillance maintained by the Madrid Brigada Político Social, brought to its notice that personnel who had entered the country from France by clandestine methods intended to mount acts of sabotage in an attempt to overshadow the events staged on 19 July past in commemoration of the victory. Close observation identified Zaragoza as the location selected for those feats and the brigade posted to the city a team of officers who, with luck on their side, managed to detain the clandestine CNT's so-called committee, some 27 individuals down from Toulouse and to seize two crateloads of sundry explosive materials plus some weapons."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Jacinto Mas Colomer and his two fellow members of the group served between 12 and 15 years of the 30 year prison sentences passed on them. They served much of their sentences in San Miguel de los Reyes prison in Valencia. Among other things, Jacinto was the man who taught the guerrilla Joan Busquets how to read music, so that he might access the benefits of playing in the prison music band.

¹¹⁸ *Cuando los maquis*. Addendum No 3 to the accompanying CD. Luis Pérez de Bersaluce, Talleres Editoriales Cometa, Zaragoza, 2018

¹¹⁹ *Facerías. Guerrilla urbana (1939-1957)*, p. 210, Antonio Téllez, Ruedo Ibérico, Paris, 1974

Chapter 36

Plans in the Interior

In previous chapters we mentioned how Cerrada and his Sección de Fomento were laying the groundwork for an infrastructure focused on the interior. Let us now focus on some of the things that happened, or were on the verge of happening, south of the Pyrenees and about which we know something.

Let us hark back here to Ramón Rufat and his allusion to Cerrada collaborating with members of the *Libertad* Battalion. For one thing, this was the first hint I had had regarding both the participation of Alberto Santaolaria Frauca in that battalion which was, for the most part, made up of anarchists who had taken part in the resistance in France, and of any cooperation or plans thrashed out between Alberto and Laureano. Santaolaria was a member of the action groups, especially José Luis Facerías's group, and his first incursion back into the interior came in late 1944, by which time France's liberation was all but complete. But I would do better to hand over to Ramón Rufat's testimony:

"A veteran of the *Libertad* Battalion, a sincere and authentic libertarian ... he was convinced that Spain had to be liberated by force of arms. He was also one of the first people to establish the system of couriers and support bases stretching from Puigcerdà to Barcelona, a system that was pretty much used up until 1951. On his various incursions, his travelling companions were the soundest guerrillas and he set about planning acts of violence that thereafter proved just about perfect. He it was who, in 1947, following conversations with Cerrada who was enthusiastic about the idea and offered him all sorts of help, drew up the 'Bringing Gear Ashore on the Garraf Coast' Operation, in order to launch a powerful guerrilla campaign in that area in order to harry and perhaps even sever all of Barcelona's southbound communications. To that end he had already bought a fisherman's hut or shelter on the coast near the village of Garraf, where gear was to have been received and stored prior to the arrival and arming of the men arriving as guerrillas. The purchase of the hut had gone through: the remainder of the plan got no further than promises and delays."¹²⁰

One of the things that Cerrada is best remembered for was above all the business of that light airplane. Light airplane? What for? The Norecrin – for that was the make of it – was bought with an eye, among other things, to mounting an attempt on the life of the dictator Francisco Franco. It was known that he was to attend the regatta in San Sebastian Bay and so the plane was made ready. For one thing, it was moved closer to the border as take-off would be from the Les Landes area, more specifically, from Dax. Prior to that, the mechanic, Soler, had drilled a hole behind one of the seats and installed a funnel from which bombs would be dropped after they had first been picked up from Mont de Marsan. The team on the ground, dispatched to San Sebastian, was made up of Luis Robla and José María Larrea. They were to confirm the dictator's attendance and establish where he would be and verify the success or failure of the operation. There was even a maritime team, made up of Julio Hermosilla and Ángel Aransáez, who would monitor developments from a boat out to sea. It should be said that Hermosilla and Aransáez had both been members of the French resistance under the Nazi occupation and had not given up on their underground activities. Many years later they were still in the thick of the action as they both resumed collaboration with conspiratorial activity at the highest levels, this time in laying the groundwork for Defensa Interior's (DI) abortive attempt on Franco's life at the Ayete Palace near San Sebastian in August 1962. The air crew was made up of pilot Primitivo Gómez Pérez, a former aviator with the Republic's air force, Antonio Ortiz and José Pérez Ibáñez. And so, on Sunday 12 September 1948, having taken a call from the ground team, the plane took off from French territory.

As they neared San Sebastian Bay, they were first intercepted by a Spanish army seaplane and then by two fighter planes which forced them to make a U-turn and after all but veering out to sea, they headed back towards Spain at full speed. Their lives may well have been spared by the haste with which they had set off following Robla's phone call, as they had not even covered up the plane's registration which clearly identified it as a French plane. It may well have been because they did not trigger an international incident that they were allowed to head back to France unscathed. The bomb-load was jettisoned over the sea, due to the risk involved

¹²⁰ *La vida clandestina del movimiento libertario Espanol en la epoca de 1939 al 1951, Volume II*, p. 224 Ramon Rufat, Paris, 1981 (Unpublished text)

in attempting a landing on a dirt airstrip with them rolling around loose in the cockpit. Had everything gone off well, the plane would have landed in the Navarrese Pyrenees in a pre-arranged location and then been torched whilst its three occupants would have made it over the mountains into France together with local guides working for the organization. Regrettably, there was no need to set the Norecrin ablaze. Manuel Huet's view of the assassination bid is worth considering:

"Like others that never made it off the drawing board, this attentat failed because of undue haste and hurry in the organizing of it and a go-it-alone approach that attracted only comrades that were poorly trained and itching to make a grand entrance into the pages of history. No one with a titter of wit would have agreed to march straight into disaster due, often enough, to the excessive numbers of personnel involved in the venture, which made discretion all the harder and enemy infiltration all the easier.

The fact is that when Cerrada later mentioned the attentat mounted against Franco in the sea off San Sebastian, using a light aircraft, I had to express my feelings on the matter. Among other reasons, because they were clueless about flying whereas I had been a flight mechanic in the flying boat base in Barcelona back in 1927-1930. And I can tell you that had I climbed aboard that plane, take it from me, the pilot would not have turned around when he already had Franco's yacht within sight. I would have put the barrel of my gun to the pilot's head and, had another pass been impossible, we could have crashed the plane into the yacht. Because when it comes to organizing an attentat, one has to see it through to the finish, no matter the cost. And in those days Franco was the Gordian knot as far as the dictatorship was concerned."¹²¹

In the chapter on the Tartas guerrilla base, we already mentioned another attempt on the life of the dictator organized by Laureano Cerrada and the reason for its failure.

¹²¹ *Los senderos de la libertad* pp. 171-173, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

Chapter 37

The Clandestine Apparatus in Exile

But let us return to France. The Sección Fomento had more tricks up its sleeve, lots more. It looks as if the organization, in addition to de-centralizing matters and beginning to operate out of a variety of French cities and regions, started – especially the counterfeiting apparatus – to work directly in the countries whose currency was being counterfeited. Fomento's main focus was on the Spanish state. But counterfeiting bills is one thing and getting all of that money into circulation afterwards quite another story. But the counterfeiting section was undaunted: currency was the important thing, but who said anything about their being afraid? They turned their attention to forged documents – passes, lottery tickets, work certificates and death certificates, even football or bullfight tickets – all were churned out by Cerrada's printing presses. Not only was the set-up now de-centralizing, but it was breaking down into specialist areas. On the one hand, there was the afore-mentioned counterfeiting set-up, wherein we come across a range of more or less well-known names: Cerrada's, that of the French illustrator Madeleine Lamberet, or the engineer Antonio Verardini: they were part of the creative team, who were in charge of watermarks. On the other hand, there were Bautista Agustí, José Calpe, José Ballus, Diego Fornís, Eduardo Rey, Pedro Abella and Vicente Gallego. This group made it its business then to print up on Cerrada's presses the product generated by the creative team, be they lottery tickets, paper money, a range of certificates or documents of any description.

After the counterfeiters and the printers, let us move on to the team dedicated to distributing the currencies or various forgeries. Some were arrested in Spain and some in France: others managed to evade the crackdown and most of them we will never know. Among the ones we do know of were the Catalan Juan Villalba, Nino Santi aka *Santini*, Pedro Ordas Fernández, Justo Sanchez Mula aka *el Kino*, Juan Romera de Lucas, Antonio Francisco Aguilar Molías, Dàmaso Hucha Enriquez aka *el Maño*, Enrique Guillermo Todaro Armengüäl, Jorge Roos, Carlos Enrique Rodríguez Caeiro and, of course, Laureano's right hand man, Luis Robla.

Cerrada's teams set their sights high: the newspaper *Sur* reported the arrest in Malaga in August 1947 of three anarchists who had shown up with more than 100,000 counterfeit pesetas and who had been caught in the act of passing them. Naturally they had come down from France via Andorra. The persons arrested were José Aguilar Urbaneja, Antonio Peña Sánchez and José Martín Martín. If everything went belly-up, they would join the fight in the sierras. They never got the chance.¹²²

Then came the operations groups. Some were committed to carrying out hold-ups in order to secure French francs (since the counterfeiting team did not deal in francs, as that carried much heavier penalties than any other foreign currency); that was the largest team of all and involved folk from a range of groups, especially in the area of Lyon, Paris and Toulouse. They included Manolo and his men, together with *Vidale*, Joaquín Blesa and the Soto brothers: plus the Aragonese Bailó Mata brothers, born in Leciñena; the Murcian Juan Sánchez, Antonio Guardia, Domingo Vela, the Sabaté brothers and Juan Català. There was also another group dedicated to raiding and pilfering from both museums and former castles as well as from other locations known to house works of art. Apropos of art, their primary targets were tapestries, paintings and gems, like the ones discovered in a hidden room inside Cerrada's house in the small town of Aubervilliers near Paris. That team included at least José Villagrana and Vicente Servatón. They could also count on jewellers and experts from the organization when it came to melting down stolen items; we might name the Catalan Martí Borrás aka *el Marras* here.

Lastly (as far we have been able to ascertain so far) there was the team that handled purchasing and acquisition, shipment and trading in arms. That arms dealing was carried out overland between France and Spain – especially with an eye to equipping the libertarian guerrilla war against Franco – and by means of sea routes across the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean route even carried heavy weaponry, some bound for Israel and a variety of motor launches were used for this purpose. Apparently Cerrada bought a speedboat from the United States navy stationed in Marseilles back in 1947, a *Vedette*. The vessel was used in the organizing of this trade as well as by the CNT in the transportation of arms (especially between Genoa and the French ports from Nice down to Marseilles), propaganda and activists across the Mediterranean (this may well

¹²² *Tiempo de lucha*, José María Azuaga, Alhullia Editorial, Salobreña Granada, 2014

have been Cerrada's answer to the police raid on Cavi di Lavagna, a vessel that could outrun the customs officials' dinghies). Seemingly this speedboat was paid for with part of the swag from the raid on that Crédit Lyonnais van in Paris and the man in charge of it was Queralto who had served in the navy of the Republic and was an old acquaintance of Cerrada's. To this team we may add Manolo and his comrades and Ángel Carballeira Rego who was arrested in 1947 on two occasions whilst ferrying military equipment close to the Spanish border, once in Saint Jean de Luz and once in Bourg-Madame. In 1948 he had a further run-in with the French authorities for the same reasons, but this time in La Tour de Carol.¹²³ Both he and Huet were in charges of arms purchases and of transporting them by lorry as far as Perpignan, Hendaye, Biarritz or Toulouse. Also involved in this were Alejandro Simó Sierra, Francisco de Haro Milla, Marcial Mayans Costa and Emilio Vilardaga Peralba. Later on, the groups led by Sabaté, Facerías, Massana, etc., took it upon themselves to smuggle arms into the interior in their knapsacks, or shipped them from Atlantic and Mediterranean ports in France for delivery to Spain by sea. We also know that sometimes both Juan Sánchez and Pedro Abella and Bautista Agustí served as drivers.

Plainly, all of the above was part and parcel of the underground apparatus. But then there was the lawful aspect of things, the financial and laundering team. Let us begin with the statement that Cerrada's treasurer and one of his leading financial advisors was José Villanueva Lecumberri. Among the lawful business interests and assets we may include several workshops and garages in the French capital, like the ones on the Rue Douane and almost certainly others in Marseilles, Toulouse and Perpignan as well, these being the main locations through which arms procured by the organization passed. A number of heavy good lorries were purchased and fictitious haulage companies were set up. A number of printing presses were set up for the distribution of the CNT's press and propaganda. And there was also a shoe factory and its warehouses – the one run by Cerrada's friend and collaborator Pedro Moñino aka *el zapatero cojo*, who also happened to be a good friend of Huet's. Not that that was the sole investment in the world of footwear: Teófilo Navarro aka *Negro* (another member of the action groups) ran a shoe-mender's on Toulouse's Avenue Paul Séjourné, as well as heading up a shoe-menders' collective set up thanks to funding from Cerrada. And, speaking of diversification, there was a number of goods import/export firms. Several hotels were purchased, housing mostly Spanish anarchists, whether or not they were from Cerrada's groups. We know of the Hotel de Paris, the Hotel des Vosges on the Passage Goix, or the one on the Rue Rebeval where the stolen 17th century Flemish tapestries were later discovered. A hotel was also acquired in Mont Louis in the French Cerdagne, reachable from Toulouse by train or road, a hotel habitually used by action groups bound for the Spanish state. In addition to which we should underline a significant network of available apartments, particularly in Paris, but also in other cities with large presence of Spanish libertarians. And, of course, the 'mas Tartas' was purchased.

It needs stressing that much of the effort mounted by Cerrada and his teams were always designed to support the action groups operating inside Spain, funding the libertarian press and, above all, directed at ending the life of the dictator Francisco Franco. To be sure, this entire arrangement may remind us of the networks of corruption being uncovered in this and other countries, or certain organizations linked to mafia-like networks. But there is one not insignificant feature which alters matters, as far as I am concerned at any rate. Most of the money stolen, counterfeited or procured by fraud was not used to line the pockets of the leaders and members of the network but was used to strengthen the organization, balance the books of the loss-making CNT press and propaganda costs, assist the huge mass of prisoners and their families or the cooperatives launched by MLE personnel. Naturally, it is up to everyone to draw his own conclusions there, which may be as authentic or mistaken as my own. Nor can we deny, since Cerrada himself complained about it, that some of his front men (anarchists like himself), having acquired whatever money they could, took off for South America and turned into well-to-do businessmen, or, as Juan Sánchez confessed whilst on trial: "In my opinion, this trial is being mishandled. You have lumped together the robberies we carried out for our own benefit with the ones we carried out as fund-raisers for our organization."¹²⁴ Which was how the expropriator groups themselves distinguished between those of their activities that brought in profits to cover their living expenses, and the

¹²³ *L'antifranquisme en France, 1944-1975*, p. 71, Various Authors, Nouvelles Editions Loubatières, Portet-sur-Garonne, 2013

¹²⁴ *La Vanguardia*, 16-1-1955

ones that went to the MLE, although let us bear in mind that 10% of the proceeds also went to the groups that were carrying out the operations.

Let us now set out the details of the operations we believe to have been carried out by the action groups and the expropriations. Actions ascribable to Cerrada's people, most of them lumped together in the one indictment and tried together in the wake of the raid on the van in Lyon in early 1955 [actions in the Lyon trial indictment appear in bold type]:

Summer 1944: Attack on a payroll officer from the United States army on the outskirts of Paris, led by Laureano Cerrada, Manuel Huet, Manuel Soto and another unidentified comrade. The tip-off came from an NCO by the name of Pastor, the son of a Barcelona anarchist. The officer and his two-man escort were disarmed, tied up and gagged and dumped in a wood. Their cash and their car were taken. This stroke was one of which the French police were unaware which is why it was not included in the indictment heard in 1955.

18 December 1944. Raid in Pau on the home of one Sarvón, in which the doorman was tied up and the press spoke of the sum of 350? million francs having been netted.

22 December 1944: Raid on the home of a certain Allegre in Villevaire (Aveyron department); he was shot twice. We do not know if anything was taken.

3 August 1945: Raid on the casino in Valras (Hérault department), netting 140,000 francs.

1 October 1945: Raid on the Séchillenne Industrial Union in the Lyon area, netting 14 million francs.

26 December 1945: Armed hold-up at the Pézenas (Hérault) police station, leaving one guard wounded. Whether this was a settling of scores with that guard or the aim was to steal weapons or documents, we do not know.

February 1946: Raid in Paris on a Crédit Lyonnais van; organized by Huet and Cerrada, it netted something in excess of 30 million francs (other sources speak of 12 millions).

1946: Four old paintings stolen from Madame Grun's hotel in Neuilly.

9 November 1946: Raid on papermills in Gorges and in Domène (Isère department), the upshot being that one worker was wounded: we do not know if anything was netted. Other sources mention the date as 8 September 1946 in connection with these raids.

16 November 1946: Raid in Capdrot (Dordogne) on the farmer François Villeser, who was killed along with two members of his family. A significant stash of gold was netted.

22 November 1946: Raid on the La Biscose factory in Grenoble, 3,400,000 francs netted.

30 September 1947: Further raid on the Séchillenne Industrial Union.

Between 31 October 1947 and 3 February 1948: Five raids in Toulouse. Proceeds unknown.

February 1948: Three men held up a post office van in Lyon. 5 million francs were taken. If we believe David Wingate in his book *Jours de gloire, jours de honte. Le Parti Communiste d'Espagne en France depuis son arrivé jusqu'à son départ en 1950*, in the wake of this raid, the French gendarmerie started to look closely into the actions of Spanish libertarians in the city.

