



Foto de passaport d'Elio Ziglioli || Arxiu personal de la família Ziglioli

ELIO ZIGLIOLI, AN ITALIAN IN THE ANARCHIST GUERRILLA STRUGGLE:

THE STORY OF A RETURN

By way of introduction

I could go into detail regarding when and how I first heard tell of Francisco Sabaté Llopart, *Quico*. The death of a guerrilla in the town where I was a student made such an impact on me that his figure has one way or another stuck with me throughout my life-time.

In the final year of my Philosophy and Letters (Contemporary History) course and having no knowledge of what armed opposition to Francoism entailed, I and a friend did some research into Quico Sabaté. Off we went, building up a bibliography – in 1987 it did not amount to much – consulting newspaper libraries and interviewing first-hand witnesses to the death of the maquis. Naturally, this university research represented a watershed in my knowledge of the anarchist fight against Francoism.

By the year 2000, I was on the panel planning to organize a meeting in Sant Celoni paying tribute to Sabaté. In the first talk I had ever given, I had the privilege of briefing the populace of Sant Celoni on Francisco Sabaté's fight against fascism as well as the details of his tragic death.

[Image: Elio Ziglioli's passport photo]

In 2010, I drafted a project on behalf of the "50th Anniversary of the Death of Quico Sabaté" commission. Lots of activities and talks were planned, there was to be a blog on the Internet and, for the first time in 50 years, Sabaté's younger daughter, Alba, was to take part in a talk alongside Lucio Urtubia and speak about her father. There would be a graveside tribute, a statue would be erected on the spot where he alighted from the train and a mural painted with a message calling for social revolution. No other anarchist guerrilla, perhaps, had ever been rendered such tribute.

That commemoration prompted me to go further and to press on with my research into the trajectory, not just of Francisco Sabaté, but also of his two brothers, Manuel and José. With greater or less intensity, from late 2009 onwards, on the basis of the most utter modesty and the utmost respect for the feelings of relations (regrettably almost always feelings of grief) I dipped into 35 documentation sources in Spain, France and Holland and recorded 15 interviews, as well as consulting bibliographies and contemporary newspapers for the sole purpose of adding to the priceless information offered in his day by Antonio Téllez, the author of the book, *Sabaté, guerrilla urbana*.

Elio's death, in context

1 April 1939 marked the official ending of a three year civil war. The final dispatch issued by Franco, the Victory Dispatch, proclaimed:

"On this day, the Red Army being captive and disarmed, Nationalist troops have achieved their ultimate military aims. The war is over.

Generalísimo Franco, Burgos, 1 April 1939"

The first battle against fascism had been lost. But the war carried on. On 1 September the same year, the Second World War began.

Not everyone was in agreement with the outcome of the misnamed Civil War: many refused to stand down and were to carry on with the fight and a large number of exiles were to serve in the French Resistance. The battle-field might have changed but the enemy was unchanged. The aim was plain: once Europe had been rid of Hitler and Mussolini, Francisco Franco would be the next to fall. Unfortunately, this did not prove to be the case as a series of circumstances (the Cold War, a war-weary population, brutal repression and so on) were to aid and abet the regime's consolidation.

All in all, a number of historians break down the armed opposition to Francoism into distinct chronological phases:

