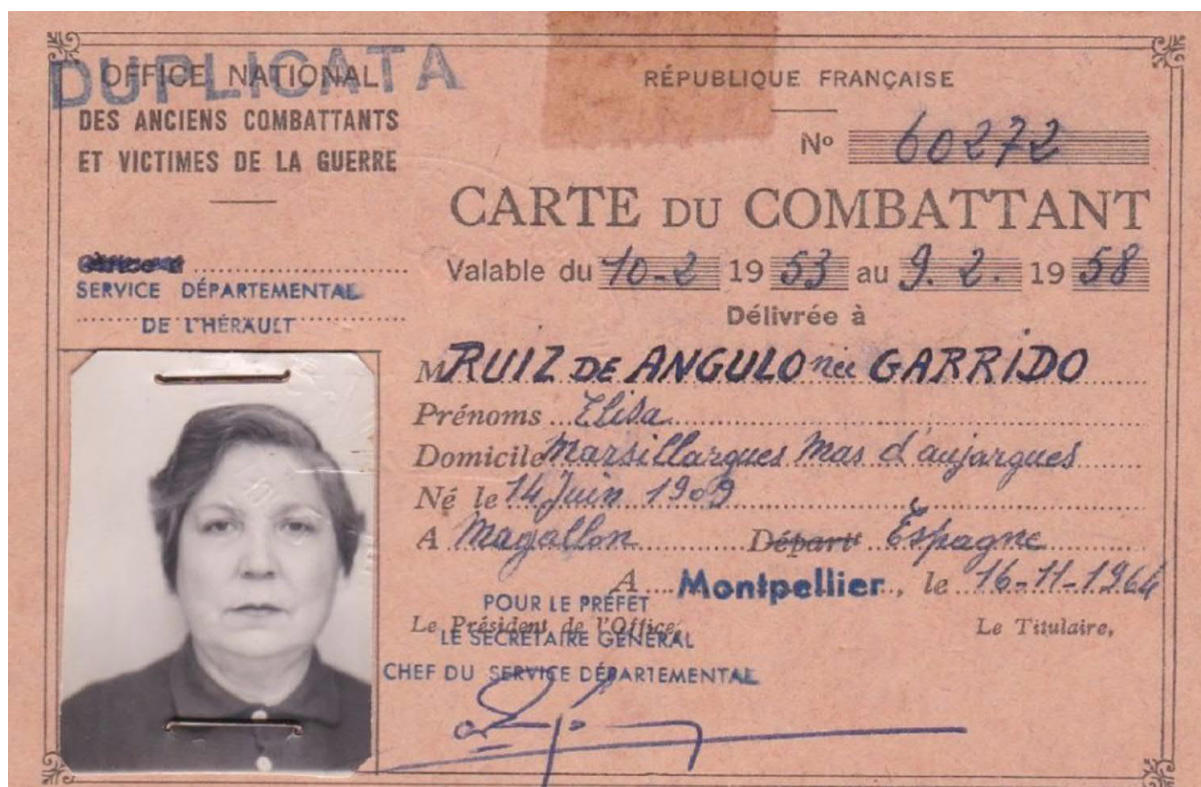


WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ALLIED ESCAPE LINES

Today we turn to the hidden and unfamiliar role of Spanish women's participation in the escape lines set up by the Allied secret services to counter the Nazi occupation of Europe