6 May 1948: Allegedly, the Sabaté brothers held up the Rhône-Poulenc plant in Peage de Roussillon (Isère department). On the night of 6-7 May, 4 armed and masked men, arriving by car, first cut the power lines at the plant before climbing over the stockade or wall, intending to make off with the staff payroll. They disarmed, tied up and gagged the guards Poncet and Hannelbaund, but a third guard who happened to be on his rounds at the time, Maurice Monnot, stumbled upon them and made to arrest them. The hooded raiders replied with a burst of sub-machinegun fire that claimed Monnot's life. Albeit that some versions claim that they made off with the cash they were after, it looks as if they made off with a million and a half francs. The shooting provoked them into taking flight and they left

behind a number of leads that the police would later follow up. Among these, they omitted to change their original licence plates which they forgot and left fitted to the car (7263 FS 8), from which the police discovered that the car belonged to the anarchist Carlos Vidal Pasanau. It is known that Carlos Vidal, Benítez, and José Sabaté did take part and that it is more than likely that *el Quico* did too, so, within a few days, they all switched theatre of operations to Barcelona, all except for José Sabaté.

17 May 1948: Domingo Vela murdered in the city of Perpignan. A news report stressed that the deceased was a member of the gang, which seems a bit odd.

28 May 1948: A car was stolen from a garage on the Rue Chevreul in Lyon; attributed to Francisco Bailó.

23 June 1948: Using the stolen car, an educational group in Villeurbanne was robbed, with the raiders making off with somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million francs in food stamps. The raiders were Francisco Bailó, who was the driver and carried a sub-machinegun, José Bailó, the ring-leader, with another sub-machine-gun and Secundino Fernández Álvarez, brandishing a revolver.

1 July 1948: Three SNCF (French Railways) employees held up in Lyon, netting 4,800,000 francs.

1949, on a date undetermined: Hold-up at the Société Parisienne d'Escompte in Charenton (Villagrasa was credited with being the ring-leader in this raid).

31 March 1949: Raid on post office van in Demville (Eure department) netting 2,000,000 francs.

July 1949: There was a raid on the SNCF in Toulouse; as to whether there were any proceeds or what they amounted to, we do not know.

October 1949: A van laden with goods to the value of 1,000,000 francs was stolen in Lyon. '*El Pelao*' and the Bailó Mata brothers were involved.

17 December 1949: A car was stolen from the Rue Flachet in Villeurbanne, Lyon. Francisco Bailó and Juan Sánchez were behind this.

23 December 1949: There was a failed raid made on the pay-master of 'Lyon Rubber Manufacturers' who was carrying a briefcase containing 4.600,000 francs; despite being assaulted, however, he managed to wriggle free and escaped. The raiders were Francisco Bailó, who was the driver and carried a sub-machinegun and Juan Sánchez, brandishing a revolver.

31 December 1949: Raid on the post office branch in Saint-Priest: proceeds unknown. The French gendarmerie credited this hold-up to the '*Los Maños*' group.¹²⁵

21 January 1950: Raid on a jeweller's in Caen (Calvados), netting 3,000,000 francs.

Early 1950: Raid on the 'Damian Establishments' company.

February 1950: Raid on a Parisian sales company. Proceeds 3,000,000 francs. The French gendarmes credited this to the '*Los Maños*' group.

12 March 1950: Raid on the 'La Renaissance' jewellery store in Lyon on the Avenue Jaurès, netting 4,000,000 francs' worth of gems.

17 March 1950: Raid on the Aujolat jewellery store in the Rue Jean Jaurès in Lyon, with the proceeds amounting to 3,500,000 in watches and gems. The perpetrators were Francisco Bailó, Juan Sánchez, Antonio Jiménez, who was the driver, and Valeriano Jiménez.

¹²⁵ The French police were mistaken in crediting two hold-ups to the '*Los Maños*' group. That group had crossed the border, bound for Barcelona, on 22 December 1949 and was broken up by the police on 9 January 1950. Therefore those two raids on French soil were almost certainly carried out by Spanish anarchists, but not by '*Los Maños*'.

Raid on the Silva company, precise date and proceeds unknown, but the raid was on the Silva company's cashier.

27 May 1950: Attempted theft of a car from the Rue Buire in Lyon. The attempt was abandoned when they found some bars on the vehicle and spotted that it was the property of an inspector from the Garde Mobile. Francisco Bailó and Juan Sánchez were involved.

1 June 1950: A car was stolen from the Rue Malesherbes in Lyon. Francisco Bailó and Juan Sánchez again.

23 June 1950: Raid on the Monty stores in the Rue Brest in Lyon. Textile goods to the value of 300,000 francs were stolen by Francisco Bailó and Juan Sánchez.

25 July 1950: Robbery at the Damian stores on the Rue Pierre Sépard in Lyon, to reconnoitre the inside of the building. Two crates of jam, containing 50 jars, were stolen. Francisco Bailó and Juan Sánchez were involved in this.

14 August 1950: Three abortive attempted hold-ups on national highway No7 near Saint-Symphorien d'Ozon (Seine department). They blocked off the road and intercepted a touring car carrying a Belgian couple who ran off across country. They then intercepted a touring car carrying an Irishman who, according to the witness, kicked up such a shouting match that they gave up. The raiders were Francisco Bailó, who was the getaway driver and carried a sub-machinegun, Juan Sánchez with another sub-machinegun and Vidal Cantero, also carrying a sub-machinegun. A third vehicle managed to escape and drove into a ditch.

28 August 1950: Thwarted attempted hold-up of a lorry driver on the Rue Chiret in Villeurbanne, Lyon. Francisco Bailó and Juan Sánchez were involved.

30 August 1950: A van and its goods were stolen on the outskirts of Lyon.

September 1950: Establishment held up in the Rue Pierre-Sépard in Lyon.

30 August 1950: Van and all of the goods inside stolen on the outskirts of Lyon.

11 SEPTEMBER 1950: Armed robbery at the Damian-Lyon company in Lyon city. Proceeds, meagre. '*El Pelao*' and the Bailó Matas had a hand in this.

31 OCTOBER 1950: Attempted murder in Lyon. Shots fired at a Catalan by the name of Batlle, who was gravely wounded.

November 1950: Raid on the Recette Auxiliaire on Lyon's Rue Boileau.

23 November 1950: Raid on a post office van on the Rue Duguesclin in Lyon, with the theft of a sack containing 705,000 francs. The Bailó Mata brothers and Juan Sánchez aka *el Pelao* are involved.

1950: Date undetermined in Pau: 350 million francs stolen in the form of gems supposedly belonging to the Belgian crown.

And finally, on **18 January 1951:** the notorious and dramatic Lyon armed robbery.

Not having the exact dates and other details for the following operations, I am placing them at the end of the list.

- The raid on the post office van in Evreux. Villagrasa was mentioned as the leader of the gang.
- Hold-up at the bank in Noisy-le-Grand. As in the previous case, Villagrasa was mentioned as the ring-leader.
- Hold-up at the Monty Stores, carried out by the '*el Pelao*' and Bailó brothers' gang.

- Hold-up at the Ticket Distribution Centre on the Rue Jules-Guesde in Paris. Netting at least 1,200,000 francs. Carried out by the '*el Pelao*' and Bailó brothers' gang.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Most of the dates regarding the hold-ups carried out in France has been taken from the book *L'Antifranquisme en France, 1944-1975* (pp. 63-71), with the exception of the ones included in the indictment of the Lyon trial and which appear in **bold** type.

Chapter 38

And Sometimes a Calm in the Eye of the Storm

In an effort to follow a chronological sequence, however sketchily, I shall leave the clandestine apparatus and its groups for the moment and return the focus to Manolo.

For all the screeching of the media circus, the rabid right or jobbing police, and no matter how much we might be told otherwise, the fact is that even the most ferocious anarchists take time out now and then. Not merely resting but trying to lead a normal life, a family life, indeed, if they had the chance to do so. And Manolo was no exception. So once he had stashed away his .9 Parabellum special, Huet collected Rosita and María and off they went to the beaches in Cerbère or set off on a stroll through Perpignan. On other occasions, he donned his brightest smile, dressed himself up in his finery and went out selling fabric in a range of small markets in Toulouse. If he saw that business was slow, Melich used to tell me, rather than selling off his bolts of cloth, he would trim off swatches and sell them at 10 francs apiece. “They were snatched out his hands”¹²⁷, the old resister said. He told me, too, that Manolo usually spoke Catalan and was very likeable. That, as a result of the conversations they had, he was a big influence on getting Enric to give some thought to joining the action groups passing through to carry the fight to Francoism. And to changing his address and moving out of Toulouse, where he would find it much easier to find work. In fact, he was even teaching Melich how to drive, so that, even though he had no car and no plans to get one, he might act as a driver. Given that driving was not going to be Enric’s future, he was helping him find work in Toulouse, the capital of the Spanish exile community in France.

It was also at around this time in the late 1940s (allegedly business took off in the spring of 1946 and, comparing the timing, maybe relied on his ‘cut’ from the van raid in Paris) that Manolo became no more and no less than an importer of carpets from Iran. Yes, those famous Persian carpets. To launch the business, he needed a good location and his choice fell, of course, on Perpignan and the principality of Andorra where he even opened up a store selling carpets. The actual running of the shop itself would mostly be left to his wife and, later, to his daughter and her husband. As far as Manolo was concerned, the business was primarily a cover, because he had always seen Andorra as a place of consummate interest. As he himself, forever the hustler, acknowledged, telling Pons Prades: “There we also sell carpets made in Alicante province which are every bit as good as the Persian ones and a lot cheaper to boot.”¹²⁸

As we shall see when we come to look at *el Quico* in greater depth, Manolo exploited his business trips (and here ‘business’ refers to his carpets and fabrics) to ensure that that “his other business” went undetected. Often, under the bolts of cloth or carpeting that he was transporting in his car, the gendarmes, had they only troubled to take a closer look, might have been unpleasantly surprised to find what might have popped up. Remember also that the two locations in which the business was based – Andorra and Perpignan – just happened to be the main transit points for his two best friends, Marcelino Massana and *Quico* Sabaté.

It was at this time too that the Perpignan group took shape and when they began to brief Huet on what was going on along the border. Bear in mind that in those days information was still pure gold. That was also the time that determined his future relationship with Federica Montseny and the CNT’s major bureaucrats, as it was plain what his friendships and activities were. As the organization distanced itself from armed operations within Spain, the subversives were to find themselves sidelined and even defamed, not just by some of the upper echelons but also by a section of the broader membership that swallowed the official line.

Pons Prades has also left us this fine anecdote about Manolo, dating back possibly to the late 1950s or early 1960s:

“As younger generations of militants were drawn into the fight, some approached the ageing militant. Some in search of advice, others seeking guidance and a few, bent on dragging him back into the struggle. Whereupon, in order to ward off the siege being laid by them all, he emphatically replied:

¹²⁷ Enric Melich, interviewed in his home in Pontella on 3-3-2018

¹²⁸ Manuscript pages, *A la sombra del Quico*, Pons Prades holdings, ANC

What is it that you are after? That I should take to the hills again to save humanity? If that is the case, count me out! I am weary of acting as a saviour. Humanity was not worth all the sacrifices and the spilling of all that blood. And after a short breather, given that his breathing was not the best, he added: Once you are out to exterminate humanity, then you can call on me and I'll be happy to lend you a hand."¹²⁹

Eduardo used to chuckle at the expressions on the faces of the youngsters when they heard Huet talk like that and he even mentioned how outraged some of them were.

¹²⁹ *El mensaje de otros mundos*, pp. 201-202, Eduardo Pons Prades, Editorial Planeta, Barcelona, 1982

Chapter 39

Laureano Cerrada's Downfall

Time is moving on and we have yet to vindicate the book of axioms, even though climate change rankles with some of us. Whatever goes up must come down again. And this is what happened to Laureano Cerrada and his many intricate business deals. The organization had never known such financial clout, but of course Cerrada's methods were looking more and more unacceptable to the growing number of his detractors and enemies.

The set-backs began in 1949, in May, on May 10 to be specific. The police entered a large garage at No 4, Passage Goix, belonging to the Hotel des Vosges, in the French capital's 18th *arrondissement*. Inside they found an illegal printing press and six men. When the police showed up, some of the printers drew their guns until they could be sure that the Spanish police were nothing to do with the raid. Once they had been disarmed, the police could start the search. The first thing they saw was the phoney lottery tickets which were being run off at the time, around 40,000 of them having been churned out so far: but it did not stop at that. After a more painstaking search, they discovered an arsenal of weapons. If we go by the press of the day, some 30 charges complete with Bickford detonators were being stored there, along with 100 detonators, 20 kilos of plastic explosive, 4 anti-tank mines, 50 grenades, 1 machinegun, 25 submachineguns, 4 recoilless rifles, 4 rifles, 30 revolvers and enough ammunition to sustain a war. The persons arrested were six Spanish anarchists and even though the police could not prove it, they were Cerrada's people. Their names? Diego Fornis Peralta, José Ballus, Eduardo Rey, José Calpe, Pedro Abella Rebull and Vicente Gallego. They were to receive six-month prison sentences.

Shortly after that, in September that same year, José Villanueva Lecumberri was asked to step down from the Liaison Commission. The aim was to cut Cerrada's treasurer loose due to his lobbying on behalf of the six men arrested in connection with the clandestine printing press, lest it compromise the organization. Not only was Villanueva the treasurer; he was also part of the hard core of counterfeiters.

In late 1949, a plenum of the organization agreed to break up the plates for the Bank of Spain bills which had been counterfeited two years before, also at the behest of the organization. The next target was control of the mouthpiece of the CNT-in-exile, *Solidaridad Obrera*, the Parisian edition of which had become the organization's most widely read newspaper in France. *Soli* was published and overseen by Cerrada's people, and headed by Abraham Guillén, so he was another collateral casualty, being accused of being a Marxist, and was dismissed from his post. Once the director had been stood down, attention turned to the office of treasurer, with Germinal Gracia taking charge, in order to put paid to the *Cerradista* control over the paper.

If Téllez is to be believed, it was in January 1950 that Laureano Cerrada was expelled from the organization on the grounds of "unacceptable methods". Not only that, but the ex-railway worker pulled off something that virtually no one else was capable of; he managed to unify the CNT. As Edo states in his memoirs, in the case of previous polemics, there had always been defenders and detractors of the person or group slated for expulsion: Cerrada pulled off something extraordinary in that they *all* turned on him.

Although, as the exception proves the rule, let us hear from Manolo:

"Yes, I know a lot of bad or rather ugly things have been said about Cerrada. And all in the name of some sort of ideological purity ... and other such nonsense. Because there had always been hold-ups. But with care being taken to see to it that the proceeds made their way into the organization's coffers by routes above suspicion. And let us say nothing of the 'anonymous donations' coming from well-to-do liberal folk who claimed to sympathize with our social justice ideals ... And I imagine you will be aware of how, at the outset of the Republic, cash from the biggest bandit in the Mediterranean (he meant Juan March) wormed its way into our press. When normal practice might have been to stick up the banker-cum-smuggler and have done with it. And let me tell you, under the German occupation in France, Cerrada forged everything that could be forged, from bank notes to ration cards, not to mention the French and German documents that were in use, thereby saving countless comrades who, had they been detained as undocumented, might have found themselves in very dire straits. There were times when some of our comrades looked upon Cerrada as little short of a god ... And after

the liberation of France in the summer of 1944, our people refused to take it on board that if we had to fight on to effect, we needed a lot of resources inaccessible to an organization such as ours, legally at any rate. The 'poor but honest' thing could be consigned to history. Or was it thinkable that revolution could be made on the back of the dues from the membership?"¹³⁰

History is capricious, it surely is. Just a few years prior to Cerrada's trial, in late 1944 or early 1945, there was a big socialist rally held in Marseilles. Some 1,000 people took part and the core issue was the expulsion of Sampedro. He was a socialist who had been an exemplary militant during the Civil War and the Second World War, but, on the side, he was in charge of distributing and forging ration cards covering all sorts of foodstuffs, largely helping out the Spanish exile community. At the same time, he had been able to buy civil servants and policemen and even underworld figures and grown into one of the chieftains of black-marketeering in Marseilles. The rally met and debated and came to its decision : he was to be thrown out of the socialist party. But the vote to expel him passed by a slim majority, whereas Laureano pulled off the miracle of unity within the CNT when it came to the vote on his fate.

The last word in hare-brained notions came when the upper echelons of the libertarian committees suggested to the '*Los Maños*' group and to Facerías's group that Laureano should be 'bumped off' that year. Fortunately, neither group wanted anything to do with that. Cerrada had had provided them with both phoney papers and arms on a number of occasions and their rejection of the proposition was firm and emphatic.

But the misadventures of the ex-railway worker did not end there. Seemingly, another CNT member, of who more anon, by the name of Ramón Benichó Canuda aka *Leriles* reported Cerrada to the authorities in 1950, albeit that we do not know what lay beneath their enmity.

And, since it never rains but it pours, in April 1950 detectives Maurel, Berthier and Bessières from the 6th Territorial Brigade arrested Servatón and Villagrasa in Paris and up popped the first of the stolen art works. Later, the police arrived at Cerrada's home on the Rue des Grandes Murailles in Aubervilliers and made a greater find there. They turned up quite a number of works of art, including several signed paintings, valuable carpets and sundry jewels under the floorboards, plus plates for counterfeiting Spanish and German currency. But, worst of all, a range of documents regarding the MLE and associated accounts, including a bill of sale for that Norecrin light plane, and recording income and expenditures to the tune of some 40 million francs. Plus details of, among other things, a dozen front companies, or receipts for payment made to certain libertarian movement bigwigs like Montseny or Esgleas (or, as they were described, the "holy family"). By that point Cerrada was already serving time in Evreux, having been arrested with Calpe and Ballus whilst counterfeiting currency and jailed on 18 January 1950.