- The years 1939-1944 are referred to as the 'on the runs' period (to borrow the official phrase). In that initial phase, guerrilla activity was mounted by small groups that had taken to the hills in order to survive. They left to escape torture under police interrogation, imprisonment, 'dragnet' operations carried out by Falangists and night-time shootings (or *paseos*). They took to the hills to escape concentration camps and villages where the local caciques held the threat of fresh arrest over their heads. Those guerrillas operated in an impromptu fashion, outside of the political and trade union organizations.
- The period between 1945 and 1951 saw the maximum phase of the guerrilla movement's activities. It opened with the Vall d'Aran incursion in October 1944 when between 3 and 4 thousand well-armed guerrillas embarked on the 'Reconquest of Spain' operation in order to establish a bridgehead in the Vall d'Aran where a provisional government of the Republic presided over by Juan Negrín could be installed. The failure of the invasion in the open countryside led to a reconsideration of the struggle. From then on it would be fought by small cross-border groups. On 22 May 1945 the Civil Guard General Directorate banned the use of the terms 'maquis' and 'guerrilla' in all documents. Francoism's intention was thereby to drain the armed resistance of political content. All of those fighters with their unmistakable ideological beliefs were now being represented as bandits or (much the same thing) criminals. As far as the outside world was concerned therefore, instead of a conflict of arms it had been reduced to a matter of public order:
- *"It is emphatically forbidden to refer to the gangs of robbers operating in various locations around the Peninsula using the terms 'runaways', 'maquis', 'guerrillas', 'rebels', etc. Therefore, from now on, every time reference is made to these evil-doers, they are to be referred to as bandits or highwaymen, as befits the common offences they commit, and that label shall be applicable also to those coming from France to pursue their criminal activities along the border or in the interior. Madrid, 22 May 1945"*.

In spite of everything, the dictator was to be fortified by and to draw advantage from the Cold War, declaring himself to be a natural ally of the United States. As a result of which in 1946 the communists dropped their guerrilla tactics as a method for overthrowing the dictator. The new line was that machine-guns were to be traded for underground printing presses. A few years later, the anarchist leaders followed suit. In 1952 the Civil Guard reckoned the phenomenon was now a thing of the past.

- 1952 signalled the opening of a period characterized by the personal feats of a handful of die-hards unsupported by the libertarian organizations in exile. The proximity of the border and density of the population ensured that many of their activities took place against an urban backdrop. They operated in the towns (hold-ups, clandestine propaganda, sabotage attacks, etc.) and looked to support bases in a rural setting from where they could then flee for France. Gradually, they were gunned down by the forces of repression. Guerrillas such as Marcelino Massana, José Luis Facerías, the Sabaté brothers and, finally, Ramón Vila Capdevila (*Caracremada*) should be included in this phase.

This bunch of men and women were to be the reference point and inspiration, if you will, for future clandestine organizations that carried on plotting against the dictatorship. To take just two examples, we might mention Defensa Interior (Octavio Alberola, Stuart Christie, Salvador Gurrucharri, Francisco Granado or Joaquín Delgado) and the Iberian Liberation Movement (MIL) (Salvador Puig Antich, Oriol Solé Sugranyes, Jean Marc Rouillan and others).

Elio Ziglioli, From Lombardy to the Pyrenees

It is against the backdrop of the resistance to Francoism on the part of the libertarian organizations that we must see Elio Ziglioli's incursion – which some see as the last whereas others view it as the only one.

In terms of publications, the earliest reference to Elio turned up in the novel by an unidentified author *Habla mi conciencia: José Francisco*, published by Alas publishers in 1956. The writer describes the evolution of his protagonist, an exile by the name of *José Francisco*, from his entry into the resistance groups up until he finishes up in prison, repenting what he has done:

“They were a motley crew. Among them were an Italian they called Helios Cighioli, two Aragonese brothers with the odd surname of Culebras, another guy called Cornejo, plus Aced and Busquets.” (p. 125)

As we follow the narrative, figures from the anarchist guerrilla war turn up, such as *Llaugí* (an alias of Ramón Vila), Manuel Sabaté, José López Pedrero (*Tragapanes*), Pere Adrover (*El Yayo*), Francisco and José Sabaté, Massana, etc. As discernible in the account, the writer must have been a member of the Francoist security forces with direct access to the police files, which may well explain the highly detailed information in the novel. Oddly enough, in the same year as the novel was published Quico Sabaté was photographed at the Arco del Triunfo in Barcelona: he was back operating in the city off his own bat and at his own risk.