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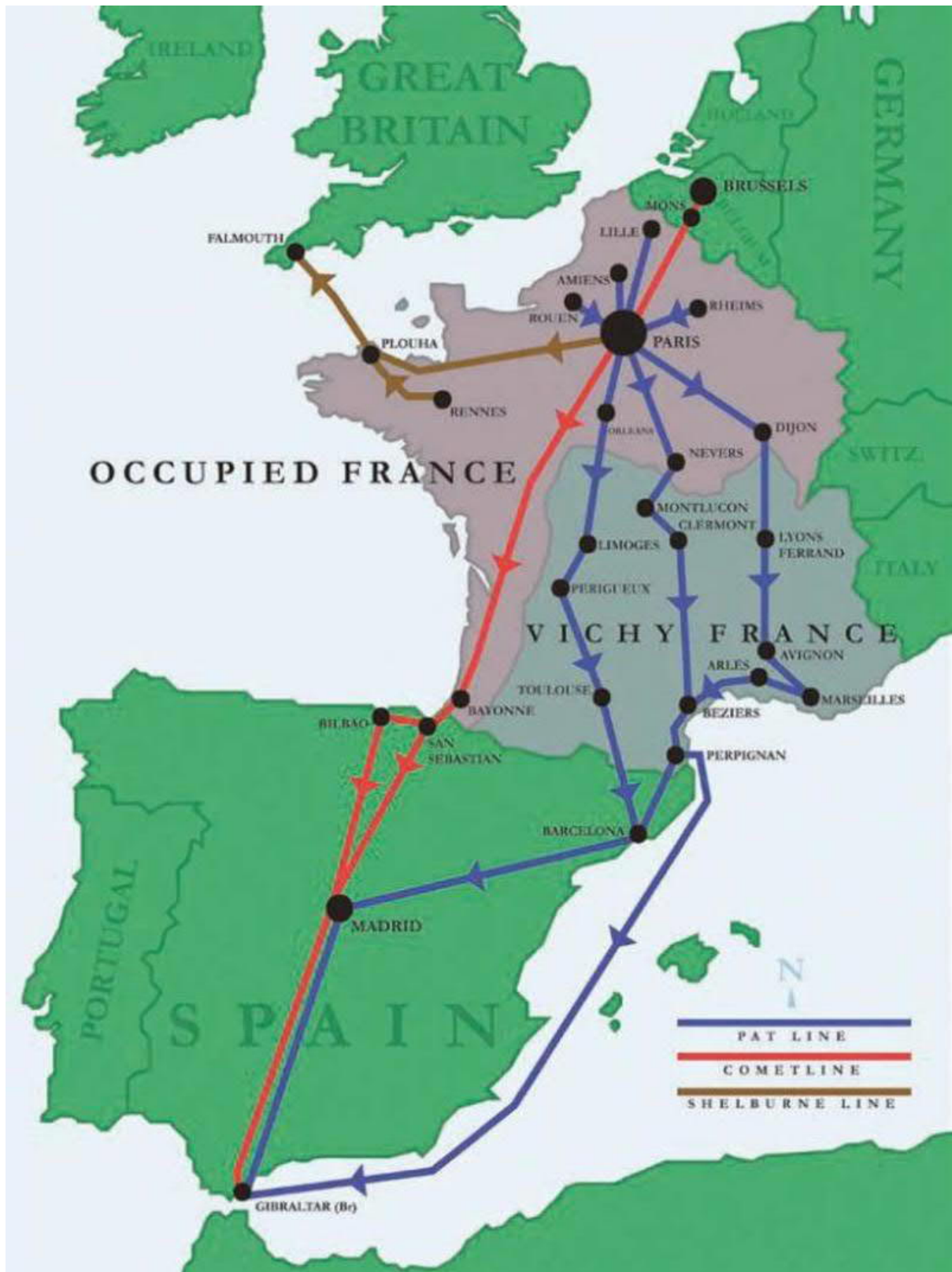
[Elisa Garrido, member of Ponzan's network, was deported to Germany and later became an anti-Nazi saboteur.]

I have, I must admit, been spending quite some time delving into the escape lines operating between France and Spain during the Second World War. With regard to information per se, I have lots; too much, I sometimes think. But recently having come up with the brainwave of looking into women's role in those lines, I have come to realize that, whether they participated or not in them, they have been overlooked.

And so, I started all over again. But this time looking out only for the part played by those women. Actually, I would go further and my first interest was in finding out who they were. Because, as ever in the maze of memory, if you were not merely clandestine but also female, you will find yourself doubly forgotten and consigned to the huge trunk of un-remembering. To cap it all, one of the men who was the embodiment of French manhood and resistance, the man who went on later to become President Charles de Gaulle not only downplayed the role of the resisters, but whittled it down as far as he was able, to the military and the menfolk only.

My first surprise was to stumble upon a stack of names, most of them entirely unknown. In fact, most of the information for this articles is based on Diego Gaspar Celaya's text *Au combat sans armes*. And if I was able to find them it was because they were there waiting to be found. The issue is: Had I overlooked them because unless you specify that it is women you are looking for, it is the men's

stories that pop up, or is it that they did put in an appearance, only for me to pay them no heed? I shall leave that hanging.