Among the "items" that also turned up among Cerrada's papers was the bill of sale for the Norecrin light plane. It was purchased in 1946 by Georges Fontenis (general secretary of the French Anarchist Federation at the time) who registered it in his name. He had paid, in cash, the sum of 1,600,000 francs handed to him a short time before by Cerrada's treasurer, José Villanueva. He later declared the purchase at the police station, made a test flight and took possession of the plane and quietly stored it in a hangar in the aerodrome in Guyancourt near Versailles. They say he made several flights that took off in the direction of Spain and returned, landing in various airports like the one in Angoulême, St Jean d'Angely or Guyancourt, where it was eventually garaged. Whenever the air police started to look into the Norecrin, it came to light that whenever it would land in the Paris area, a van would show up to greet it and gear would be unloaded from the plane and transferred to the van. Following up their leads, the police traced the garage where the van was unloaded; it was run by a Spanish anarchist. The driver was also identified. He was a Spanish anarchist by the name of Pedro Abella Rebull who lived with his partner in a hotel which was itself run by another anarchist. Going by the newspaper reports at the time, Abella committed suicide before the French police could question him and his partner turned up asphyxiated. As of now, this is all I know about those two deaths and the curious circumstances surrounding them. Remember that Pedro Abella had been one of the 6 Spaniards arrested at the printworks on the Passage Goix, where a small arsenal had also been hidden.

¹³⁰ *Los senderos de la libertad*, pp 173-174, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

The French press speculated about a second plane because when the Norecrin's flight control documents were examined, they recorded just three flights made – according to *France-Soir*.¹³¹ But as we have stated above, a plane bearing the markings FBEQB had been spotted on several flights between a range of French landing-strips. Those markings, of course, belonged to our Norecrin. My own view is that it was a lot easier for Cerrada and his team to bribe flight controllers than to get their hands on another ghost plane.

The final blow that did for Cerrada and his Fomento Section was the previously cited hold-up in Lyon and its tragic outcome. And the capital made out of this by the French authorities in order to tighten the noose on the MLE to get it to bring its “loose cannon” to heel. The mass round-ups carried out against Spanish anarchist circles in France, the social panic generated and the ongoing newspaper focus on them over a lengthy period, plus the number of well-known names that wound up behind bars eventually left Cerrada on his own and many of the doors previously open to him were closed in his face. He was now Mr Big, gang boss, the man who gave the orders ... but let us not get ahead of ourselves.

The blows did not rain down on Cerrada alone. Anyone with any real connection to him was removed from the organization: his son Floreal was collateral damage in his father's activities and was utterly shunned. Thanks to Villanueva's good offices, he was adopted by Edo, Lucio Urtubia and others and welcomed into the Clichy Libertarian Youth group, becoming a member. Let it be said that the cold shoulder that Laureano Cerrada received from CNT circles in exile from then on, did not stop the counterfeiter from continuing to work on behalf of the underground and the members of the action groups. In fact, we will find him subsequently working with Defensa Interior in the 1960s, which group also availed of the services of the forger and engineer Verardini. Years later, in the 1970s he was working with the young autonomists who took over from earlier generations and trained them in the skills of the counterfeiter. At the same time, it would not be out of place to acknowledge that, even as he collaborated with revolutionary groups, the Parisian underworld was benefiting from his forgery skills.

¹³¹ *France Soir*, 13-2-1951

Chapter 40

The Lyon Hold-up

On 18 January 1951, at 7.00 p.m., something was about to change in the relations between the MLE and the French government. A black Citroën front-wheel drive vehicle stolen the previous week in the Ain area and displaying licence plates 1878-E69 cut off and forced a post office van to a halt in the Rue Duguesclin in Lyon. Three of the car's four doors opened and four men alighted, armed with sub-machineguns; one of them wore his hair long, as the press would highlight; whilst two of them stood guard, the other two robbers cautiously approached the van. At that very moment, one of the guards climbed out of the van to await the two bank employees bringing out bags of cash. Before he knew what was happening, the raiders were trying to immobilize the officer from behind, but he fought back, wriggling free of their clutches. As the guard veered to the side, dodging the onslaught and trying to draw his own weapon, a burst of sub-machinegun fire felled him to the pavement. A follow-up burst was aimed at the cabin, shattering the windows and hitting some of the occupants inside. Panic and chaos ensued: people running in every direction, people sprawled on the ground. And the proceeds? Nothing, zero, as the guy in charge of bringing the cash out of the bank had not set foot on the street. During the gunfire, one of the gang members was shot in the leg, but of course, it was the guards who came off worst. The members of the commando gathered up their wounded colleague and headed back to the Citroën, its engine still running, and escaped at speed down the deserted street.

Let us take this one step at a time. For a start, who made up the raider gang? Five anarchists, most of them from the FAI, from groups with ties to Laureano Cerrada; three of them were from the Lyon area and two had come up from Toulouse. And were they identified? Yes again; the members of the gang were Francisco Bailó Mata, at the wheel of the Citroën and, alongside him, his brother José who was acting as the ring-leader, Juan Sánchez aka *el Pelao* (the fellow with the long hair) and the couple who had come up from Toulouse for the raid were Antonio Guardia Socada and a familiar name in this book, the eternal escaper, Joan Català. What led to the shoot-out? Going by the information available to us, they were expecting two guards escorting the driver as they had examined the operation at length, together with the timing and itinerary, since Francisco worked just two streets away from the site of the hold-up. What they were not expecting was any resistance being offered by the guards. And the upshot of the shoot-out? Things went badly; worse than badly, if we look at what later ensued as a result. The two police officers from the van – Guy Arnaud and Louis Morin – were killed and a passerby, Auguste Jars, was seriously wounded and subsequently died a few days later. Also wounded was the van driver, Jean-Marie Janin, and a further 8 civilians, whilst, on the side of the raiders, Joan Català had, as we have stated, taken a bullet to the leg.

On now to step two: the relentless search for the killers of the policemen on the part of the French Interior ministry. On the 19th itself, a huge operation was launched involving every police officer in the city, in order to establish the identity and whereabouts of the robbers. On the 20th, every asset of the various police corps in Lyon began a huge crackdown on mafioso circles in the city. Outcome? Nothing. On the 24th, there was another mass mobilization of the police forces, the targets this time being garages, workshops, parking spots and any lead that might bring them to the car that had been used. Licence plates and some parts of a Citroën were found in the La Jonage canal; even though it was not the vehicle used in the Rue Duguesclin hold-up, it turned out that they belonged to the car used in the raid on the Rue Pierre Séward back in September 1950¹³², which, oddly enough had not been included among the various raids for which indictments were laid. In the end the police stumbled upon a lead and threw everything they had into it, after which this paid off. 27 January saw some car parts found consistent with the type of car used in the raid, and after the search was intensified and part of the canal dredged, they were to find the remainder of the vehicle two kilometres downstream. As if further evidence was needed, officer Morin's sub-machinegun, snatched from him after he had been killed, was still inside the car. On the 28th, after lots of questioning, a further lead emerged: a bunch of shabbily dressed Spaniards had been seen riding around in a car like the one used for the robbery. Despite several thousand identity checks, hundreds of house searches and the ransacking of districts inhabited by Spanish emigrés, no suspects could be found until 30 January, when inquiries led to the arrest of Juan Sánchez aka *el Pelao*, the 37-year old long-haired suspect. On 2 February, police tracked down Francisco Bailó Mata, hiding out

¹³² *Lyon criminel*, p.166, André Seveyrat, Editions Voyages, 2000, Grenoble, 1974

in the Des Iris district. Shortly after that, police discovered the corpse of his brother José, with a bullet wound to the head and a short note in which he explained that he did not want to shed any more blood and that the game was up. Just as I was about to hand over the final draft of this book, on a truly fruitful evening spent in front of the computer, out of the information gleaned loomed, among other things, the testimony of the daughter of Felisa Bailó Mata, the sister of Francisco and José, which, to my surprise, contained the following:

“My parents learnt of José’s suicide over the radio. In 2002, in the Newspaper Library in Lyon, we read that he had taken a bullet to the back. No member of my family was invited to identify the corpse. It was to finish up in an unmarked grave.”¹³³

So the alleged suicide note may well have been nothing of the sort (we all know how the police pull out all of the stops when one of their own has been killed). Which would not be anything out of the ordinary: an unofficial settling of scores on the part of the French forces of repression.

Beside those three, the names surfaced of Antonio Guardia Socada, who had been interned in the Le Vernet concentration camp, like so many other Spanish republicans, and Joan Català Balanya, whose name regularly crops up in this book. Furthermore, this catastrophic hold-up operation triggered the persecution and arrest of lots of libertarians throughout France.

The crackdown was orchestrated from central police headquarters on the Rue Vauban, the notoriety of which dated back to war-time. Even though the police focused on the action groups, the right-wing press pointed an accusing finger at the MLE as a whole. Whereupon the crackdown began. And the Bailó brothers’ family suffered their share: their sister Felisa’s partner took such a beating that his face swelled to twice its size; the other brother, Pascual, who had served in the Foreign Legion, was not only beaten up but locked up, naked, in refrigeration chambers. Francisco’s wife was stripped naked, humiliated and tortured. For her part, Juan Sánchez’s sister Juana and her partner Alfonso aka *Borbón* were also arrested and manhandled as they were being linked with weapons that had been unearthed in a basement. They even stubbed out cigarettes on Juana’s breasts; that, among other courtesies of the French police. Also in the Lyon area, they arrested Paco Pérez, García, Cayetano Zaplana, Juan del Amo (delegates from the libertarian organizations in exile), Valero and Valero’s wife. But it did not stop there: once it was clear that Spanish anarchists had been involved, they grabbed the chance to spread the crackdown wider and it spread like wildfire. Among others, they arrested Marcelino Massana in Toulouse, Sabaté in Dijon, and Ramón Vila in Font Romeu. Guide Jesús Martínez Maluenda was arrested for possession of a weapon the same as the ones used in the hold-up and this brought all sorts of abuse down on his head. Even leading opponents of the Cerrada approach finished up in the interrogation cells either way. Ask Peirats about the beating he was subjected to; even so, he did not point the finger at Laureano. Other bigwigs who were questioned were José Pascual Palacios and Pedro Mateu, who will be remembered by many for the part he had played in the group that ended the life of Eduardo Dato.

As we have said before, we know the names of the members of the commando that carried out the hold-up in Lyon but who were these men? We shall now try to delve a little deeper into each of them.

We begin with Francisco Bailó Mata, from Aragon, born in Leciñena in 1920. During the civil war he served as a militiaman with the Durruti Column as part of its guerrilla groups. He crossed in France in February 1939 and, as a member of the 26th Division was interned in the Le Vernet camp. He enlisted in the French army and from inside its ranks fought the Germans over the brief period when the French managed to ward off the Teutonic hordes. On 25 April 1941 he was deported to Germany and placed in the notorious Mauthausen camp where he was stripped of name and nationality, becoming instead Inmate 4216. Likewise, they made him wear the blue triangle of stateless persons, emblazoned with “S” for *rot Spanier* (Spanish Red). In July 1945, which is to say more than four years later, two nurses called to the door of Felisa Bailó, his sister, to drop off someone who was unable even to stand. It was what was left of Francisco after his long trek through the Nazi hell. As his sister testifies:

¹³³ Taken from http://www.24-aout-1944.org/IMG/pdf/mi_madre_felisa_bailo_mata.pdf

“The family and the neighbours never complained of the screaming from his night terrors: his insatiable thirst; his anxiety; his traumatic histrionics ... he never received any psychological help as a victim.”¹³⁴

How had Bailó managed to survive there for so long? After seeing how the Nazis were wearing him out working in the quarry and that horrifying stone staircase, he applied for a job as a crane operator, even though he had never worked on one before. He must not have fared too badly as they granted him the job. On returning to France, he was little by little rebuilding what was left of his life: he rejoined libertarian circles and joined Cerrada's groups. But when at home, not everything was going well. He would spend long periods of time chain-smoking and staring at the wall. By night his nightmares set him to screaming and dashing downstairs in terror. Those nightmares lingered for over a year. He could not drink enough water: his thirst was insatiable right up until the day he died in 1986. Francisco was arrested on 1 February 1951 in the Des Iris district.

His brother José had had to flee Leciñena together with his mother and his sister Felisa. He would have been about ten years old when the town fell to Francoist troops. From there, they withdrew to Fraga, then moved on until they came to Barcelona. And, things going from bad to worse, the Francoists overran Barcelona. So again, they were back on the road, heading north, to see whether they might not find a little peace and tranquility in France. They arrived at the border in dire condition, only to be interned in the camps directly by the French. Felisa and Justa, their mother, were placed in the Argelès camp and the now 13-year old José was sent to the Saint Cyprien camp. He managed to get released from the camp after he was taken in by a French family and it was out of the frying pan and into the fire when the Nazis invaded France. So he was soon operating as a runner for the resistance and, shortly after that, took to the hills with them until the end of the world war. Like his brother, José joined the action groups operating on French soil under Laureano's supervision. In fact, he was in charge of the Lyon group. He took part in the Rue Duguesclin hold-up and allegedly committed suicide by shooting himself in the head with his Colt before the police could capture him, in the midst of massive swoops and intense police searches. Equally allegedly, he left behind a note before he took that final step: it read: “I can foresee that there is nothing more to be done and I have no desire to fight the police. Too much blood has flowed already ...”¹³⁵ Of course, we can do the usual and make do with the police version, or maybe there are those who disagree with it. According to the evidence of his niece, Elsa Osaba, they read in the Lyon Newspaper Library in 2002 that José had been shot in the back, which challenges that version somewhat. His body turned up in a garden in Vénissieux, a Lyon suburb, on 4 February 1951.

The gang member regarding whom I have been able to amass the least information was the Aragonese Antonio Guardia Socada. Born in the Valderrobres area, he served in the Durruti Column, crossing over into France with it and being interned in the Le Vernet camp. Once he managed to get out, we know that for a time at any rate he was living in Perpignan, more specifically at No5, Boulevard Wilson. In February 1944 we find him in the Pyrenees acting as a people-smuggler for several RAF pilots and we imagine that that risky pursuit was the reason why he wound up, not only under arrest, but also committed to the Saint Gilles prison in Brussels. In August 1944 he was in that prison with a further 1,400 political prisoners. On the night of 1 September, with a whiff of freedom already in the air, SS General Richard Jungclauss ordered the prison emptied and the removal of the inmates to Germany. The prisoners resisted but with only their bare hands and in the end, after a sound thrashing they were forced to board lorries and dropped off at the Gare du Midi station and loaded on to the notorious “ghost trains”. The train was unable to leave until the following day, thanks to all of the hindrances and sabotage carried out by the Dutch, as well as the resistance from the deportees. It took the train 8 hours to cover the first 12 miles, what with red signals, other trains on the tracks and whatever else the resistance people were able to devise. Then the engine ran low on water so they had to spend the night in Malines. In the end, the train pulled out again on 3 September, back to Brussels and by 4 September the Allies entered Brussels, rescuing Antonio among others and his 1,500 comrades. Antonio later made for the capital of the Spanish exile community in France – Toulouse – where he settled. From there he later moved up to Lyon for the raid on the van. Many years later, he was a member of the Amicale du Vernet [Le Vernet Friendly Association]

¹³⁴ “Felisa Bailó Mata, 1919-2008. *Mi madre*”. Article by Esa Osaba.

¹³⁵ *La Vanguardia*, 7-2-1951

to which he made regular financial contributions and, after the death of Franco, he returned to Spain, settling in Barcelona.

Our information about the life of Juan Sánchez was scrappy but luckily our comrade Joel Ruiz has sent us additional information from Paris. For one thing he has provided us with Sanchez's second surname, previously not known. Juan Sánchez Martínez aka *el Pelao* was born in Lorca in Murcia in 1914 into an anarchist family. Like lots of other libertarian militants, what he failed to learn in school he picked up in the trade unions and *ateneos*. He joined the CNT early on, on the recommendation of his father and later, off his own bat, joined the FAI. In the early 1930s, the entire family moved away to France, making for the city of Lyon-Villeurbanne. There was a very active core of Spanish libertarians there drawn from the ranks of the economic migrants and he joined them. In August 1936, he and some other comrades, after finding out what was going on in Spain, decided to pack their bags and get in on the fight. He also turned up in various collectives in Catalonia and Aragon after giving up the fight as he thought of himself as an anti-militarist. That stance may well have been the result of the militarization of the militias and his example was one followed by many anarchists. During his time in Spain, he wrote for a number of CNT papers, including *Amanecer*. After the defeat, he, like so many others, crossed into exile in France. He, like many another, saw his share of the concentration camps and was later dispatched to perform hard labour in the Djelfa area in Algeria. He managed to escape and finished up joining the Free French Forces. He popped up again in 1944 as part of the Paris-North Regional Resistance, in which one of the leading lights was Cerrada, known as 'the Forger'. Serving together with them and from inside the resistance committee were several more men from the groups working with Laureano. During the 1955 trial, the word was that the members of the team that carried out the Lyon hold-up had been members of the resistance and in actual fact Sánchez was operating in the Lyon area during the Nazi occupation, alongside his sister Juana and other libertarians from the La Barraca group.¹³⁶ Juan Sánchez carried on crossing the border over the years that followed, among other things, to obtain money from Catalan businessmen by selling the CNT stamps. The Nazis had just lost the war and a lot of folk reckoned that Franco and his reign of terror would be the next to go, so one faction of the business community used to purchase those stamps quite readily just in case the tables turned. Much of the information I have about Juan was provided to me by the Aragonese Isidoro Berdie who got to know him in Sweden where *el Pelao* was given a haven after serving 15 years in French prisons for that notorious hold-up. They soon became friends. Isidoro used to sleep at Juan's house when visiting Sweden and Juan would stop over at Isidoro's when *el Pelao* visited the land of his birth. Juan was arrested on 30 January 1951, the first of the gang members to fall into police hands.