Elio amb dos exiliats a Carmaux || Fons Antonio Téllez-Arxiu d'Història Social d'Amsterdam

The first, more concrete information on Elio Ziglioli comes from Antonio Téllez, the biographer of Francisco Sabaté, *Quico*, in the second edition of his book *Sabaté: guerrilla urbana*, published in Paris in 1974. Téllez offers some basic but vital details for anyone starting to search for facts about Elio. He writes that he came from the Italian city of Lovere, that his parents had long since separated and that he had gone to Paris in search of his father. And it looks as if, having found him, he was disappointed. He was to come into contact with Spanish exiles active in anarchist organizations like the CNT and the Libertarian Youth (JJ.LL). There are indications that he spent time in Carmaux: in Antonio Téllez's personal archives held at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam there are snapshots of him with other individuals. Following the trail of the clandestine struggle, he wound up in the city of Toulouse where he was to come into contact with José Sabaté. The likelihood is that before heading into the Pyrenees, specifically for Mas Tartàs (Palau de Cerdanya), he lodged with José's partner Emilia Beriain and their son, Helios Sabaté.¹

Through contacts with his family in Lovere in 2010, I have been able to establish further information about Elio. And on 13 May last, at the funeral in the cemetery in Lovere, his friend Remo Clarai, 92, spoke movingly of his friend and what they had been through together.

[Image: Elio with two exiles in Carmaux [José Arroyo and Ricardo Martínez, identified on losdelasierra website]. Antonio Téllez Solà Collection, International Institute for Social History (Amsterdam)]

1 In all likelihood, José Sabaté called his son Helios after his great Italian pal. But, in keeping with the libertarian movement's tradition which shunned Christian names, José tacked on an 'H' to the name to invest it with a naturalist and pagan resonance. In libertarian circles children were customarily 'baptized' with names such as Aurora, Liberto, Libertat or Germinal, among others.

His parents were Tobia Ziglioli and Bartolomea Volpi. He lived in Lovere and was raised by his mother until 1948, spending many of his summers with his maternal grandparents. He was very young when his parents separated. His paternal grandparents (Pietro Ziglioli Vobarno and Lucrezia Soldati Noble Varese) and uncles (Severo Ziglioli and Francesca Caminada) played a very telling part in his rearing. A restless youngster, he had studied French, Castilian and Esperanto.

The substantial involvement of youngsters from Lovere in the partisan movement against fascism between 1943 and 1945 was certainly to leave its mark on Elio's personality: the very first nucleus of the Lovere 53rd 'Tredici Martiri' Garibaldi Brigade was to be formed in the home of his grandfather Giacomo Volpi.

In 1945, just before the end of the Second World War, he sent a letter to his mother from an unknown location and was photographed with his comrades in a partisan base known as Malgalunga.

Elio's father, Tobia, had been a communist militant for many years. It was his beliefs that prompted him to flee Italy. Harassed by the fascists, he sought refuge in Paris where there was a community of people from Lovere.

In 1948, Elio decided to pay his father a visit in Paris. Their encounter was none too affectionate and the bonds between father and son could not be rebuilt. Some years earlier, Elio had encountered anarchist ideas and the Spanish libertarian movement's fight against Franco. An ideological clash was inevitable.

Signatures dels components del grup d'acció «Los Primos» processats a finals de 1949 || Fons arxiu personal d'Argimiro Ferrero

His paternal uncles, even though they had had no news of Elio since 1948 (and believed that he had signed on with the French Foreign Legion) were to move heaven and earth to keep his memory alive, never losing hope that he might one day walk in through the door.

The group that was to turn up at the farmhouse known as Mas Tartàs located in the village of Palau de Cerdanya was trained by the Defence Committee at the Rue Belfort in Toulouse (the so-called 'terrorism school' as it was described by the fearsome Superintendent Eduardo Quintela in his reports).

The Ford Mercury van driven by the charismatic José Pascual was to set off from Toulouse on 3 September 1949. Carrying the brothers Saturnino (29, aka *El Primo*— hence the name of the group) and Gregorio Culebras (39), Miguel Acevedo Arias, Manuel Aced Ortell (35, aka *El Boxeador*), José Conejos García (38, aka *Conill*), Joan Busquets Verges (21, aka *El Senzill* or *El Chaval*) Elio Ziglioli (22), Manuel Sabaté Llopert (24) and Ramón Vila Capdevila aka *Caracremada* (41).