[Main routes of three of the best known evasion networks.]

For the benefit of anybody interested, let me say that the escape lines were in charge of smuggling many thousands of people wanted by the Nazis out of several European countries and as far as the Allied embassies in Spain and Portugal or, if possible, all the way to Gibraltar. Those lines were set up and funded by the Allied secret services which also supplied the arms, forged papers and even radio sets to the various escape lines.

Followers of this blog will know that I normally zero in on libertarian circles, so today, as ever, we have to start with the network that had the largest number of male and female libertarians among its members. We refer to the Ponzán network or *Pat O'Leary* escape line.



[Pilar Ponzán, sister of Paco, while an inmate in the Brens camp in 1942, following her arrest.]

The Ponzán network was one of the most significant operating in France and evacuated something between 2,000 and 3,000 people, most of them smuggled over the Pyrenees, but also by sea. Under the supervision of the anarchist school-teacher Francisco Ponzán aka '*Vidal*' who handled the Toulouse-to-Spain routes, a lot of anarchists were active, but, as we have said, today it is the females we are concerned with. So, let us begin with the women who also served in that escape line. The first was Ponzán's own sister, Pilar. Francisco's unfailing collaborator, she was rounded up in a gendarmerie swoop and served several months in the Brens prison camp. The Aragonese **Elisa Garrido** was part of the network, initially in the area of the Alps and later in Toulouse. Arrested, tortured and deported to Germany where was part of a labour commando sent out from the Buchenwald camp, she helped blow up the shell plant in which she was working.

As part of the same escape line's maritime branch, Valencia's **Segunda Montero** aka *Conxita* and **Lucia Rueda** aka *Patro* were outstanding as couriers. Among other things they were in charge of escorting the survivors of 'Operation Nutshell' from Marseilles to Perpignan and Toulouse.[1] **Margarita Sol** operated as a liaison for the escape line and her home in Toulouse held one of the line's counterfeiting workshops. **Alfonsina Bueno Vela** operated out of Banyuls and in addition to harbouring people in her own home she busied herself collecting weapons dropped by the British and intended for both the network and the maquis. Arrested in 1943, she was deported to the camps in Germany, but managed to survive and return. In addition to the above, other collaborators with the Ponzán escape line included **Generosa Cortina Roig**, **Palmira Pla**, **María López**, **Antonieta Bretos**,

Pepita Solé or **Carmen Mur Arderiu**. Most of these women were anarchists. Following the arrest of the head of the *Pat O'Leary* line, the Belgian Albert Guérissse in mid-1943, the Frenchwoman Marie-Louise Dissard aka *Françoise* took charge of the line up until the end of the Occupation and the defeat of the Nazis

In the French-Belgian *Comète* line which usually smuggled people out through the western Pyrenees, which is to say, via the Basque Country, we find, among others, **Francisca Halzuet** aka *Frantxisca* who was arrested along with several airmen in January 1943. Deported to Germany, she perished in the Ravensbruck camp. Part of the same escape line were **Maritxu Anatol**, **María Irene Angoso**, **María Garayar Recalde** and **Consuelo Olorón**. Finally, given that today's focus is on "the girls", it should be said that this network had been founded by the Belgian citizen Andrée De Jongh.



[The Basque, Maritxu Anatol, member of the Comète escape line.]

Luisa Rodríguez was active with the *Brandy* escape line as a courier from 1942 up until the liberation of France. She too endured the inevitable arrests and interrogation by the Gestapo. **Feliciano Llach** was also a courier with the same line.

Earlier, we mentioned **Generosa Cortina** who was working for the *Pat O'Leary* line. She was also to be found working for the Belgian *De Jean* escape line.

In the French escape lines, we find **Rosa Hernández** with the *Action R1* line; she also worked with the Picaussel maquis. The *Action R3* line included **Adela Guardia** and **Primitiva Vilarrasa**. The former also worked with the *Combat* teams in Béziers.

Palmira Fernández and **Elena María Picón** worked for the *AJ-AJ* line which was run by the Allied High Command. They both served as couriers for the network, although Palmira combined those efforts with working as a mountain guide and taking charge of collecting weapons dropped by parachute.