As for Joan Català, the last of the five members of the gang, we have been mentioning him throughout this book so I shall not dwell upon his life story, but anyone interested in that can refer to his memoirs, published in both Catalan and Castilian.¹³⁷

Having completed that cursory presentation of our protagonists and seen the militant records of them all, it strikes me as somewhat easier to fight shy of the glib criticism of "these cop-killing armed robbers", whilst not attempting to excuse murder at any time, even of policemen. We must not let the glare of the streetlamps blind us to the moon. These men and women were fighting on behalf of an ideal. After a life-time filled with battles – many of which had been lost – rather than retreating into a yearned-for tranquility, they carried on trying to kill Franco and raising money for all sorts of causes, as well as skimming off something – a pittance usually – for themselves. Remember that it was so much towards the struggle, much more than ended up in their own pockets. I am not about to criticize them in the least: instead, let me address the criticism to myself and all those folk who fight and try to change the world by clicking 'likes' on social media.

¹³⁶ La Barraca was the name by which an active core of libertarians based in the Lyon-Villeurbanne area was known: they were drawn from the economic migrant community, bolstered by the post-civil war political emigres. It was called after the place where its meetings were held. In addition to politics, the group had a reputation for its artistic creativity.

¹³⁷ *L'etern descontent*, Joan Català, Josep Ester Borrás Study Centre and Col.lectiu a les Trinxeres Berga, 2017: *El eterno descontento*, Joan Català, Jaime Cinca Editor, 2007

Chapter 41

Show Trial of the “Gang of Spaniards”

In the wake of the disastrous raid on the postal van in Lyon and the social panic generated across the country, the lid was lifted on virtually the entirety of the arrangements that had remained covert. Added to which there were the matters that had been surfacing during 1949 and 1950 and the French courts, following the mass arrests of anarchists, was ready to bring the whole weight of the law down on the Spanish libertarian action groups operating in France. And so the press, as information emerged, was soon being generous with its condemnations of the “gang of Spaniards”.

Following the police investigations, there was a long list of Spanish anarchists involved in previous raids and they included: the brothers Francisco and José Bailó Mata, Juan Sánchez aka *el Pelao*, Domingo Vela (who died before the trial), José Soto Suárez, Francisco Pérez, Francisco and José Sabaté Llopart, Joan Català Balanya and Antonio Guardia Socada. In addition to them, the police rounded up a huge number of leading Spanish libertarians. Let us now name the lawyers handling the defence of the anarchists: Henri Torres, René Floriot, Johannes Ambre, Roger Breysse and Daniel Mie. In the end the trial concluded with Juan Sánchez being sentenced to death (subsequently commuted); life sentences for Francisco Bailó Mata and Antonio Guardia Socada, and a 20-year prison term for Joan Català Balanya. Francisco Pérez and *Quico* Sabaté received lighter sentences.

After Francisco Bailó’s arrest and under questioning, he dropped the name of a certain Sabaté and *Quico* was arrested in Dijon (where he was living) the very same day. He was held incommunicado for six days and very harshly interrogated. On the fourth day, in an effort to bring the questioning to an end, he jumped out of a window. From what little *Quico* said of the torture to which he was subjected over those six endless days, they had him naked with his arms outstretched and were weighing down on them; they forced him to kneel on a triangular metal frame and held him like that for long stretches of time, beating him when the items they placed in his hands were dropped.

But of course, with all the sensationalism, all the arrests, all the raids that had been carried out, one big issue still remained: Who was leading the whole operation? There being nothing else for it, what with the evidence here and the odd confession there, the gendarmes finally came up with Cerrada’s name. But it turned out that Mr Big, as he was referred to in certain newspapers, was already behind bars for the forgeries discovered in 1950. And even though certain books of accounts had been found detailing lots of what we might term rather unlawful activities, he was not included in the show trial. It is worth asking whether his absence from the show trial, or his brief sentences, had something to do with the reports he had held on to since the days of the Nazi occupation. Cerrada was aware that a lot of powerful people had been collaborators with the invaders. His exclusion may well have been intended to buy his silence, albeit that this is merely a hypothesis.

Let us leap forward in time here to the criminal assizes of the high court in Lyon. The high court was armour-plated inside and out, with something like 150 gendarmes. And the date? January 1955. Everything was in place for the trial to begin: journalists, cameras and an expectant public ... Let the games begin!

Up for consideration were 17 hold-ups and armed robberies carried out in France between 1944 and 1951 and covered by the same indictment; to these would be added five killings carried out in the course of those robberies. Although if there was one that stood out, it was doubtless the sensational and tragic Lyon raid. The protagonists who appeared in the dock were 14 Spaniards with CNT connections. The trial was split into three parts. Part one dealt with 8 of the cases and was heard between 12 and 15 January 1955. Part two tried the other five cases and was heard between 17 and 20 January. Finally, there was a third part, involving a further four cases, including the star, highly sensational trial for the Lyon van hold-up and it started on 21 January.

The two major accused – Juan Sánchez aka *el Pelao* and Francisco Bailó Mata – stood accused of involvement in six of the cases, whereas the remaining dozen accused were indicted in relation to one, two or three. One of the accused, Santiago Camps, had allegedly held a high position within the organization. Another of the accused, Ramón Bonías, who had allegedly carried out another raid in concert with Sánchez and Bailó Mata on a food store, denied the charges. Also involved in part one was a woman, who may have been Melchora

Manero, although I cannot be entirely sure. Bailó and Sánchez were also charged with attacking cars on a number of highways such as the Lyon-Marseilles highway, intent on locating the famous actress Rita Hayworth and robbing her. We will not go here into the robbery of the celebrated couple (Rita Hayworth and the Aga Khan) during their stay on the Côte d'Azur in France, which coincided with the gang's raids, time-wise.

Part one of the proceedings resulted in Sanchez's being given a life sentence, Bailó 20 years, Fernández Álvarez 8 years, Ramón Bonías 6 years and Vidal Cantero 5 years. According to *La Vanguardia* newspaper, all four, other than Bonías, held preferential residence status (awarded to foreigners who had distinguished themselves in their resistance activities): that status normally spared them a lot of problems with the police.¹³⁸

In the second part of the trial, the accused were – in addition to Sánchez and Bailó – Santiago Camps, Antonio Jiménez, Francisco Pérez, former police detective Marcel Galdin and local businessman Alexandre Chierici. The charges included the attempt to steal a police car in Lyon following the theft of a privately-owned vehicle, and the robbery of a jewellery store. Three men had robbed a jewellery store run by the Aujolat couple from Lyon, making off with 147 rings and 2 bracelets. The two residents of Marseilles indicted became accomplices of the gang once its members tried to fence the stolen items. Also indicted here was Francisco Pérez who was part of the crew that made contact with the businessman Chierici in Marseilles regarding sale of the jewellery. Chierici was told that they came from Spain, by way of warding off any suspicions. Also implicated in part two was a woman, Joaquina Puncel (née Joaquina Córdoba) who had been in charge of delivering the jewellery to the city.

In part three, the main item was the Lyon post office van raid. Here, beside the usual suspects, meaning Sánchez and Bailó, the accused include Antonio Guardia Socada and Joan Catalá Balanya. The prosecution asked for death sentences for Sánchez, Guardia Socada and Bailó, who stood charged with "the greatest acts of gangsterism" seen in France since the Second World War. Juan Sánchez was sentenced to death, albeit that this was later commuted. He served 15 years, was expelled from France and he ended his days in Sweden, where he was welcomed. Francisco Bailó and Antonio Guardia were sentenced to life imprisonment. According to his sister, Bailó served 20 years behind bars. We do not know how long Guardia served, but he managed to return to Spain and was living in Barcelona by 1977. As for Català, he received a 20 year sentence of which he served fourteen and a half behind bars. Oddly enough *el Pelao*, once the manhunt for anarchists kicked off after the Lyon hold-up, could not come up with a better hiding place for three of the sub-machineguns that had been used in it than the premises of the CNT in Villeurbanne. Luckily, the doorman, who was trustworthy, was the one that stumbled upon them. They finished up in Decines where they were hidden by Ruiz, the brother of Martín Ruiz Montoya, who was Sabaté's companion on his final outing which proved deadly for every member of the group.

In relation to the trial which was very closely monitored by the French and the Spanish newspapers, there were a few surreal moments. Antonio Guardia was asked: "Did you ever think about what you were doing?" To which he replied: "No, all I thought was that I was taking part in an armed robbery." Juan Sánchez, whose answers were curt, had his past actions thrown in his face, to which his reaction was: "I never have a lot to say. I act." At another point under questioning he was asked: "how many bullets were there in your sub-machinegun?" ... "Don't know. Didn't count them."¹³⁹ On a different day, Juan Sánchez showed up in court with a sort of a red lace in his lapel, triggering the following exchange: "After holding back for a moment, the presiding judge ventured to ask the accused the meaning of the distinguishing feature or decoration on his lapel. It was a sweetie wrapper. I wear it on my lapel because it looks good, came Sánchez's sardonic response."¹⁴⁰ Nor did it help the Spanish anarchists that among the evidence being brought to light, there were the 35 bullet-holes in the van that was attacked, or that among the autopsy reports it was recorded that officer Arnaud had died as a result of 10 bullets, or officer Morin by a further seven.

¹³⁸ *La Vanguardia*, 16-1-1955

¹³⁹ *La Vanguardia*, 29-1-1955

¹⁴⁰ *La Vanguardia*, 16-1-1955

As we said earlier, Joan Català was part of the squad of guides that served the Ponzán network, so, insofar as he could, he contacted *el Padre* to ask him to intercede on his behalf with the French authorities. Here we reproduce part of the contents of what he sent to Terres and the latter's subsequent intervention:

"Dear sir: as you have volunteered to give evidence on my behalf, I would ask that you do whatever you can to assist me, since you have the wherewithal to do so. Your evidence plus the extenuating circumstances applicable to me, might do much to lighten my sentence and I would be delighted to be thankful for it."¹⁴¹

As requested by Català, *el Padre* spoke up for him during the trial for the incidents in Lyon:

"This little Spaniard risked his life on a thousand occasions to defend France against the forces of the occupation, whereas a lot of French people sat quietly at home. I had him under my command along with a dozen and a half of his countrymen and they always carried out my instructions best. Several of them perished in the fight for the liberation of France. After the liberation, what did France do for them? Nothing, gentlemen, she did nothing! She cast them aside like useless trash. Català was left with no option but to go and sign on at the employment office as jobless ... meaning that we did all in our power to plunge them into despair and all but compelled them to turn to crime, as has now been the case with my comrade in the struggle, Juan Català ... Gentlemen, I cannot but ask you to show the utmost magnanimity ..."¹⁴²

El Padre was still looking after his own.

As mentioned previously, Mr X, meaning Laureano Cerrada, was not indicted in the trial nor was he tried nor convicted; he was shuttling in and out of French prisons more or less regularly, as they pinned his forgeries on him. When all is said and done, that was where his forte was.

¹⁴¹ *Los senderos de la libertad*, p 241, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

¹⁴² Letter sent from Lyon by Català to Terres, dated 24 December 1954 and lifted from *Los senderos de la libertad*, pp. 241-242, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

Chapter 42

El Quico

Throughout the previous pages, the name *el Quico* has been cropping up repeatedly. For many years that name was enough to open many a door and to ensure that many more were shut; in any event, what that name was not, was unfamiliar. During the 1940s and 1950s, he came to be Public Enemy No1 for the forces of repression in Catalonia, a wanted man on both sides of the border, because he was active on both sides of it. Francisco Sabaté Llopart aka *el Quico* was born into a humble family in Hospitalet del Llobregat in Barcelona province on 30 March 1915. He was the second of five siblings, four boys and one girl. As tradition at the time dictated, he began his working life at a very early age in a plumbing workshop. By the age of 16 he was active within the CNT and shortly after that, aged 17, he joined the action groups, more specifically the *Los Novatos* group, of which his brother Jose was also a member. That was to be his first contact with gunpowder and lead, a contact that was to endure up until well into 1960, when he was gunned down on the streets of San Celoni.

Come the fascist uprising in 1936, and having ensured that the situation was under control in Hospitalet, they headed for Barcelona. Once the reactionaries had been routed in the Catalan capital, José and Francisco enlisted with the Los Aguiluchos column raised by Garcia Oliver, leaving Barcelona on 27 August, bound for Aragon. Francisco later swapped to the 28th Division (formerly the Ascaso Column) and then to the 25th (formerly the Ortiz Column). After the Teruel offensive in late 1937, in open power struggles with the communists, *el Quico* executed the commissar Ariño by shooting him in the head, holding him responsible for the slaughter of a goodly number of the unit's anarchists in suicidal attacks. After that, Francisco and his comrades chose to desert and sought refuge in Barcelona because staying in the front lines would have meant the firing squad. *El Quico* was finally arrested in Barcelona in 1938 and jailed. He managed to escape, only to be re-arrested by four carabinieri. With the prospect of his being returned to prison, he drew the gun he had been given by his wife Leonor on a prison visit and intended to assist his escape and right then and there he killed all four of them. He finally made it back to Barcelona where he signed on with the 121st Brigade of the 26th Division (formerly the Durruti Column) and fought in its ranks right up until the war ended and crossed over the border into France with his unit. There he was interned in the inevitable concentration camps and, having been with the 26th Division, he was assigned to the Le Vernet camp. Once France was invaded by the Germans, Sabaté threw himself into fighting them; it could scarcely have gone otherwise. In 1941 his daughter Paquita was born. (Alba would be born in February 1946). In 1943 the family arrived in Perpignan. We cannot say if it was then (1943) that he made the acquaintance of Manolo Huet, or if they had known each other earlier during the civil war or in the camps. What is clear is that from 1945 onwards, Francisco Sabaté Llopart was to commit himself body and soul to the fight against Franco. Apropos of this, there are several books that can be consulted (some are listed in the bibliography at the end of this book) and they offer a more than comprehensive account of *Quico's* struggles throughout his risk-laden existence. Therefore we shall confine ourselves here to offering a few samples of the lesser known incidents, and especially to setting out the relationship that connected Francisco and the book's protagonist, Manolo Huet. If we go by the notes by Pons Prades held at the archive in San Cugat, we find things such as this: "For nearly 20 years, Huet operated in the shadow of the libertarian urban guerrilla groups and especially that of *Quico* Sabaté, whom he looked upon as an older brother. Facerías's and Massana's groups too would regard Huet as an unconditional comrade."¹⁴³

El Quico and *el Murciano* soon found that their dealings would become initially, mutually collaborative and then swiftly blossom into unstinting friendship. Two get-up-and-go types with heads crammed with the fight against Franco. Manolo tagged along with and was active in some of *Quico's* group's visits to Barcelona in the 1940s, albeit that we do not have the exact dates. We do know that in the later 1940s the MLE was thoroughly stepping up armed action against Francoism and as a result an ambitious plan was devised in France. As part of this, three groups were to work in concert: on the one hand, Marcelino Massana's group, which would concentrate on felling electricity pylons, leaving Barcelona in utter darkness. Not that that was *Pantxo's* group's first attempt at sabotaging a large number of power pylons. Massana too was a friend of Huet's as well as being the only group leader among those operating out of France who, be it on grounds of caution or on the basis of much needed good fortune, or his sure-footed decision-making at the right moment, never lost one of his men

¹⁴³ Pons Prades holdings, ANC

in the course of his operations. The group used to rest up in France and was generally active in the Berguedà mining district, of which both Marcelino and some of the members of his band were natives. Besides *Pantxo's* group, there were the group of Francisco Sabaté and of Manolo Huet. These would see to picking up the explosives previously stashed in a range of support bases and would try to orchestrate a campaign of bomb attacks inside Barcelona city. Three target areas were selected: number one, the army centre in the Plaza de Cataluña, the police station on the Calle Pelayo and, lastly, a Falange premises on the Paseo de Gracia. According to Huet: "All three targets were in Barcelona; the bombings would be carried out on the same night, by way of notification that we anarchists were taking the lead again."¹⁴⁴

"When you saw the situation in which the young folk found themselves, with no one to teach or guide them, and given the impact of the war and the repression in their homes, you said to yourself that only sensational and spectacular actions – which could be mounted by small groups of determined people – could awaken the consciousness of those boys and girls who had so many scores that needed settling in personal, family or collective terms, with those who were humiliating and exploiting them."¹⁴⁵

There are few references to this plan, although we can see Massana in the documentary *Guerrilleros. 13 testimonios de la resistencia armada al franquismo* talk in passing about the matter. And Reguant's book *Marcelino Massana ¿Terrorismo o Resistencia?* touches upon it. Inevitably Pons Prades's *Los senderos de la Libertad* and finally the *Historias de la clandestinitat* published by *El Correo Catalan* do likewise. Going by these sources, it seems that the plan was jettisoned after Huet's group was intercepted by the Civil Guard in Gerona province and especially following the intense fire-fight between the Civil Guards and the guerrillas. Despite taking losses, Manolo and his comrades had to head back towards the border. For its part, Massana's group, whilst raising funds to proceed with the operation without any hitch and due to bad intelligence, machine-gunned two cars in which the Fígols miners' payroll was supposed to be travelling and this ended with several passengers in the intercepted cars being wounded; unfortunately for all concerned, they were not the cars they had been lying in wait for.