In Palau de Cerdanya (according to what José Conejos stated) each member of the group was to have his phony papers and his rucksack. They shared out the weapons, to wit, eight Sten guns, eight pistols, eight hand grenades, some plastic explosives, some limpet bombs, incendiary explosives and a few metres of fuse-wire. Ramón Vila handed each of them a thousand pesetas.

[Image: Signatures of the members of the 'Los Primos' action group tried in late 1949]

There is every likelihood that both Ramón Vila and Ziglioli and Sabaté had been to the farmhouse before. There are documents that speak of all three of them – Vila, Ziglioli and Sabaté – having been arrested that June by the French gendarmes. The name of this particular action group was *Los Primos*. We know that most of them lacked expertise and that this was their first venture into incursions of this sort. To two of the group's members, this

was nothing new: Joan Busquets had made two or three crossings of the border and had roved the mountains of the Berguedà and Bages under the orders of Marcelino Massana. He was only too familiar with farmhouses such as Cal Moreno, El Flequer or Casassaies. The other group member inured to actions of this sort was Ramón Vila Capdevila aka *Caracremada*, who had been active in the French Resistance, was a bit of a lone wolf, knew the border trails like the back of his hand and was the CNT's main guide. It was his responsibility to see them safely to the gates of Barcelona via Terrassa so that they might contact the clandestine militants already operating in Barcelona, José Sabaté for one.

We know from statements made later under questioning in the police station in the Via Laietana and from Joan Busquets's own testimony that the group was to cross the border on 4 September. As was conventional, they moved by night and slept by day, in an attempt to dodge any Civil Guard 'patrols'. The group was to drop in at the Cal Moreno farmhouse (near Berga) and spent eight days there before proceeding on through the Berga district without incident.

Joan Busquets explains that when they were 4 kilometres from the Ponte de Vilomara-to-Rocafort road, Culebras decided to hijack a car. The point was to make it to Vilomara and hold up the "innkeeper". They tried to flag down the first car to happen along, but, far from slowing down, the driver accelerated and almost ran them over. The guerrillas opened fire with their sub-machineguns. Civil Guard reports note that this occurred at 9.00 p.m. on 23 September. The car was carrying José Pujol Viñas (a Manresa landlord and industrialist), María Cuadrado Martínez (a seventeen year old maid) and Benito Abel Sabata (driver), María Cuadrado was hit by two bullets and they all made every effort to accelerate away so that the girl could be attended to as soon as possible.

In the 23 December 1949 verdict at the end of expedited case 638-IV-49, in one of the many explanatory paragraphs, we find the following:

"GIVEN that, after having weighed at some length the evidence placed before the court, the Council is persuaded that the situation of the accused deserves to be punished with the utmost rigour in light of the terroristic, unruly intentions driving all the members of the 'LOS PRIMOS' gang from the moment they left Toulouse bound for Spain and which have been set out in paragraph five of this verdict where it has been shown that, minded to raise the funding to meet their needs, they decided to attack an inn-keeper from the Manresa comarca, to which end they came down from the hills on to the Pont Vilomara-to-Rocafort highway, waving down a vehicle, licence plates B-70609, belonging to D. José Pujol Viñas and, upon the latter's refusal to stop, fired their sub-machineguns – several bursts – whereupon the vehicle halted, SATURNINO CULEBRAS very actively stepped in, so much so that he was the one who asked the driver of the vehicle for his papers and his cash, as did those named MANUEL SABATER, JUAN BUSQUETS, RAMÓN LLAUGER and ELIOS CICLONE who fired their weapons, LLAUGER's current whereabouts being unknown, and CICLONE was killed in a clash with the security forces whilst attempting to cross the border, GREGORIO CULEBRAS, MANUEL ACED ORTELL and JOSÉ CONEJOS GARCÍA, who were very close to the scene of the incident colluding in this grievous incident (...)" – verbatim copy.²

The next day, the group split up: Saturnino and Joan pressed on alone, making for Matadepera, Terrassa and Barcelona, though not without first having a brush with a gang of Somatén members. The others were to stash their gear in various locations before following the same itinerary; Ziglioli, Vila and Sabaté started out on the trip back to the border. Their mission was complete.