The British *Alibi* escape line had the cooperation of **Carmen Aguilera Zapater**, **Rosario Fábregas** and **Braulio Cánovas**. They too combined those efforts with acting as guides and harbouring escapers in their respective homes.

The *Andalousie* escape line was served by **Concepción Davín**.

The libertarian **Agustina Tomás Chale** worked with the *Robur Alfred* line.

We find **Aurora Díaz Monje** acting as a courier for the communist *Base Espagne* escape line: so did was **Marina Vega de la Iglesia** from Cantabria; she later acted as a spy on behalf of the Allies.



[Cantabria-born Marina

Vega de la Iglesia, a member of the escape lines and later a spy on behalf of the Allies.]

The Belgian *Sabot* line had the collaboration of **Segunda Montero** aka *Conxita*, whom we have seen also working with the Ponzán network. **Carmen Gardell García** and her daughter **Sabina Bartoli** also worked for the *Sabot* line but were involved also with the *Darius* escape line. **Carmen Gardell** was deported to Germany and died there.

María Gloria Barragán combined her work as a liaison with working as a courier and intelligence agent for the British *Georges France* network.

María Benítez Lúquez worked for the British *Gilbert* escape line.

Teresa Fenolleras acted as a guide for one of the Polish escape lines, covering the route from the border down to Barcelona.

Pilar Álvarez belonged to the American *Buckmaster* network whilst also working for the libertarian guerrilla Ramón Vila Capdevila.

Marcela Cayetano operated as a liaison for the British *Jade Fitzroy* network.

María Angulo, **María del Carmen Parra Moreno** and **María Josefa Sansberro** worked with the British *Shelburn* line. The first two name harboured escapees in their homes and served as back-up. Sansberro operated as a courier and as a mountain guide.

Rosa Muñiz and **Matilde Sirven** acted as liaisons and couriers on behalf of the French Naval Intelligence.

The anarchist **Rosa Camps** served as a liaison in Bordeaux. She escorted airmen from Bordeaux to Bayonne and hid resistance members in her home. She was arrested and tortured by the Gestapo before eventually being released in May 1944.

The libertarian **Pepita Solé** took part in a small, mostly CNT-staffed escape line linking Buciet in the Pyrénées Atlantiques department with the Navarrese capital, Pamplona.

Another anarchist, a prominent sportswoman and poetess, **Ana María Martínez Sagi**, joined one of the escape lines in the city of Chartres, but which one has yet to be clarified.



[Ana María Martínez Sagi – anarchist, poet, sports star, journalist, lesbian and member of the resistance in France.]



[Generosa Cortina with her husband Jaume Soldevilla; both were involved with the escape lines.]

Paquita Argote worked for the *Jove* escape line.

Teresa Terraza operated as liaison for the *NAP* [2] as well as harbouring and shipping weapons or hiding escapers. As if that was not enough, she worked actively alongside the *Combat* and *MUR* resistance groups in Montpellier.

Micaela Egea worked with the Polish *PSW-AFR* escape line.

This represents only an opening salvo, a sample of women's part in the escape lines. Unfortunately, a lot of names will have been omitted and some of these I hope to include over time. Equally unfortunately, if we search for information about women, maybe half or more of the ones cited here go unmentioned other than in Diego Gaspar Celaya's text. There is a lot of work to be done but nobody said that it was going to be easy. If all goes well, the next ones to get a mention in these pages will be the women who took part in the resistance in France, but let us not get ahead of ourselves ...

Translation: PS

Notes [KSL]

1, The Spanish *Cascara de Nuez* may be a mistranslation of Cockleshell, in which case the reference should be to Operation Frankton (Cockleshell Heroes) in December 1942. Two of the surviving raiders, Major Herbert Hasler and Corporal Bill Spark followed the post-raid route outlined in the text here, from Lyon to Perpignan then across the Pyrenees.

2, The NAP (Noyautage des administrations publiques – Penetration of Public Administrations) was founded in 1942 to infiltrate/monitor the Vichy administration and prepare for its postwar replacement.

All photos: Imanol <https://www.elsaltodiario.com/autor/imanol>