Sabaté's obsession with flagging up the political motives behind his struggle and combatting the image peddled by the Franco regime which always tied together the label 'bandit' and any activity spearheaded by the guerrillas, prompted him to invest a lot of what they took from banks or wealthy individuals in sustaining and supporting the CNT press, producing leaflets, or putting together his own publication, *El Combate*. In the latter years of his struggle, with the times a-changing, he also turned to trying out fresh propaganda approaches. One of those was the use of tape recordings in which he recorded addresses to the workers urging them to stay united, oppose the dictatorship and sending out other anti-Francoist messages; these would then be distributed in workshops, factory canteens and even in movie-houses at the end of screenings. And thus we find *Quico* and Manolo again on the streets of Paris. Shopping. For what? A splendid tape recorder on which to record and copy tapes. Once again they had to surmount police monitoring, but luckily both men had sangfroid to spare and were able to avoid attention. They did not go armed, although *el Quico* was still under an assigned residence order and, if found in the French capital, was going to find himself in serious difficulty.

In the end they found the machine they were after but, unfortunately, we have no knowledge of any of the recordings made surviving.

Another of the methods employed to publicize the anti-Francoist struggle and denounce the regime was even odder. One of the iconic images of *el Quico* shows Sabaté hunched beside his propaganda mortar. That mortar had been bought by Teófilo Navarro aka *el Negro* and it was then passed on to *Quico* who was restricted to the city of Dijon at the time. In Dijon, there was another old hand from the action groups – Jesús Martínez Maluenda aka *el Maño*, and he had this to say:

"One day he set out for the mountains to try it out, together with an elderly Asturian comrade and another one, an Andalusian. When they test-fired the mortar, it created such a racket that all three of them threw themselves to the ground. Whereupon the elderly Andalusia said to *Quico*:

¹⁴⁴ *Los senderos de la libertad*, p.286, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

¹⁴⁵ *Crónica Negra de la transición española (1976-1985)*, p. 59, Eduardo Pons Prades, Plaza & Janés Editores, Barcelona 1987

‘You’re going to have to make a small foot-plate and place the thing on that. Then you can place a couple of sandbags or bags of pebbles, after which you can fire it. But what do you intend to use this item for?’

‘Well, actually, I mean to use it in Barcelona.’

‘No, you must not fire ordnance in Barcelona. What you should do is fire lots of propaganda material, paper, paper, paper ... and half a charge should do the job. You can fire it yourself from a seated position and carry the item wherever you like, but then you must stop using it, because otherwise they’re going to kill you some day.’¹⁴⁶

El Quico heeded the old man. This was the very same Andalusian comrade who, when Sabaté made to breach the order restricting him to Dijon and head straight out of that city, picked him up in his car and ferried him out a number of villages by following the railway lines. Later, the old man would step into the station and buy a ticket to whatever destination *el Quico* wanted, whilst *Quico* would slip in the back way. Finally, they would sit together on a bench and would swap the ticket. Which was both discreet and effective.

Quico also had other ways of travelling, though. Remember that Huet’s family had that rug and carpet store in Andorra and from time to time business matters used to bring them to Paris or other French cities and among the Pons Prades papers we find the following:

“On occasion the carpet trade would bring them to Paris, with Sabaté hiding under the goods, in the back of a brand new Opel-Kapitan. In early 1959, with the war in Algeria at its height and under the impact of Algerian bombings carried out all over metropolitan France, they were stopped at a road checkpoint quite close to Paris. His elegant mode of dress – his comrades used to refer to Huet as ‘*el Marqués*’ – his amiable aspect, his papers showing him to be a favoured resident (status enjoyed back then only by foreigners with a proven record of patriotic pro-France activity – earned on account of his performance within both the escape lines and within the resistance, all of it vouched for by ‘*el Padre*’) and the presence of his no less elegant and suitably bejewelled wife at his side, both of them in their fifties, ensured that they sailed through the checkpoint without undue delay.”

Years later Huet admitted to Pons Prades that “We were very lucky because had the gendarmes troubled to look under the rolls of carpet we were carrying in the back seat, Sabaté, who was armed with his sub-machinegun, might have popped up and let them have it. And I, who had my own gun under my seat, would have had no option but to leap from the car while firing at the gendarmes. And, rest assured, there would have been no one left to tell the tale.”¹⁴⁷

It should be said also that Manolo himself on several occasions was tasked with picking up *Quico* once the latter made it back to the safety of the French side of the border.

Whether it was in among the rugs or with the aid of that elderly Andalusian, we cannot say, but at the beginning of October 1959, Sabaté was back in Paris. One of his regular contacts in the city was the Clichy Libertarian Youth group and one of its members was Luis Andrés Edo. Some months previously, in one of the bars Edo was used to frequenting in the area, he customarily ran into another old hand from the Civil War who always asked Edo about ‘*el Quico*’ and asked him to arrange a meeting with him. This was none other than Valentín González aka *el Campesino*.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Jaume Serra Fontelles, *L’ombra del maquis*, Solsona Comunicacions S.L., Lérida, 2001, p. 122

¹⁴⁷ Manuscript pages, *A la sombra de Quico Sabaté*, Pons Prades holdings, ANC

¹⁴⁸ Valentín González aka *el Campesino* was born in Malcocinado (Badajoz) in 1909. He joined the PCE prior to the civil war and once the war began served in the 5th Regiment and later commanded the 46th Division. Having fallen out of favour in communist circles, he managed to get out to Algeria and later to the USSR. He was sent to the Vorkuta gulag in the Urals and escaped from there, eventually arriving in Iran. He was later to settle in France. In August 1961, he and several other dissidents from the PCE mounted an incursion via the Orbaiceta area: the upshot was that three Civil Guards and several of the members of the raiding party were killed. In the end, he moved to Madrid in 1978 and died in that city five years later.

Edo had been putting him off but in the end he had a word with Sabaté and mentioned *el Campesino's* request to him, to which *Quico* retorted: "Well, it is always good to hear what he has to say. Set up a meeting."¹⁴⁹

There is one thing he had to sort out before turning up for the rendezvous. In late 1959, the MLE, after years of saying little, years of distancing and disaster, laid the groundwork for a fresh offensive against the regime and was setting up a brand new conspiratorial agency, Defensa Interior (DI). Octavio Alberola had come over from Mexico to take the reins and other militants of renown were also on board, and not just any old militants but Cipriano Mera and Juan García Oliver. Besides, the ageing constituency that had experience of armed action was also stirring. Discreet gatherings in out of the way locations witnessed a parade of old acquaintances like Marcelino Massana, Laureano Cerrada, *el Quico* himself, Ramón Vila and efforts were under way to make contact with the likes of Daniel González Marín aka *Rodolfo*, a former member of the *Los Maños* action group. Without further ado, Edo picked Sabaté up from Clichy and found him in animated discussion with Massana, Cerrada and Luis Robla (Cerrada's right hand man for many a year past). After collecting Sabaté, Edo and he set off for the agreed rendezvous. Thanks to Edo's presence, we know how the meeting between the two militants went. *Quico* was the first to speak:

"I'd like your view on what I have been up to in recent years, because if your view is negative, there will be no need for us to go any further. As for me, I have agreed to your request due to your having already quit the CP."

"Not only have I quit the CP, but I have denounced its Stalinist procedures. As to your actions, I find them excellent, which is precisely why I wanted to see you. I should like your opinion regarding a radical sort of policy coordinated between several anti-Francoist factions, obviously excluding the CP."

"Anything to do with radical direct action against the dictatorship, you can always count on me. As for coordinating with various sectors, the issue with organizations and parties, as I see it is that what I regard as militants ready to engage in that sort of action should not drag in their organizations and parties. Besides, such action ought not to aim at an indiscriminate psychological attack, by which I mean that Franco and the top leaders of the dictatorship are not exempt. When my actions resulted in the deaths of policemen and Civil Guards, it was as a result of self-defence and not because that was my intended target."

"I agree completely, not just that initials should not be dragged into it but that there is a series of militants eager to act and which the CP has declared dissidents and whom I believe should be harnessed."¹⁵⁰

The conversation stuck to a good tone and cordiality and they agreed upon such contacts being kept strictly confidential and they schedule a further meeting for three months later and identified Edo as the go-between linking the pair of them. Unfortunately, gunpowder and lead would cross Sabaté's path and prevent that follow-up meeting.

On 19 December 1959, Manolo was working up to a meeting between two good friends of his in the barn owned by the Sant Miquel de Cuxà abbey where José Anta Rodríguez, political exile and former collaborator of the Maritime Antenna was in charge. On the one hand, there was Eduardo Pons Prades, there with the intention of joining the Iberian Revolutionary Front (FRI) and Huet's other interlocutor was none other than *el Quico*. He was there to set out a proposal received from Yugoslavia through some former International Brigaders like Rade Nikolic and designed to beef up the fight against Franco. Pons Prades was going through it item by item and Sabaté was expressing some doubts, like a good old hound, although if *el Murciano* was behind the arranging of the meeting, the least that he (*Quico*) could do was turn up and give proper consideration to the offer on the table. The exchange went as follows:

¹⁴⁹ *La CNT en la encrucijada. Aventuras de un heterodoxo*, p. 129, Luis Andrés Edo, Flor del Viento, Barcelona, 2006

¹⁵⁰ *La CNT en la encrucijada, Aventuras de un heterodoxo*, p. 130, Luis Andrés Edo, Flor del Viento, Barcelona, 2006

"Pons Prades – We have a proposition coming from a socialist country, Yugoslavia, contingent upon our efforts to bring down the Franco regime's not being scatter-gun.

Quico Sabaté – You know that as a rule I am not ready to collaborate with politicians, let alone with communists.

P.P. – Well, the Yugoslavs have put this proposition to us for the very purpose of countering the actions of the Spanish Stalinists. And especially the broadcasts from Radio España Independiente.

Q.S. – Let us get down to brass tacks, comrade Floreal [Pons Prades was known in the underground as Floreal Barcino].

P.P. – We're off to Yugoslavia in a couple of days at the invitation of the Institute for Political and Social Studies. Not only is there the possibility of all manner of material assistance, but also of setting up a radio broadcast devoted exclusively to the activities of antifascist groups in the Interior [Spain].

Q.S. – You know rightly that no one gives anything away for free, except in return for something.

P.P. – *Quico*, until such time as we wake up to the reality we are living in we are not going to be able to say what needs doing. Our first priority must be to ensure that we do not waste other people's time ...

Q.S. – Sure, sure, but if we are being asked to give our approval, then we need to know many more of the details of the plan.

P.P. – The sole condition imposed by the Yugoslavs is that we be serious. For instance, in the Front's broadcasts, that no news be reported from the Interior that has not been authenticated. Which is why we in the Front hope that the Portuguese antifascists will shortly be joining. In any case, we cannot be too particular, since we need to keep it in mind that they have made the first move.

Q.S. – Yes all of that is well and good, but I cannot make a move without consulting with my comrades ... We have been fighting alongside one another for many a year now and we cannot leap blindly into this sort of operation.

P.P. – No one is asking you to give up anything; all that is being asked for is unity of action. And if our thoughts turned to you, that is because you, after a fashion, represent the CNT and because it is people of libertarian background that we have to work with.

Q.S. – And is that all you have to say to us?

P.P. – I could explain how we got to know Rade Nikolic who came to see us on behalf of his friends from the Association of Spanish Civil War Ex-combatants and the Socialist Alliance of Yugoslavia. But, to save time, it might be better if you put your questions to me ...

Q.S. – Yes, I think so. My first question is this: Is this proposal being made to us as CNT members or as anti-Francoists generally.

P.P. – I believe that, through those CNT militants that have never given up on the struggle, it is being put to all antifascists. To avoid any confusion, it has therefore occurred to us to launch an umbrella body: the Iberian Revolutionary Front. And I have to tell you that both the name and its basic aims are going to be provisional until such time as we hold our first foundation meeting.

Q.S. – And what are those proposals, specifically?

P.P. – Let me say it again: nothing is set in stone. All we have done is swap impressions and we have been promised aid for the clandestine struggle which will grow as we demonstrate that our activities are authentically revolutionary.

Q.S. – What sort of struggle are we talking about?

P.P. – For one thing, carrying the armed struggle into the Interior and affording maximum radio back-up to actions. That medium is very important since you know already how both Radio España Independiente and Radio Nacional misrepresent the facts to suit themselves. Later we will have military training camps in Yugoslavia, like the ones the National Liberation Front of Algeria now has. Boys and girls will be shipped out to Yugoslavia via France and Italy, or straight to Yugoslavia on French and Italian ships putting in to Barcelona and Valencia.

Q.S. – The fact of the matter is that I cannot quite see this clearly ... And what is our role in these schemes going to be?

P.P. – There is no telling exactly. Knowing these people and their marxist training, there are grounds for thinking that they are not about to help us unless we can come up with a heavyweight plan of action in which the responsibilities of one and all are tightly defined. As for you and your group and other Barcelona groups sharing your ideological background, we can foresee that actions cannot be impromptu the way they appear to be at the moment. I reckon they are going to have to be synchronized with other actions as part of the overall plan. And all subject to some over-arching body.

Q.S. – (Interrupting us, indignant) – Can you not see that by proceeding along those lines we are directly heading towards communist domination? Or can you not see that?

P.P. – I honestly do not believe that. But the fact of the matter is that if less improvised approaches are introduced into our modus operandi, we are not going to be the same as we always have been ... In any event, it is up to us to ensure that within the Front there is ample freedom to voice one's opinion on everything. If we can show imagination and if we are dynamic people, I do not think that there is anything for us to fear.

Q.S. – Just look at what happened back in May 1937 ...

P.P. – Yes, comrade *Quico*, I am looking because I lived through it at very close quarters. But just as at the end we collaborated with 'Casado coup', I do not think that we libertarians now possess the moral authority to cast the first stone ...

Q.S. – Surely you are not comparing the one with the other?

P.P. – Well, this is not the time for us to delve into analysis of the civil war. What we need to be clear about is the extent of our potential collaboration ... in the current context and where the Yugoslavs are concerned.

Q.S. – Be that as it may as I have told you already: I cannot commit to anything. I must consult with the comrades and that will take at least two or three weeks. After that, you will have our answer.

P.P. – It is not a question of commitments of any sort, until we get back from Yugoslavia and can appreciate the importance of the proposals being put to us. Here it is simply a matter of knowing whether you are prepared, in principle, to collaborate with us and whether we can then, together, look into the chances of breathing some revolutionary life into the Front.

Q.S. – Well I have taken that on board and I will speak with my comrades. When we next see each other, it will be easy for us to set out the results of a sensational operation on which we have been working for a long time. So, when do you leave for Yugoslavia?

P.P. – Within the next two or three days. We are waiting for the delegate from the Interior who is to come with us. A delegate from the University Socialist Agrupación.

Q.S. And what more do you reckon can be done?

P.P. – In actual fact we already have things about half ironed out as the republican government was represented in Belgrade by Federico Miñana and had a short-wave transmitter ready to take to the airwaves. The death of the republican ambassador brought everything to a standstill. Last week I

myself had a comprehensive exchange of views with the head of the government-in-exile, Gordón Ordás, and one of his ministers, Juli Just from Valencia. And they assured me that the transmitter, assuming that the Yugoslavs give the go-ahead for its use, can begin broadcasting right away. By our reckoning, from this coming January, we will be able to set 5, 6 or 7 minutes aside for reading our communiques from the Interior. The texts will be coming out carried by *Iberia* pilots and flight attendants flying to London or Paris (from Madrid or Barcelona). Meaning that facts can be reported and commented upon within 24 hours of their occurring. We will centralize everything in Paris and the copy will be telegraphed through to Belgrade. I am telling you this because, if you wish, we can say something about your group's upcoming actions, without mentioning your name, if that is your wish.

Q.S. – No, that is not on. We have not been out of France for more than a year now, working on the groundwork for this big operation and we cannot needlessly put ourselves in danger by making it public. It is going to be something sensational; that much I can tell you. And afterwards there will be a reaction and then you will see that there will be no shortage of aid ...

P.P. – Let us agree to cut off contact therefore and we will re-establish it once you get back from the Interior and ourselves from Yugoslavia ...

Q.S. – Good luck, comrade Floreal!

P.P. And the same to you, comrade Sabaté!"¹⁵¹

On the one hand it was not my intention to quote this conversation in full, due to its length, but then again I thought it might be of interest as it is indicative of what was afoot at the time and the stances adopted by the protagonists. I should also say that it is almost certain that the plans that Sabaté was talking about were for the kidnapping and murder of the notorious Creix brothers – Vicente, Juan and Juan Antonio – sinister torturers in the pay of the BPS.

Contacts with the Yugoslavs had begun just a few months before and the FRI's first delegate was to arrive in Zagreb in August 1959. Given the imminent travel plans of the two comrades, they arranged to meet up again upon their returns and pursue the debate. Pons Prades headed off to Yugoslavia with the FRI delegation on 22 December, whereas Sabaté would cross the border with his comrades on the night of 29-30 December. The follow-up meeting never took place.