Joan Busquets describes how Elio went into Matadepera to buy grub for the return trip but roused the suspicions of the shopkeeper who alerted the Civil Guard ("suspicious individual buying food in the shops") and he was arrested on 28 September. The report from the Command of the Terrassa Civil Guard dated 15 October 1949 bears this out:

"I have the honour of informing Your Excellency the respected Authority that, as a result of the inquiries carried out by the undersigned Captain and men under his orders: At 20.30 hours on 28 September he was alerted by a

2 In historiographical terms, documentation generated by the Francoist state's security forces – the Civil Guard or the Brigada Político-Social – is enormously valuable. It does, however, need to be treated with care. In no case can it be accepted as a sole source of information and, insofar as possible, ought to be shrewdly compared and contrasted with other sources like biographies or oral testimony. Plainly, the methods employed by detectives from the Police or by the 'ranks' of the Civil Guard during interrogations (systematic beatings, abuse, threats, insults or unrelenting whipping) largely tainted the statements made by arrested persons.

phone call from a Matadepera resident, name not given, that a suspicious person had been spotted buying food from shops in that village, so I set off with several men for that place, tracking down the individual in question who claimed that he was a FERNANDO GARCIA BERNÓN, 19 year-old bachelor, mechanic by trade, a native of La Coruña, supposedly the son of José and María. Put under questioning he admitted that he was a bandit who had come with a further 7 persons and further claimed that they had 5 sub-machineguns plus various explosive materials in two rucksacks hidden in a wood in the Castellar del Vallés area and when the Lieutenant in command of the Monistrol precinct, D. Antonio Brunet Ferrer, was sent with him and men under his orders to pick up said gear, on nearing the location, he tried to attack the men with a bomb that he had had hidden in a bush, the attack being repelled, and he was killed. On the 30th of the month, another bandit by the name of Manuel Sabater Llopart was detained by the Captain of the 2nd Vich Company, and on his being brought before me, he admitted to being one of the members of the gang of 8 which had come down from France.”

That official version of events conflicts with the testimony gathered by Jordi Guillemot and published at <http://caudelguille.net>. On foot of interviews and first-hand testimony he was able to determine that the tip-off to the Civil Guard regarding the presence in the village of a suspicious individual came from the night watchman (sereno), known as ‘El Tanta’.

In 2002 Guillemot was to interview Dolors Argemi, the female farmer from El Castell, who remembered the emotional impact made by the sight of a handcuffed Elio looking dishevelled and unkempt and bearing the marks of torture undergone under interrogation, under escort by two Guards and asking for a sip of water and, of course, the short, dry crack of the gunshot that was to end his life within moments of leaving El Castell. The striking photo of the death certificate found in the Castellar del Vallés Civil Registry bears this out. Dolors’s daughters, who were very young in 1949, still have vivid memories of Elio and his fleeting passage through El Castell. The fact that the hearse, the usual means of transport for dead bodies, was standing by indicates that Elio’s fate had already been decided by those who held him captive. His body was to be buried in the civil section of Castellar cemetery.

It is worth highlighting the few official documents recording Elio’s statements, the circumstances of his arrest and, ultimately, his death. Oddly enough, the Italian’s name gets only a small number of mentions. As rightly indicated by Jordi Guillemot, maybe the intention was to erase him from the written record; the death of a foreigner in strange circumstances might have triggered diplomatic problems. But what became of the rest of the members of the *Los Primos* group? Ramón Vila Capdevila and Manuel Sabaté, after Elio failed to return, feared the worst and decided to press on with their return to France. The day after Elio died, 30 September, they approached the La Musarra farmhouse only to be greeted with gunfire by the Civil Guard. In all the confusion, Vila ducked to the side and Sabaté got lost in some woodland. On 1 October Manuel Sabaté was arrested in La Moratona – near Moià – according to the Civil Guard. In his statement he stated twice that he had tried to give himself up, a perfectly valid suggestion, given that he was lost, had lost his bearings and, besides, had no prior convictions that might imply he would receive a heavy prison sentence or even be sentenced to death.

Manuel was taken to the police station on the Via Laietana before being placed in the Modelo prison on 6 October. There, on 17 October, he would receive the awful news that his brother José had died at the hands of police detectives. José left a widow (Emilia Beriain) and a 17 month-old son.