In late 1959 Sabaté carried out a hold-up in France. I am unaware of either the location or what he netted, but thanks to the pamphlet *Lucio, l'anarchiste fantasy* and information provided by the Catalan historian Argimiro Ferrero, we know that *Quico*, Francisco Conesa, Antonio Miracle (its was, for both of them, their first hold-up and their last), Luis Andrés Edo and Lucio Urtubia carried it out. The cash netted was used to cover the costs of their excursion to Barcelona and quite possibly to assist the families of the excursionists during their absence.

¹⁵²

Late December 1959: Perpignan and No 37 Avenue Maréchal Foch, one of Huet's safe houses. For a few days now Huet had had a long face on him. Very much against his will, he was getting ready for a delivery. He prepared it as best he could as the lives of several comrades might depend on it, although, reflecting upon it, he knew that their lives were forfeit once they left France. *El Quico* crossed the border once more, Barcelona-bound. Massana had advised him to hold off. Manolo had done the same. And, worst of all, there was a spreading scuttlebut that Sabaté was off to Barcelona. Lined up against the wall there were five neatly packed knapsacks and every time his eye fell on them (this hard nut from the FAI's action groups) his heart skipped a beat.

On the afternoon of the 28th, the Feast of the Holy Innocents, the train from Lyon pulled in. The man waiting on the station platform only had eyes for two of the passengers. One was a young lad and this would be his first border crossing and first involvement with the action groups: his name was Martín Ruiz Montoya and he was

¹⁵¹ El coleccionable, *Histoires de la clandestinitat*. El coleccionable, *El Correo Catalán, La guerrilla urbana libertaria*, part 2, No 10, 31-3-85, pp. 181-184

¹⁵² *Lucio, l'anarchist fantasy*, p. 5, José Cisneros.

about 20 years old. The other one was a few years older and the border was home ground to him. Whatever experience one lacked, the other had in spades: *el Quico* was heading south with Martín. The contact hailed them and men left the station by taxi, it dropping them off first at the Hotel Moderne, run by Alejandro Tiburce, an erstwhile action groups member and implicitly trusted comrade. It would be his job to bring them closer to the longed-for border.

Within a short time of that all three were at Huet's door and when they knocked, it was Rosita who opened up: leaving the youngster to himself, Rosa was only too familiar with the other two and she had a warm welcome for *el Quico*. The next hug was exchanged between two great pals and it was intense and heartfelt. Then it was down to more serious business. Manolo brought them to the apartment where the gear was; together with those knapsacks, there were two parcels, one containing weapons and the other with gear for the crossing of the Pyrenees.

- The guns are in this parcel: five pistols and five sub-machineguns, as requested by you. The other one holds the zip-up wind-cheaters and the rest of the gear. Want to run your eye over it?

- No need. I'm sure you have prepared them with the utmost care.

- Yes: of that you can be sure. I haven't missed anything out: it is all there, like in the old days. For the crossing there are back-up rations for a day. I've also included the can of pepper, first-aid kit and a few good doses of morphine that I hope you won't be needing ... *After a moment's uncomfortable silence he added ...* the first one there is yours. Anything else you like added?

- Ammunition?

- Enough to take on a battalion.

- I'd prefer we don't have to use it.

- They hauled the knapsacks and parcels out to the van and then the unwelcome moment to say goodbyes arrived and they hugged. Huet made a meal of this, knowing that this would be their last goodbye.

- Thanks again, Manolo. Until we meet again.

They broke off the hug but there was still a catch in their voices.

- No, *Quico*. We won't be meeting again. There are too many people in the know about your heading south.¹⁵³

The group crossed the border on the night of 29-30 December 1959. Along with Quico, were Martin Ruiz Montya, Francisco Conesa Alcaraz, Rogelio Madrigal Torres and Antonio Miracle Guitart, all four of them Libertarian Youth members from Lyon and Clermont-Ferrand. We shall leave it at that because the remainder of the story is only too well known. On Sunday 3 January the group was encircled in the mas Clarà near Gerona. The only one to escape from that safe-house alive was Sabaté and he was wounded but crawled off under cover of the darkness. On 5 January, his health failing rapidly, he hijacked the 1104 mail train and reached Sant Celoni. There, following a shoot-out with members of the *Somatén* and the Civil Guard, Manuel Huet's darkest premonitions became reality. Francisco Sabaté Llopart aka *el Quico*, his friend, lay sprawled on the ground, his body riddled.

"No *Quico*, we won't be meeting again. There are too many people in the know about your heading south."

¹⁵³ Conversation lifted from *Tren correu 1104. El darrer viatge del Quico Sabaté i el seus companys*, pp. 33-34, Joan Ventura, Edithot, Gerona, 2010

Chapter 43

Bureaucrats, 1960s

To round off the preceding chapter, let it be said that for years the regime's press celebrated the death of the guerrilla *Quico* and carried all sort of nonsense about him and his comrades. Given the times there was nothing strange, nothing out of the ordinary about this. What we do find strange and out of the ordinary is the silence, indeed criticism with which the Libertarian Movement in Exile (MLE) – with the odd honourable exception – greeted what had happened. By way of example, this is how Federica Montseny dealt with it in *CNT* (the weekly paper of which she was editor-in-chief) on 17 January 1960; it was neither an in memoriam note on the 5 guerrillas killed nor a criticism of the dictatorship at the hands of which they had perished: she wrote:

"I refuse to think of Sabaté in the implacable terms of those who judged him in terms of the damage that his conduct may well have done to the CNT, against whose decisions he rebelled, often claiming – and this is unthinkable in anyone shaped in part of its cadres – to replace it. Nor do I want to see him made a hero, a new Empecinado, a new Durruti.

He will not have to face the judgment of Francoist courts nor any other harsh tribunals; the tribunals of the collective conscience will not readily forgive him for having defied it and having ignored its norms and accords.

I refuse to see his obsession as the unreasoned and unreasonable determination that brought him to Spain in defiance of every individual and collective interest, more than anything that might absolve him in the eyes of many; in my own eyes at any rate; the despair in his soul, his unbridled craving to avenge his dead brothers, a notion which, inside him, had turned into an obsession so enormous, so mighty that every other consideration was pushed into second place."¹⁵⁴

According to Enric Melich, Huet was a very solitary man and indeed the people with whom he had had dealings down through the years had been pushing him in that direction. Remember that he was one of the few champions of Cerrada and his methods when Cerrada was expelled and fell into disgrace and later on he supported Sabaté right up until that guerrilla met his end. His friendship with and loyalty to *el Quico* placed Huet in the firing line as far as Federica and her clique were concerned; he was a danger to the organization. Manolo opted to ignore them and, to be sure, his career led him, if not in an opposite direction, then at least a rather different one.

From the 1950s onward, the orthodox sector reverted to a do-nothing-ism. They chose to cling to what they had and to carry on with their quiet lives rather than throwing their support behind the guerrilla war and the guerrillas. There were honourable exceptions like José Pascual Palacios, but essentially, the veteran militants supportive of action were being ousted and marginalized. Professional trade union bureaucrats like Esgleas and Montseny were right at home there, and the last thing they wanted was for some action carried out by some MLE militant without their say-so to upset the apple-cart they had built up. Anything rather than a repetition of something like the Lyon hold-up back in 1951. Remember that it ended up with masses of comrades behind bars – some "sacred cows" among them – and with the organization subjected to swingeing criticism, with the press on its case and it was on the brink of being outlawed in France, a prospect that threw a goodly number of comrades into panic and terror.

As Edo remarked, some outstanding militants, even though they lived in major cities, chose to organize into little coteries at local levels. That way they could dodge large gatherings and avoid wrangling with the rank and file membership who might ask them for much more than they were ready to deliver.

With the launch of *Defensa Interior* at the start of the 1960s, all three of the wings of the libertarian movement – the CNT, the FAI and the FIJL – came together, each with its own delegates, the omnipresent Esgleas inevitably being one of these. It has always struck me as very odd that Ramón Vila, after so many years of silence, reverted to bombings and sabotage attacks at a time when there was no one else from the old guard still operating. The first light cast on this long-established puzzle came in Edo's book and was later ratified for

¹⁵⁴ Sabaté. *Guerrilla urbana en España (1945-1960)*, p. 336, Antonio Tellez, Virus Editorial, Barcelona, 2001

me by Octavio Alberola in Perpignan. Esgleas, a staunch champion of do-nothing-ism, but a participant in the DI, was keen to make his contribution. And so the CNT proposed that one of its major figures play his part, somebody whose commitment no one doubted. Esgleas dispatched Carballeira to persuade Ramón Vila to rejoin the struggle. Whereas the actions of Defensa Interior were much more in tune with the times, with its campaigns hitting out at tourism and its exploitation and handling of the media, and its attacks on Francoist interests outside of Spain and the internationalization of the struggle, Vila was at the same time being asked to carry on the same as he had always done with the old maquis approach. To pull up his boots, heave his knapsack on to his back, cross the border by night and on foot and re-live old times, hacking through two of the feet of electricity pylons and using 'plastique' on the other two, as well as using the trip in order to drop off some propaganda and hoist the union's colours where they might be seen. Ramón headed south over three summers, between 1961 and 1963 and went through the old ritual time and time again. Ramon perished on 7 August 1963 at the age of 55 in La Creu de Perelló in the townland of Castellnou del Bages, whilst heading back to France following a series of sabotage attacks. His death was the last act of the libertarian maquis: he was the last of his breed to meet his end brandishing arms. His countrymen quickly spread the news and through the peaks and valleys of the Bages, Cardoner and Upper Llobregat, the call rang out: "*El Maroto es mort, l'han matat les caderneres*" (Maroto is dead. He died at the hands of the Civil Guard.)¹⁵⁵

Even though his reversion to action had not been unsolicited but had come at the request of the upper echelons, as Téllez wrote: "Once more, his comrades in struggle in France maintained a prudent but indescribable silence. Not a single voice spoke out to explain to the world who it was that had perished. The dictatorship in Spain cut short his life, but the MLE acted as the grave-digger."¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ *Ruta*, March 1980, *Ramón Vila Capdevila. Apoteosis de la acción*, by Pedro Flores.

¹⁵⁶ *Chapter 9 of Sabate: Guerilla Extraordinary*.

Chapter 44

Old Faces, Fresh Struggles

As we saw earlier, both Huet and Pons Prades chose to throw their weight behind the FRI option. But almost at that very moment or shortly thereafter, some other characters who have featured in these pages (I cannot help imagining how many movies might have been made about them, one and all, had they been born in America) joined a brand-new organization that was slowly taking shape. It is not for me to go into a detailed catalogue of the struggles of Defensa Interior (the new conspiratorial agency set up following the reunification of the CNT)¹⁵⁷. Suffice to say that those holding the reins within Defensa Interior were Germinal Esgleas and Vicente Llansola (champions of the MLE's official do-nothing policy) alongside other much more heavyweight names such as Cipriano Mera, Juan García Oliver, and, finally, Acracio Ruiz, Juan Jiménez and Octavio Alberola (who was to be the great driving force behind the group's activities).

Naturally they made contact with another personage who was perennially linked to CNT conspiratorial activity, José Pascual Palacios and, in spite of the frictions with Pascual, contact was also made with Cerrada to get him to take up the post of document-forgery. Naturally, Laureano's involvement in the area was clandestine as the do-nothing-ist faction would have flown off the handle had it known, but there was no need for it to know. And the ex-railway worker brought with him someone else from his team, someone cited in previous chapters but about whom it might not hurt to provide a few details, given his peculiar talents and interesting background – Antonio Verardini. Verardini was born in Madrid on 13 June 1910, into a well-to-do family. Even at an early age he stood out on account of his intelligence because, at the age of just 15 he was already delivering science talks whilst studying under the Jesuits, from whose college he would later be expelled. At the age of 17, he ran away from home and from his strict, reactionary father and fled to Paris where he tried to earn a living as a painter. His father dragged him back by the ears. In the end he returned to the French capital and this time, with the family's blessing, he settled down and was able to pursue his education as an industrial engineer at the Paris Polytechnic. He must have taken to studying as he graduated in just two years as the youngest person in his year. In 1931 he was jailed in Madrid's Modelo prison for fraud, although, if Edo is to be believed, it was actually for forging bank cheques. In prison he formed firm friendships, among them one with a bricklayer and member of the Madrid action groups, Cipriano Mera. There is a story regarding his days in the nick and it will live forever : the dinner for which the banker Juan March footed the bill at Christmas 1932.

“On the afternoon of Christmas Eve a van from the Hotel Palace in Madrid pulled up at the gates of the Modelo Prison. It brought a range of foodstuffs and Cuban cigars intended for two of the inmates. The open-handed donor of this gift that allowed the prisoners to mark that great annual feast of peace and brotherly love was Don Juan March, known to all the world because he had been locked up there six months earlier. The odd thing is that no one was more taken aback by the arrival and delivery of the foodstuffs and meats from the Hotel Palace than March himself. He was one of the largest share-holders in that great hotel establishment and as he had not ordered anything to do with this great gift, he asked the hotel administration to fill him in on what was going on. ‘All I did was comply with the order you sent me by letter’, the administrator replied, brandishing a piece of paper. It actually was an order placed by March himself. The puzzled March admitted: “You really would have taken it for my own signature, but the fact is that I never signed any such order.’ March showed no indication of being irked.”¹⁵⁸

For anyone interested in knowing the contents both of the letter and the dinner, here are the details:

¹⁵⁷ The libertarian movement had been split since 1945. The interminable jockeying between heterodoxes and orthodoxes, between the CNT of the Interior which was mostly behind the former and the CNT in exile, which backed the later, was furious, right up until the congress of reunification held in Limoges in 1961. Although, as Alberola rightly explains, there was a coming together of tendencies, it soon became apparent what the crux of the next breakdown in the movement was going to be. On the one hand stood those in favour of anti-Francoist action and on the other the majority faction who clung to do-nothing-ism.

¹⁵⁸ See <http://rafazubi52.blogspot.com/2012/10/;lupe-sino-se-caso-en-1937-en-Madrid-con.html>

"JUAN MARCH. Personal. "Dear sirs, I should be grateful if you would, on this coming 24th dispatch to Don Antonio Verardini at prison cell No875, 5th landing, dinner for two people, forwarding the invoice to my home. Send him no wine, as the prison regulations allow none, but include a few cigars with the dinner. [Apparent signature] Juan March."

The menu was as follows: one sole meunière, lamb cutlets bressanne, roast chicken, Rhiz gâteau, fruit and Cuban cigars. Cost? 90 of the pesetas of that time.¹⁵⁹

Released on 21 July 1936 because of the coup attempt, Verardini was inseparable from Mera thereafter. His expertise in armaments led to his rapid promotion and by that August he was chief of staff of the Del Rosal Column. That December he was appointed to the High Command of the International Brigades. Shortly after that, he was a divisional commander and finally, on 10 February 1937, at Mera's request, he was confirmed as chief of staff of the IV Army Corps. During the civil war, in October 1937, he married the famous Antonia Bronchalo Lopesino, a stage actress and cabaret performer, who would later have a liaison with the bullfighter 'Manolete'. Come the end of the civil war, Antonia stayed in Madrid whilst Verardini, after playing his part in the Casado coup, had to emigrate to Oran.

As to his time in Algeria, we know that he was processed through the camp in Morand, enlisted in the Legion and was involved with anti-German networks. When the World War came to an end, he moved to Paris where, inevitably, he fell in with Cerrada and the both of them committed themselves body and soul to counterfeiting whatever came their way. He was forced to change his name to avert problems with the French authorities and under this false identity he worked for the Curie Foundation. At the beginning of the 1960s he and Laureano joined Defensa Interior, after their own fashion. According to Edo, Verardini was paranoid about the committees and their infiltrators so he kept his collaboration with the project as hush-hush as possible, always using Edo as his go-between. Moreover, he ensured that the conspiratorial project had the cooperation of the occasion French engineering colleague of his. They set up a research bureau working for the DI and there, among other things, they set about trials of radio-controlled prototypes (rather than transmitting wavelengths, they operated on the basis of electrical circuitry), even as they were exploring the use of model planes as an aid to an attempt on the dictator's life. Plus, with help from a French engineer, who was a radar expert, they came up with a radio transmitter that could detonate explosives by remote control and this was sent down to Spain for the purpose of ending the life of the dictator.

But let us leave Verardini and return to our subject. The DI's struggle and strategy had been adapted and updated insofar as they could. Thus, over the years when the underground structure was in operation, indiscriminate bombing casualties were avoided and in addition to the removal of the regime's figurehead (the dictator himself) institutions or symbolic monuments were targeted. Furthermore, they selected a fresh target which had previously not been reckoned with – tourism. Bringing influence to bear on the mass tourist market, if not to get them to change destination then at least to let them know that they were about to sample "the delights of a dictatorship". We might include internationalization of the struggle under the same heading and we are talking about more than merely tourism here. Explosive devices began turning up at various European airports on planes owned by the airline Iberia: at the same time Spanish consulates abroad, high profile personalities or Iberian firms abroad, might find themselves and did find themselves targets for the wrath of the DI or ideologically kindred movements operating in those countries as they collaborated with or supported the initiative. And in this change and modernization of the strategy, we also have to reckon with the fact that the underground machine flatly refused to fund itself by means of armed robberies or the fact that it started to exploit the mass media in order to provide coverage to certain actions or communiqués, something that the libertarian movement had previously never done.

Among the DI's record, we should highlight the bombing of the ever-controversial mausoleum in the Valle de los Caídos, the abduction of Monsignor Ussía in Rome or the attempted bomb attacks on the dictator, first of all at the Ayete Palace in San Sebastian and later on the Puente de los Franceses in the Spanish capital. Of course, we cannot avoid mentioning the trial of Delgado and Granados. Both were accused – falsely – by the

¹⁵⁹ <http://rafazubi52.blogspot.com/2012/10/lupe-sino-se-caso-en-1937-en-Madrid-con.html>

authorities of having planted the bomb that exploded at the General Security Directorate (DGS) in Madrid, for which they were arrested, tried and executed in August 1963, in spite of a powerful international lobby against their sentencing. The real reason why they were arrested was none other than the explosives and short-wave radio detonator created by Verardini and his French engineer friend: these were found in Granado's possession. In fact, this was not the first time that the security forces had come across that strange device: the bomb planted near the Ayete Palace had been detonated using a similar device.

Chapter 45

Over and Out (no oration)

With regard to the latter years of Huet's life, we find more murky areas than clear-cut ones. We know that after the murder of his comrade and friend Sabaté and surrounded by profound upset and depression he cut his ties with CNT activism. By that time, Huet was already unwell. A life studded with tough and tense experiences, plus his addition to tobacco, had, among other things, left his lungs in a rather delicate state. Here I have to launch into *'it seems'* and *'possibly'*. It is just lucky that I am not a reporter or I would be sacked already. According to Pons Prades, the word seems to be that Manolo retreated initially to Andorra. He washed his hands of activism and spent his time looking after the family carpet and rug store, his wife and his daughter (I am unaware of when his grandchildren were born) and enjoying the Pyrenean mountains. Basically, from the 1960s onwards we have no clue as to what *'el Murciano'* was up to, apart from his collaboration in the launching of the Iberian Revolutionary Front (FRI). The FRI would give way to the DRIL (Iberian Revolutionary Liberation Directorate) which was also made up of anti-Francoists and anti-Salazarists who finished up hijacking the liner the *Santa María* in the Atlantic, with 1,500 passengers aboard. If we go by Kostas Floros, on the basis of his interviews with Pons Prades for his book, he claims that some time after the death of *el Quico*, Manolo took off to Bolivia for quite a while, and we also know that some of the letters in which he recounted his adventures to Eduardo were postmarked Caracas, Venezuela. How much time he spent in the Americas, we do not know. We do know that after returning to France, he was intensely involved in Pons Prades's quest for testimonies for the book that he was writing about Spanish republicans in the Second World War, to ensure that at least some of the testimonials would be from comrades rather than it looking as if the communists had done everything.

Those years were also tough times, not just because of the impact on his health, but because those who had been his comrades and friends were dying off. This time there was no fending off the loss because they were falling, not to the bullets of the fascist foe, but mown down by the passage of time, the ageing process and precarious health. The first loss was Vicente Mora the elderly trade unionist. After his death on 22 November 1964, Manolo's visits to Cerbère were never the same again. Vicente was followed a few years later, on 21 February 1976 by that other *Manolo*, Manuel Soto. That loss must have come as a real hammer-blow: this was the friend with whom he could have counted in good times or in bad and with whom he could laugh and chat or produce his 'iron' if need be. On 18 October the same year, another leading character in this book, the great Laureano was gunned down. His death occurred just a few metres from Paris's Bar Europa which was a favoured haunt of his, because, among other things it was 'his' bar, as he was still at it with his dodgy dealings and fronts and so on. Manolo had his own version of the counterfeiter's killing; as mentioned elsewhere, Huet had spent a period of time in Caracas and this is the story he used to tell:

"Later, ultimately, Cerrada was treacherously murdered because the people who killed him were former comrades of his – from the railway workers' union, like himself – on whom he had not set eyes for a long time as they were living in Venezuela. These were not hired killers, far from it, but veteran militants, doubtless persuaded that Cerrada had brought the organization into disrepute."¹⁶⁰

What the talk was in the Venezuelan capital at the time, I have no idea, any more than I have of the sources on the basis of which Huet said that. I rather favour the contention that the killer was Ramón Benichó.¹⁶¹ The last person to leave Cerrada on 22 January 1978 was Mariano Puzo, with whom he had been through so much. The old gang was shrinking.

¹⁶⁰ *Los senderos de la libertad*, p. 174, Eduardo Pons Prades, Flor de Viento Ediciones, Barcelona, 2002

¹⁶¹ If we go by what Eliseo Bayo has written, and he was in contact with Laureano Cerrada regarding the writing of his biography, it looks as if Ramon Benicho was the killer of the elderly railway worker. Bayo accuses him of being a police informer and embroiled with the Paris mafia. From *Gaceta Ilustrada*, Bayo reported both the murder and the name of the man he regarded as the likely assassin. Benicho had no difficulty in leaving France by plane, despite any suspicions about the killing and even though he had been questioned by the gendarmerie, and was able to blithely enter Canada without any police meddling, even though he had been identified by one of the customers in the bar that Cerrada had just left.

Meanwhile Manolo went back to live in Perpignan, at No 35, Rue Foch. From time to time he shared the place with Eduardo and Antonina. Enric Melich told me that he was used to seeing Antonina out walking in the streets of the city with Manolo when the latter was unwell. He also told me how, back in the 1970s, he happened to be driving a batch of Sten sub-machineguns on their way from Toulouse to Perpignan on the Mediterranean for the new groups that the youngsters were setting up. Those sub-machineguns were the very ones that the old maquis had used and which were now the legacy of upcoming generations in keeping up the timeless struggle. Melich was very much on edge as he had not been caught up in arms deals for some time. Manolo, who spotted that there was something up with him, had a good long chat to find out why he was so edgy and got him to admit the real reason. So Huet took charge of the 'irons' and delivered them to their destination. But the recipient was not bothered when he saw that the delivery driver was not as arranged, as the person who was going to take delivery of them, prior to their being salted away and handed over later was none other than Mariano Puzo. It was also at around that time, when the far right planted a bomb that destroyed the Spanish Bookstore that Melich ran in Perpignan; anyone with any doubts as to the sort of reading matter to be found there had only to see the display window filled with social and political books. That was on 15 June 1976 and shortly after that Huet and Pons Prades showed up to see that Enric was alright and view the damage. Eduardo wrote an article denouncing the attack.

We referred previously to Eduardo's and *el Padre's* stays in Puigcerdà and will do so again in the next chapter. They corresponded pretty frequently with each other; in fact, Terres was still sending out questionnaires to his friends regarding both the Sokolnikoff affair and other matters that he was chasing up.

To round things off, a traffic accident occurred up around Lerida, close to the French border and it has been quite hard to dig up any mention of it in digital newspaper libraries. It should be said with regard to his death that it reached my ears that in the end Manolo committed suicide, because of his illness he was grappling with promised to leave him paralysed. Supposedly, this information could be found among Eduardo's papers, although I could not find it in the Pons Prades holdings at the National Archive of Catalonia; but Rosa Sala and Placid García-Planas did locate it in the course of researching their book *El marqués y la esvástica*. Subsequently, when I got in touch with Rosa, she forwarded me what they had found on Huet and the final paragraph of it was this: "According to a working note from the Pons Prades archive (at the ANC), Huet took his own life in October 1983, upon learning that he was suffering from an illness that would leave him paralysed."¹⁶² But I think that I can discount that hypothesis after a further talk with Antonina, because when I asked her about and informed her of the note's contents, she told me that she knew nothing about it.¹⁶³ Besides I think there is one detail that demolishes that theory. Huet was not travelling unaccompanied in the car: his wife was with him and Manolo loved her dearly. As I see it, anyone intending to kill himself from behind the steering wheel, well, the last thing he would do is travel with a companion. Antonina also told me that Rosa was not keen on Manolo driving on account of the violent coughing fits he suffered from and which may well have caused him to lose control of his car and crash it into a tree. The upshot was that Huet was left in a serious condition and Rosa sustained a variety of injuries, from which she, fortunately, recovered. In one last blow to this thesis, my friends from the A Les Trinxeres collective have sent me a newspaper clipping regarding his accident, including a number of interesting details, as follows: "At 18.10 on Monday last (24-10-83) at the 14 kilometre mark on the C-148 highway in the townland of Alfarràs, a collision took place involving a saloon bearing the French licence plates 576-JD-66, driven by 76 year old, Manuel Huet Piera and a farm tractor ... As a result of the accident, the driver of the saloon was seriously injured and was removed to the Social Security Hospital in Lérida where he passed away at 00.35, yesterday, Tuesday. The saloon's occupants, 72 year old Rosa Huet Curt and 50 year old María Huet Curt, sustained serious injuries and were similarly admitted to the same health centre ..."¹⁶⁴ In the end, Manolo was buried in the city of Toulouse.

Yet again, I should, as ever, remark that all of the sources that I have consulted, whether on the internet or the ones cited by the historians Ferrán Sánchez Agustí and Miguel Ñíguez and the libertarian publication *CeNiT*, all agree on the date of death as 24 October 1984. The only fly in the ointment is the note from the archive which dates it one year earlier. Pons Prades was alone in insisting that it was in 1983. Once again we have the dearth

¹⁶² Correspondence from Rosa Sala on 21-5-2017

¹⁶³ Interview with Antonina Rodrigo in Barcelona on 6-7-2019

¹⁶⁴ *Diario de Lérida*, 26-10-1983, p. 20

of information regarding anything connected with Huet, even the very date of his demise. No more and no less than a year and seven months had to elapse before we find a note on his death, wherein the obituary writer expressed himself as surprised as I was at the lack of interest displayed in Manolo's fate and end. That text was carried by *CeNiT* and part of it reads: "And the shocking thing is that no one has in this instance commemorated comrade Manolo."¹⁶⁵ What the author was expressing there was his thoughts seven months on from the accident. Not just that, but if we pay close attention to the clipping, we will see the date of death was not even the 24th, but the 25th, at 00.35 hours. In the blind spot yet again, out of the limelight.

¹⁶⁵ *CeNiT*, 21-5-1985, p. 7

Chapter 46

The Guerrilla War of Remembrance

However this book may have come into your possession – as a loan, a purchase, stolen or because somebody paused for a moment to download it from the net – you and I both know that essentially we are indebted to Eduardo Pons Prades for it. The recovery of the memory of the very many men and women who took part in the escape lines, the French resistance and the subsequent guerrilla war against Francoism is down to him and his commitment. Later, for a range of reasons, other men and women took it upon themselves to filter that memory from the media centres, rounding it up and interring it once again in the depths of oblivion. So first and foremost and, in capital letters, THANK YOU! Eduardo for your tremendous efforts and tenacity, for opening all eyes to this cast of interesting persons and their stories.

Had it not been for the efforts of that guerrilla of remembrance, I would never have learnt even the name let alone all these “adventures” of Manolo. Initially I was seduced by those stories and then they drew me into an enthusiastic project (my own this time) of attempting to write a book on someone utterly unconnected with your life. Someone who lived life intensely, but always in the “blind spot”, well away from the limelight. Someone hardly ever mentioned, even though he had been in on virtually every “rumpus”, as Antonina put it to me. Someone who died nearly 40 years ago.

Eduardo was born on 19 December 1920 in the Calle Wifred in the Barcelona district of the Raval. The son of Valencian anarchists, Eduardo Pons Sisternes, a dyed-in-the-wool pacifist, from the woodworkers’ union and Gloria Prades Nuño, telephonist who had no hesitation in helping and hiding anarchist activists, despite the odd disapproving look from her partner. Actually, when Eduardo senior soberly and wisely counselled that “your best friend is a book”, Gloria’s brother Miguel, the uncle to Eduardo junior, could not help but add the clarification “sure, but with it a good pistol, for otherwise, they will never pay you any heed.”

A member of Ángel Pestaña’s Syndicalist Party, Eduardo’s calling as an educator soon came to light and he committed himself to his studies at the Labour School in the Calle Urgell. Remember also that he passed through the Rationalist School on the Calle La Cera. Eduardo earned his bacallaureate shortly before the fascist revolt on 19 July so, rather than putting it to use, he threw himself into collectivization of the Woodworkers’ Union. We recall here that our ‘guerrilla of remembrance’ was born in December 1920 and so was too young to march off with the columns or to enlist. So, in 1937, falsifying his papers, he secured admission to the School of War in Escorial de la Sierra, arriving there in August 1937. Three months later, he passed out with the rank of sergeant-instructor and ‘Militian of Culture’, assigned to the 105th Mixed Brigade, posted to the Guadarrama hills. In March 1938, while on furlough in Barcelona, he was injured in a fascist air raid. One of the falling bombs struck a lorry laden with explosives; it went up and as well as demolishing several buildings and claiming many lives, it resulted in Eduardo’s being admitted to hospital. He woke up there a couple of days after the explosion which kept him out of action and away from the front lines for nearly a month. By the time he was pronounced fit for service again the Centre zone had been cut off by the Francoist advance so he was unable to rejoin his unit. He saw action on the Segre front as well as in the battle of the Ebro, where Manolo also was, and when it became plain that there was nothing else for it, they started their withdrawal. In the course of that withdrawal between mid-December and up until the French government opened its borders, he was involved in evacuation of the wounded, of which Josep Robusté Parés was in charge. Under his command and with the assistance of Huet’s lorries they ferried upwards of 10,000 wounded republicans out of the country. After returning to Barcelona and commandeering a vehicle, Pons Prades just about managed to bundle his mother into it. Gloria Prades had sat down in the middle of the street and was refusing to leave the city and abandon all her belongings to the fascists who were already approaching. Eduardo’s younger siblings also left with them.

He crossed into exile via Port Bou during that horrific, icy February 1939. Shortly after he had crossed over the fascists arrived on the border. Thanks to his papers showing him as war wounded he secured a transfer to Carcassonne, thereby avoiding the ghastly camps into which the French state herded Spaniards arriving in its country. In November that year he joined the French army as a machine-gun lieutenant with the XIII March Regiment, his company being decimated by German flame-throwers between Belgium and Luxembourg. Remember here that that the French army held off the German panzers for just 40 days. During 1941, Pons

Prades was making contact with a range of factions like Solidaridad Española and was in touch with French military circles as well as with the very first groups of resisters. Drafted into GTE No 422, he was posted to Carcassonne and given the position of office-worker/translator. After the Germans overran Vichy France, a lot of those GTEs were transformed into action and sabotage squads and in the spring of 1943 became guerrilla detachments once and for all. Between 1942 and 1944, our 'guerrilla of remembrance' could be found operating as a guerrilla in the fullest sense of the term, but this time as a captain commanding a century of French-Spanish maquisards.

Following the liberation of the south of France, he, like many another of his countrymen turned their sights towards the other side of the Pyrenees. In mid-October 1944, he slipped across the border, mounting an intelligence-gathering mission on behalf of the Syndicalist Party and this brought him to Euskadi, Oviedo, Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona. In late 1945, he crossed the border again, intent on looking into the chances of mounting a future attempt on the life of the dictator. Just prior to his turning back for France he was arrested near Puigcerdà, although he managed to escape shortly afterwards thanks to a bribe slipped to a police officer, who must not have been very clued-up as to who he was. Later he spent time in Valencia working on foot of phoney papers.

In 1956, on 1 September to be precise, he married fellow writer Antonina Rodrigo García in Granada city: she had chosen the date by way of a tribute to Mariana Pineda¹⁶⁶ who had been born on that date. They were inseparable up until Eduardo's death in 2007.

It was in France that he embarked upon his historiographical endeavours and setting his intense life experiences down on paper. Later he managed to enter Spain legally in 1962 thanks to the intercession of Camilo José Cela. The latter was a friend of the Francoist minister Fraga Iribarne, who sorted out Eduardo's permit. Once back in Spain, and among other things, he worked with the launch of the Alfaguara publishing-house and on a number of publications and periodicals, as well as embarking on a prolific career as a writer.

If we look at the internet, there are various sources that tell us that Eduardo and Manolo became acquainted in 1941. That may well have been when they became friends, but if we follow the threads through this book, we will see that they already had a number of locations and experiences in common on a number of occasions. We might recall that during the events of July 1936, in Jover's apartment in Poble Nou, a skinny, gawky 16 year-old would show up on his bicycle. That skinny kid was in charge of passing on news arriving at the Generalitat's telephone switchboard on which his mother, Gloria Prades, worked. That may well have been their first time they ever met face to face. Subsequently in late December 1938, Huet's lorries were deployed to ferry wounded to nearer the border and, as we have already said, Eduardo was one of the people overseeing that evacuation effort. Once in exile the vagaries of history threw them together again and they were still on the same side of the trenches – Huet operating within the escape lines and Eduardo as a guerrilla attached to the resistance, the former in Sète, the latter in Carcassonne and surrounding areas. That was when their collaboration and quite possibly friendship began. Later, when the 'guerrilla of remembrance' wanted to enter Spain surreptitiously, he used one of the crossings prepared by Manolo through Andorra, plus some of his connections in the customs posts, as we remarked earlier in our chapter dealing with the Maritime Antenna. How often they saw each other over the ensuing years as they were both living as exiles, we cannot tell. We do know that in the late 1950s, they both had a hand in the establishment of the Iberian Revolutionary Front (FRI) and that Manolo, tried to use their friendship to get *el Quico* to join its ranks: as we saw in the chapter about Sabaté, Francoist bullets put paid to any chance that *Quico* might have agreed to do so. Later, in the 1970s Eduardo launched another guerrilla war every bit as significant as the one he waged during the 1940s. This new campaign was intended to banish the oblivion spread by the passage of time, one backed by a lot of people and fed by more or less deliberate silence. And so in his fight against dis-remembering up popped one of the forgotten – Manolo. And Huet started to talk, not just talk, but also to ensure that Eduardo got to know and

¹⁶⁶ Mariana Pineda Muñoz, born in Granada city on 1-9-1804. Orphaned at the age of 15 months, she married at the age of 15 and gave birth to a son and a daughter before being widowed at the age of 18. A woman of a liberal and progressive turn of mind, she was arrested on 18-7-1831, tried and executed on 26 May that year for planning the escape of an army major cousin of hers in 1828. After her death the populace turned her into a legendary figure and Federico García Lorca harnessed this in the writing of his play *Mariana Pineda*.

speak with many other forgotten ones, male and female. And Eduardo set it down on paper – and how! – and all those people and all those stories began to come into the light once more and to shake off the dust.