On 7 November 1949 Pedro Polo Borreguero, chief superintendent of the Special Services Squad at Police Headquarters, with detective Antonio Juan Creix (a notorious torturer of anti-Franco oppositionists, including the former president of the Generalitat, Jordi Pujol) acting as his secretary, drew up a report describing the arrests of the remainder of the group. According to that report, on 17 October detectives arrested José Conejos and Manuel Aced. The following day they caught Joan Busquets at his parents’ home. On 20 October Miguel Acevedo Arias (a 35 year-old aka *El Patillas*) would be picked up; in the chicken coop in his home they were to find three pistols and ammunition. The Culebras brothers were caught the same day.

The trial took place on 7 December 1949, with Infantry Colonel Luis Pumarola Alaiz, a veteran of the Blue Division, acting as supervising magistrate. They were charged with “having crossed the border by irregular means bent on carrying out hold-ups, killing, carrying out acts of vandalism and breaching the established order.”

Gregorio Culebras, Miguel Acevedo, Manuel Aced and José Conejos were given 30-year prison terms. Saturnino Culebras was sentenced to death. Under the 1947 Banditry and Terrorism Law, leadership of an action group was a guarantee of a death sentence. Manuel Sabaté and Joan Busquets received the same sentence.

In the cases of Saturnino Culebras and Manuel Sabaté, the pleas of their defence counsels proved pointless. Sentence was carried out with startling speed. On 24 February 1950 they were picked up in the morning from the Modelo prison and taken to the Campo de la Bota to be shot. In Manuel's case, the mere fact that he was the brother of the intrepid Francisco Sabaté counted against him.

The only member of the *Los Primos* group to make it back to France was Ramón Vila Capdevila aka *Caracremada* who carried on with his incursions into Catalonia and was to be gunned down in August 1963 by the Civil Guard in Castellnou del Bages after blowing up some electricity pylons.

Joan Busquets's death sentence was commuted into a thirty-year prison sentence. After 20 years of captivity and shuttling around several of Franco's prisons he was to be released on 18 October 1969. He tried to pick up the threads of his life in Barcelona but ended up slipping over the border into France again. He currently lives in Brittany and has long been campaigning to have the maquis recognized as fighters for the Republic.

Gregorio Culebras Saiz was to be released on 26 August 1959 and died in Barcelona in 1980. Gregorio had been in the Natzweiler concentration camp and in the commando Allach from which he was liberated on 30 April 1945. From the horrors of Nazism to Franco's prisons: just one of many trajectories still awaiting acknowledgment and reparations.

Manuel Aced Ortell, after he was freed on conditional licence from Burgos prison in 1959 was to be expelled to France and settled in Toulouse.

Miguel Acevedo Arias was to be released from El Dueso penitentiary on 12 January 1960.

What became of José Conejos García after sentencing we do not know.

Elio Ziglioli was not to be the only Italian to be involved in the anarchist resistance. According to Antonio Téllez, in February 1956 Francisco Sabaté picked up José Luis Facerías and an Italian from the French-Italian border. Setting off from La Preste (near Prats de Mollo) they crossed the border along with Ángel Marques Urdi and arrived in Barcelona. Squabbling between Sabaté and Facerías prompted the latter and the Italian to head back to France after they had robbed the clientele at the 'El Escorial' garage (19 March 1956). Téllez does not name the Italian in question, maybe in order to protect him. Years later, in his book on Facerías, he named him as Gian Carlo Ventimiglia, which may well be a phony name.

José Luis Facerías was to make his final trip down to Barcelona in late August 1957, in the company of Goliardo Fiaschi (a native of Carrara) and Luis Agustín Vicente (aka *El Metrallera*). The security forces got wind of the group's arrival: Luis Agustín was to be arrested in Sabadell on 27 August. Two days after that it was the turn of Goliardo, in a hut on Tibidabo. On 30 August, Facerías would be gunned down in the park in the centre of Nou Barris.

Goliardo and Luis Agustín were brought to trial in August 1958 and given sentences of 20 and 24 years, respectively. The Italian was to serve only eight years in Franco's prisons before being extradited by the Italian courts on charges of involvement in a bank hold-up.

The Battle against Forgetfulness and Deliberate Oblivion

In my on-off search for documentary evidence, diving into archives, researching bibliography and during interviews, I always operated on the basis of this basic assumption: I wanted to offer the relatives whatever I could find out in order to help resolve the mystery surrounding what had become of their father, grandfather or uncle. As a general rule, anyone throwing himself into the underground struggle abided by strict rules of discretion and the family was given scarcely any information: they would go off and cross the border and, after a while, re-appear: knowledge was dangerous. For this reason I have tried to share with the closest relatives everything that I was uncovering, no matter how harsh the reality spelled out in any documentary source I came upon. Meaning that, with the utmost respect for their pain, I have shed light upon the darker recesses of Memory.

As part of the organizing of gatherings marking the 50th anniversary (2010) of Quico Sabaté's death in Sant Celoni and, in light of Antonio Téllez's book, I wondered what an Italian could have been doing in the anarchist guerrilla war. Once again, I was distracted from the main aim of my study, the trajectory of the Sabaté brothers, but I could not resist certain temptations whilst investigating that body of men and women.

In the aim of adding to my knowledge of Elio I sent a letter out to various bodies and agencies in Llovere, Elio's native city. A week after that I had a gratifying letter from Roberto Ziglioli: "I am Elio Ziglioli's cousin." This was to prove the opening of a History, a great History that might never have been possible but for the contributions of the researcher Jordi Guillemot. His discreet, serious and methodical field-work has been of incalculable value in uncovering what happened over those months back in 1949. His web page carries a description of Elio's final moments in El Castell: and his interview with Dolors Argemi is priceless.

From the outset, Elio's relatives' lack of information came as a surprise. They had had no word of Elio since 1948: they had scoured half the world looking for him, approaching consulates, embassies and the Red Cross ... But there was no trace of him. The CNT's practice was to inform family members of the tragic end of any of its militants. In Elio's case, no one took that trouble. Not even after Téllez's book with its description of the Italian's death in a shoot-out with the Civil Guard was first published back in 1972.



Enterrament de les restes d'Elio al cementiri de Llovere (13 de maig de 2019) || Foto Argimiro Ferrero

[Image: Elio's remains are laid to rest in Llovere cemetery (13 May 2019)]

As the swapping of documentary evidence proceeded, the research parameters widened, and there was the disinterment and recovery of the body, a plan that could never have been carried out successfully but for the constancy of Enrica Volpi and her cousin Claudio, the interest shown by Ignasi Giménez (mayor of Castellar del Vallés), Giovanni Guizzetti (mayor of Llovere) and Carme García (director-general of Memòria back in 2018). In June last year the body was located and by the end of the year, using DNA analysis, we had confirmation that the remains were Elio's. On 2 May this year, there was a moving ceremony in Castellar cemetery: the Generalitat handed the remains over to family members who had expressly travelled over from Llovere and on 13 May they were placed in the family vault in that Italian city. Bringing to a conclusion a phase that had taken around two years.

Not that this Italian was the only instance of violent death around Castellar del Vallés over those years. In the Civil Registry record books, under the date 5 July 1949, there is a record of the death of a person unknown who perished of the same causes ("traumatic bleeding"[!]) as Elio. His remains too have been recovered in the hope that in time to come further information may be forthcoming as to his identity. As of this moment, nothing is known.

And there is another case awaiting resolution. In early May 1949 Guillermo Ganuza Navarro entered Catalonia accompanied by José Luis Facerías, Jesús Martínez aka *El Maño* and José Serrano. The group was tracked down by the Civil Guard and Guillermo was wounded; hours later he was to die in Can Salvi, in the townland of Sant Llorenç Savall (Vallés Occidental). Ganuza was to be laid to rest in the cemetery in San Feliu de Codines but there is no record of precisely where. Nor do we know anything about his family members.