Actually, Eduardo and Antonina moved to Perpignan, moving in with Manolo and Rosa at 35, Rue Foch, even though our ‘guerrilla of remembrance’ was spending more time in Barcelona and elsewhere around Spain than at home. Antonina told me an amusing anecdote, that there was some hold-up in Eduardo’s receiving his pension in France and he had to go through a number of interviews as a result, all of the paperwork for which had been sorted out for him by Manolo. Antonina reckoned, correctly, that it was better for her not to go with him, given that they had been a couple for 15 years by then. Besides what were they going to think when they saw a ‘codger’ like Eduardo with a girl like her on his arm? Manolo agreed and he accompanied the writer to that interview. Antonina remembers Manolo’s gracious version of events:

“Mariano and I stepped inside that bank, one of us supporting Eduardo on either side and inside it was ... all bright lights and majesty. No sooner had we set foot inside than Eduard stumbled. We were dragged down with him and, I know not how, he tripped over his own feet and fell and, the floor being so shiny fffftttt ... skidded right up to the counter. They never asked us a thing, just ushered us through, produced the forms and said straight off: ‘Sign there!’”¹⁶⁷

Antonina recalls that Manolo was very grateful to Eduardo, having spent a lot of time with him. Thanks to their reliving all those old stories and their trips to see old comrades, matters have floated to the surface when there was no one around to remember them. In fact, as we have stated before, they enormously enjoyed the short breaks they spent in the Hote de Golf in Puigcerdà, when Huet, *el Padre* and Eduardo would while away the day with stories old and new. Another small victory for Eduardo in his guerrilla war against forgetfulness was the shooting and subsequent screening of the program *La Tribuna de la Historia*, broadcast on Televisión Española’s Channel One on 16 February 1976 and consisting of a discussion of the role of Spanish republicans during the Second World War. In addition to Eduardo, Robert Terres took part, delighted that he was finally able to pay a heartfelt tribute to ‘his Spaniards’ on their native soil. Eduardo carried on working with any initiative designed to recover historical memory, be they documentaries, festivals, texts or talks, as long as his age and health allowed him to. The writing of this book about Manolo represents another small victory for our ‘guerrilla of remembrance’ and it is virtually certain that it will not be his last.

To complete this chapter and offer a taste of what Eduard’s personality was like I have just stumbled upon a most interesting paragraph on the internet. Shortly before he lost his life and during one of his last hospital admissions, it states:

“On his previous admission to the Sant Pau hospital in Barcelona a few weeks back, he delivered his last talk to doctors and nurses from the hospital and to a large group of female friends on war-time health and the evacuation of the hospital that he himself oversaw during the retreat of the republican troops at the end of the war. That talk was delivered masterfully, being painstakingly planned and expressed with his peerless sense of humour and obvious teaching talents (teaching being the trade that he would have liked to follow, but which he was prevented from doing so by the civil war, just as it thwarted him in one of his favourite pastimes, dancing).”¹⁶⁸

Even on the brink of the grave the leopard cannot change its spots.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Antonina Rodrigo in Barcelona, 17-1-2019

¹⁶⁸ Taken from <http://estelnegre.balearweb.net/post/35653>

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS CITED

1933

The *Nosotros* group is formed.

24 April: Barcelona tram strike erupts.

25 October: Manolo Huet is arrested by city police on the Ramblas.

1935

1 July: A goodly number of the members of the action group made up of Josep Vidal, Rafael Sansegundo, Santiago Iranzo, Luis Carrillo, Salvador Solsona, Joaquín Silvestre and Manolo Huet are detained by the Barcelona police. The first four are placed under arrest, with the whereabouts of the other three unknown.

1936

January: First meeting between Manolo Huet and Robert Terres aka *el Padre* in Barcelona's Hotel Oriente.

28 April: The Badía brothers are murdered in the Calle Muntaner by members of a libertarian action group. Manolo Huet was allegedly at the wheel of the getaway vehicle.

17 July: Members of the Marine Transport Union raid the arsenal on board the vessels *Manuel Arnús*, *Argentina*, *Uruguay* and *Marqués de Comillas* at anchor in the port of Barcelona. The weapons seized are taken away and stored on the union's premises.

17 July: Fascist military revolt erupts in the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco.

18 July: Fascist military revolt on Iberian soil triggers the civil war.

19/20 July: The rebel troops are defeated in Barcelona, Madrid and the Cantabrian coast (with the exception of Galicia), Extremadura, Levante and much of Andalusia and Aragon. Worker forces contribute enormously to that defeat.

1939

January-February: Mass exodus of civilians and military making for the French border after Barcelona and much of Catalonia fall to the fascists. Some 500,000 people cram the highways and roads, bent of getting out to France and away from the savage repression and relentless air raids.

26 January: The French government declares its border with Spain closed.

28 January: The French government allows civilian personnel across its Pyrenean border.

5 February: The French government allows republican military units to cross the border.

4-7 February: The nation's treasure is ferried into France, especially via Le Perthus. Much of it will be hauled by lorries from Manuel Huet's Company.

1 April: The Spanish civil war formally ends. The repression will carry on for many years to come.

23 August: The German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact is signed.

1 September: The Second World War begins with the Nazi army's invasion of Polish sovereign territory.

3 September: France and the United Kingdom declare war on Germany.

1940

January-April: Francisco Ponzán's initial contacts with the British Intelligence Service.

10 May: Germany invades the Low Countries and Luxembourg, entering French territory.

22 June: The French army capitulates to Hitler's troops. The Vichy regime is established and the country is then divided into an occupied zone under German control and a free zone under the control of Pétain's collaborationists.

Summer: Francisco Ponzán and his network start working for the French secret services as well as for the Belgian and Polish escape lines.

1941

January-March: The Sète-based Maritime Antenna is formed by Manolo Huet and ventures into its early contacts and escapes.

Summer: Following a trip to Toulouse city by Huet and Segunda Montero, they establish contact with Francisco Ponzán and place their network at his disposal.

1942

11 November: The Germans overrun the so-called free zone of France, with all the changes that this implies for the security of all clandestine activities.

1943

March: Albert Guérissé, head of the '*Pat O'Leary*' escape line is arrested in Toulouse, as is the tailor Ullmann. In Paris, Jean de la Olla is arrested.

28 April: Francisco Ponzán Vidal is arrested in Toulouse by members of the French police.

1944

6 June: The Allied armies land on the Normandy beaches, opening up a western front.

17 August: Ponzán and another fifty inmates are removed by lorry from the Saint Michel prison in Toulouse by the Germans. Forced to alight on the outskirts of Buzet-sur-Tarn, they are machine-gunned and their corpses are burned by the Gestapo.

19 August: The resistance in the French capital issues a summons to an uprising and general strike. Manolo Huet is actively involved in the fighting. The city of Toulouse is liberated by FFI forces, among whom the Spanish guerrillas are outstanding in terms of numbers and activity.

24 August: Paris is liberated and the first Allied troops enter the city and, whether our French neighbours like it or not, those troops are Spaniards from No 9 Company (*La Nueve*).

September-October: Following the liberation of the south of France, the UNE issues a call for Spanish guerrillas to muster along the border. There will be incursions all along the border line and a mass influx of some 3,500 guerrillas into the Valle de Arán, the intention being to establish a bridgehead and compel the Allied armies to recognize the government of the Republic which would establish itself in Viella, the capital of the Valle de Arán. But Operation '*Reconquest of Spain*' ends in failure.

1945

25 April: The city of Milan is liberated by partisan units. From the premises of the firm Cartografia & Carte e Valori, where some Spanish currency was printed, members of the Malatesta-Bruzzi partisan brigade impound the plates that will later be taken to Paris and handed over to the CNT regional committee there, headed by Laureano Cerrada.

8 May: The war in Europe is formally ended following the capitulation of the German armed forces to the Allied powers. The previous day, the Nazis had signed an unconditional surrender.

9 September: The last Japanese troops in China surrender, signalling the formal ending of the Second World War.

1946

February: A van belonging to the Crédit Lyonnais is held up in Paris in a raid organized by Huet and Cerrada. The cash netted in this raid will be used to purchase the Norecrin light aircraft meant to assassinate Franco, with some more of it being set aside for arms purchases to be made in Italy.

1947

May: An attempt is made to assassinate the dictator Francisco Franco in the Llobregat mining district (Barcelona). 50 libertarian guerrillas set off from the *mas* Tartas base, kitted out by Cerrada and guided by Ramón Vila. The fog that descended during the overnight trek through the mountains caused the substantial group to straggle and the matter ended in gunfire in the darkness, when the guerrillas bringing up the rear mistook some of the 'stragglers' for Civil Guards. The rattle of the gunfire and Franco's close proximity in the valley alerts all the troops in the area which results in the assassination plan being aborted.

21 May: Manolo Huet and several comrades are arrested in Cavi di Lavagna by Italian police whilst in the act of buying arms for the anarchist resistance.

12 July: A team led by José Pareja executes the traitor Eliseo Melis on the Calle Montealegre in Barcelona. Pareja himself is fatally wounded in the exchange of gunshots.

1948

July-August: In swoops in Barcelona and Zaragoza, the Transportes Galicia S.A. company is dismantled, with tens of persons belonging to the libertarian movement in both these cities being arrested and jailed. At the same time, a number of arms and explosive dumps are uncovered.

12 September: An attempt is made at an airborne assassination bid in the bay of San Sebastian during the yachting regatta attended by the dictator. The light aircraft used was forced to turn back to France after being intercepted by Spanish Air Force fighters just as the dictator's yacht was coming into view.

1949

10 May: The French police discover one of Cerrada's illegal printworks in the basement of the Hotel des Vosges in the 18th *arrondissement* of the French capital. In addition to counterfeit money and lottery tickets, they stumble upon an arsenal of weapons and explosives. Six Spanish anarchists are arrested.

1950

January: Laureano Cerrada is expelled from the MLE for his "unacceptable methods". He pulls off a feat, miraculous for that time, when he unites the entire CNT without a single voice inside the organization to contest his expulsion. Many would keep mum as to what they had up until that point been paid by Cerrada, but that is another issue.

18 January: Arrest of Laureano Cerrada, José Ballus and Calpe Bádenas on counterfeiting charges.

1951

18 January: On this date in Lyon an anarchist gang raids a post office van on the Rue Duguesclin. The upshot of the raid is the deaths of two guards and a passerby, another guard seriously wounded and a further 10 people wounded, 9 of these civilians and one a member of the attack team. There was a huge crackdown targeting the MLE in France in the wake of this raid.

1955

12 January: Opening of the trial of 14 Spanish libertarians in an amalgamation of 17 cases, foremost among them that of the hold-up of the van in Lyon. The outcome is that Juan Sánchez is condemned to death, Francisco Bailó and Antonio Guardia to life imprisonment and Joan Català to 20 years behind bars. The remainder of the accused received lesser sentences.

1960

1-5 January: *Quico Sabaté's* last ever venture on to Catalan soil. He and his companions had crossed the border on 29-30 December. On 3 January, his comrades Martín Ruiz Montoya, Francisco Conesa Alcaraz, Rogelio Madrigal Torres and Antonio Miracle Guitart were mown down by the Civil Guard at the *mas* Clarà. On 5 January, on the streets of San Celoni, Francisco Sabaté was to breathe his last.

1961

26 August: An inter-continental gathering, the Limoges congress of Local Federations, agrees to the much yearned-for unity of the CNT, which had broken down in the wake of the 1945 Toulouse congress. Of course, theory is all well and good, but practice something quite different.

1962

12 August: As part of an intensive campaign of attacks using explosives on the part of the Defensa Interior organization, a bomb is placed on this date in Spain's chief fascist mausoleum, the *valle de los caídos* (the dropping of the capital letters being a deliberate action on my part). The explosion injured no one and did no great damage.

1963

7 August: The last anarchist guerrilla, Ramón Vila Capdevila meets his end near the 'La Creu del Perelló' farmhouse in the townland of Castellnou del Bages. He is mown down by the Civil Guard after having carried out sabotage attacks on power lines over the preceding days and whilst making his way back to the safety of the French border.

1975

20 November: Dictator Francisco Franco finally dies. To the chagrin of many from Spain and abroad, he dies in his bed.

1976

18 October: The anarchist counterfeiter Laureano Cerrada is shot dead on the Boulevard Belleville in Paris. He is 74 years old at the time of death.

1983

25 October: As a result of a traffic accident in the province of Lérida the previous day out by Alfarràs, Manolo Huet loses his life and his wife, Rosa, and daughter María are left injured.

GLOSSARY OF INITIALS CITED

ACUN – Union Nacional's CNT *Agrupación*

ANC – National Archive of Catalonia

BEP – Office of Pyrenean Studies

BPS – Political-Social Brigade

CE – Counter-Espionage

CESD – Higher Defence Intelligence Centre

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CIRA – International Centre for Research on Anarchism

CNI – National Intelligence Centre

CNT – National Confederation of Labour

CTE – Foreign Labour Companies

DB – Armoured Division

DI – *Defensa Interior* (Homeland Defence)

ERC – Republican Left of Catalonia

FAI – Iberian Anarchist Federation

FFI – French Forces of the Interior

FIJL – Iberian Libertarian Youth Federation

FRI – Iberian Liberation Front

GTE – Foreign Labour Group

HMS – His Majesty's Ship

IS – Intelligence Service

MLE – Spanish Libertarian Movement

OJC – Jewish Fighting Organization

PCE – Communist Party of Spain

POUM – Workers' Party of Marxist Unification

RAF – Royal Air Force

SERE – Spanish Exiles Evacuation Service

SIA – International Antifascist Solidarity

SIEP – Special Long-range Intelligence Service

SOE – Special Operations Executive

SS – *Schutz Staffel*

TR – Rural Affairs

UGT – Workers’ General Union

UN – National Union

UNE – Spanish National Union

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Illustrations [not in the online edition]

1. Copy of birth certificate of Manuel Huet Piera, forwarded to the author by the Court in Ayora.
2. Certificate identifying Manuel Huet as captain with the 7th Automobile Transport Battalion
3. The *Boletín Interior*, mouthpiece of the 7th Automobile Transport Battalion
4. (top) Republican army lorries hauling arts treasures from the El Prado museum to the city of Valencia, November 1936. (bottom) The La Corniche quarter in the French town of Sète where some of the people smuggled by the Maritime Antenna were hidden.
5. (Left to right) Joaquín Blesa aka *Quimet*, José Vidal aka *Vidalet* and Manolo Huet in Sète in August 1940
6. (top) The *Dora* at anchor off Sète in 1940 (bottom) One of the exercise books kept by Paco Ponzán detailing some of the escapees that his network was smuggling out to Spain.
7. (top) Paco Ponzán (second right) with a number of his people-smugglers in Varilhes in 1940. (bottom) Drawing by Alicia Calle paying tribute to the Ponzán network's female smugglers and go-betweens. From left to right – Alfonsina Bueno, Elisa Garrido, Segunda Montero, Pilar Ponzán and Lucía Rueda.
8. Robert Terres aka *el Padre*, a member of the French Secret Services
9. (top) Juan Zafón and Lucía Rueda, members of the Maritime Antenna, in France in 1943. (bottom) Ángel Soto, Manuel Soto (back row), with Huet and Montero in the foreground. The identities of the rest of the people in the photograph, I do not know.
10. (top) Some of the members of *La Nueve* the Spanish company that liberated Paris; here they are posing in England in July 1944, shortly before their departure for France. (bottom) The *mas* (farmhouse) Tartas, the legendary guerrilla base in the French Cerdagne. This sketch, from the 1940s, is by the guerrilla Domènec Ibars.
11. (top) Laureano Cerrada Santos, pipe in hand. The great counterfeiter and sponsor of the anarchist underground in France, 1946. (bottom) Police photograph of Michel Szkolnikoff in 1941
12. (top) Antonio Verardini, part of Laureano Cerrada's counterfeiting team. (bottom) Press captured from Cerrada's team in the Passage Goix in May 1949.
13. (top) Juan Sánchez aka *el Pelao*, a member of Cerrada's expropriator groups. He had a hand in the abortive hold-up in Lyon and was sentenced to death as a result, although that sentence was later commuted. This photo dates from his time in prison. (bottom) Francisco Bailó Mata, a member of Cerrada's expropriator groups. A survivor of Mauthausen camp, he took part in the Lyon raid and was sentenced to 20 years in prison as a result.
14. A clipping from *Le Populaire* newspaper of 18-7-1951, revealing some of Laureano Cerrada's "business interests".
15. *Quico* Sabaté with his famous propaganda mortar, in 1955.
16. (top) Letter from Robert Terres to the French government attesting to Huet's involvement with the *Pat O'Leary* network and work on behalf of TR 117. (bottom) left to right - Eduardo Pons Prades with Robert Terres and Manolo Huet in the Hotel Golf in Puigcerdà in 1979.