Detall de l'acta de defunció de l'altre «desconocido». Registre Civil de Castellar del Vallès (5 de juliol de 1949) || Arxiu personal d'Argimiro Ferrero

Even as the remains are being recovered, there is an urgent need to uncover the much manipulated past and to fight against intentional oblivion and the warp and weft of lies and slanders woven by the bloodthirsty dictatorship, and, ultimately, restore these anarchist combatants to their proper place in History. Despite the satisfaction of helping his family to find out about Elio's past and acceding to their wishes, one burdensome task remains. We have retrieved the body and returned it to his homeland, but restoring him to his proper place in History we can never do unless we carry on with our investigations and publicizing them.

Elio is part of a body of men and women who stood up to Francoism, libertarians of extraordinary human qualities, idealists of rough diamond integrity and with an exceptional set of values. They have been willy-nilly marginalized, consigned to oblivion, utter ostracization and disremembering. The battle against the tissue of lies and slanders cooked up by the bloodthirsty dictatorship so that we may rediscover them and bring them the dignity of being part of our collective Memory is a duty we cannot shirk. One significant step forward in this process has been the production of the documentary "*Un vas d'aigua per a l'Elio*" (A Glass of Water for Elio), made by Pere Jon Ventura.³ Its screening at the Bram 2018 festival in Castellar del Vallès (on 2 March 2018) represents a giant step forwards.

Let us hope that the case of Elio Ziglioli may help to sustain the hopes of all who seek a decent burial for their family members who are gone, so that some day Spain will no longer come in just behind Cambodia as the country in the world with the largest number of common graves.

[Image: A detail of the death certificate issued on the other "person unknown". Civil Registry in Castellar del Vallès (5 July 1949)]

The Spanish state's Justice Ministry estimates that 2,500 burial sites have been uncovered throughout the country, containing some 130,000 victims of the Civil War and Francoist rule (figures provided by the Historical Memory associations). In 2013 a UN working party dealing with forced or involuntarily disappeared persons produced a report. Three years later, the Partido Popular government had yet to follow a single one of its recommendations.

³ <https://vimeo.com/260322264>

I should like to end this modest contribution with a thought from Jesús Martínez Malueda aka *El Maño*, CNT guide and Ramón Vila Capdevila's number two, because we often have questions and doubts about the sense of the sacrifice and struggle of men such as Elio, or, and it amounts to the same thing, wonder it was all worthwhile. Some people reckon that the Catalonia making its way today and visible around us, Catalonia the disobedient, Catalonia the rebellious, Catalonia the defier of the authorities, might not have been the same but for the legacy left by that generation of men and women.

“(…) And now the years slip by and one realizes that such old matters might be instructive for certain men, certain youngsters; that tough times also lie ahead of the young. I think. And when one sees certain things and you read the Spanish or the French newspapers you realize that the world is not going in the direction you want or how it should and that tough times lie ahead of people. So maybe, maybe, all the old stuff that we did, all of us, every one of us who thought that this society is a mess, can help the young to pause for thought and say: ‘Why, those guys from eighty years ago were right to fight the way they did; and we must carry on with their fight.’ And that day is coming. I believe it is on its way because the way the world is headed is not at all clear. Maybe there are men who will press on regardless, eh? ...”

Toulouse, September-October 1998, August 1999⁴

Elio Ziglioli, we have shipped you home to Lovere, but your dream, your ideal of Justice and Liberty lives on.

Sant Maria de Palautordera, June 2019

Argimiro Ferrero

Translated by Paul Sharkey. [Copyright of the article remains with Argimiro Ferrero. We can put you in touch if you would like to – for example – reprint it. Kate Sharpley Library July 2020.]

First published as Ferrero, Argimiro. «Elio Ziglioli: un italià a la guerrilla anarquista. Història d'un retorn». Plaça Vella, 2019, Núm. 60, p. 7-22, Available online at: <https://www.raco.cat/index.php/placavella/article/view/365464>

[The two other people in the photo from Carmaux are José Arroyo and Ricardo Martinez. See biography of Ziglioli (where his first name is given as 'Helios') at <http://losdelasierra.info/spip.php?article8785>]

4 Jaume Serra Fontelles, *El duende del maquis* (Ed. Virus)