THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

PREFACE

The Unsung Struggle

Spanish Anarcho-Syndlcalist Resistance to Franco 1939-51

THE PLOT TO ASSASSINATE FRANCO FROM THE AIR - 1948

The course of Spanish History might well have been changed on

Sunday 12th September 1948 on the second day ofthe fishing boat

regatta being fought out at San Sebastian before the eyes of

General Franco. A group of Anarchists in exile had laid their plans

that the chief of state should die in the waters of La Concha bay

beneath a hail of incendiary and shrapnel bombs dropped from a

light aircraft.

The earliest confused inklings of this spectacular scheme were

disclosed by the French newspapers in February 1951 when the

anarchist aircraft which was to have bombed the Caudillo was

uncovered.

In a book published in Paris while Franco was still alive (1)

Antonio Tellez included a chapter entitled "The mystery plane"

which retailed details then available about the plan, but identifying

those involved only by their ititials. Subsequently the journalist

Eliseo Bayo, intrigued by the story, interviewed the organiser of

the assassination bid, one Laureano Cerrada Santos, in Paris.

Cerrada was the subject of an article in the Gaceta lIustrada (17th

October 1976), one of a series later issued in book form (2).

By the early 1980s only two of those actually and directly involved

in the plan to eliminate the Spanish head of state survived. For the

pilot, Primitivo Perez Gomez, died a few years ago in a Parisian

hospital, while Cerrada himself was gunned down in Paris on

Monday 18th October 1976 (3) atthe age of 74. In another book by

1

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

Tellez (4) whilst relating certain events which occurred in Lyons

(France) in January 1951 (events which led to the eventual discovery of the aforementioned light aircraft), Antonio Ortiz was named

as one of the protagonists of Cerrada's scheme and the initials of

the other were given. His full name is Jose Perez Ibanez (nicknamed EI Valencia). In the essay which follows and on the basis

of the statements obtained from Ortiz and Perez, the full details of

their extraordinary scheme are disclosed (5).

Notes:

(1) Antonio Tellez: La guerilla urbana, Facerias (this has been

translated into English but unpublished. It is still available in

Spanish and Italian).

(2) Eliseo Bayo: Los atentados contra Franco (ed. Plaza y Janes,

Barcelona 1976)

(3) Bayo conducted a painstaking on-the-spot investigation into

Cerrada's murder and his findings were revealed in the Gaceta

Ilustrada (31st October and 7th November 1976). He even revealed

the name of the supposed murderer, a Spaniard by the name of

Ramon Benicho Canuda, alias Ramon Leriles, aged 52. However,the

police came to different conclusions, for having interrogated

Benicho., they released him.

(4) Antonio Tellez: Sabate, la guerilla urbana en Espana (Ed Plaza

y Janes, Barcelona, 1978) Translated by Stuart Christie (Rupert

Hart Davis 1st edn); Cienfuegos Press (2nd edn); Elephant Editions (3rd edition).

(5) When this article had already been completed but not

published (owing to certain problems with the Spanish magazine

for which it was intended) Antonio Tellez was informed by Ortiz

that he had been visited by Eliseo Bayo for the purpose of

interviewing him. Ortiz had been correspopnding with Tellez for a

number of years. Bayo published a fresh article in issue No. 175 of

Interviu (20-26 September 1979) entitled "Attempts on Franco's

Ufe, An extraordinary witness emerges",

2

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

The Background

When the Spanish generals joined the Right Wing coalition to

launch an attack on the Republic (to which they had sworn

allegiance) it was met, not by determined resistance of the Republic itself, but by the workers who saw more clearly than the

bourgeois politicians that, even though the fascist leader would be

dictator Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera had been early eliminated,

Franco would bring about fascism. Had the Republic armed them,

they would have won in a week. As it was, an "unarmed rabble"

defeated their own national Army in every main city.

They responded to the Rebellion with the Revolution. The anarcho-syndicalist forces (CNT FAI) were backed by the majority of

workers, but it had been felt by most anti-fascists they should join

the UHP (United Proletarian Brothers) including socialists and

communists. The latter had already formed the Popular Front. The

myth, peddled to the last, was that a democratic alliance against

fascism would gain the support of the democracies (by which was

understood Britain, France, the USA and the Soviet Union! In the

event the only genuine support came from Mexico).

When Russia did intervene, for what it was worth, the Communists

(insignificant at the outset of the war) became the strongest party,

Many bourgeoisie, fearful of being regarded as fascists, joined

them as an alibi, and a new generation, too, because the fascists

constantly stated they were fighting "the Reds" (as the Communists in turn insisted the internal enemy they were trying to

eliminate was not the whole of the workers movement but the

virtually non-existent "Trotskyites").

As the Republic gathered strength (against its own people) it

introduced militarisation and the suppression of the Revolution

began, under Communist generals such as Lister and "EI Campesino". First the independent Marxist Party (POUM), as a rival to the

CP, was wiped out under this, then the battle against collectivisation began within the Republic.

Many Anarchists disagreed with the policy of compromise, and

felt the Organisation had yielded too much ground and should

fight against the growing Communist influence which came from

3

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

outside the working class . They formed groups such as the

Friends of Durruti.

The last act in the drama was a civil war in which the republicans,

realising they had been double-crossed by the communists, joined

forces with anarchists in a last-dtch fight to prevent the continued

slaughter, designed to continue without hope of success for the

sake of Russian foreign policy.

Because of this last-moment split, Franco was able to avoid a

peace treaty, and genocide began inside Spain. A huge exodus

crossed into France. where they were treated like foreign invaders

by the democracy they had been told was their ally. When the

World War broke out, to avoid continued internment ofthemselves

or their families, many men joined either the French or British

forces.

During the War the Spanish refugees were rounded up for slave

labour by the Nazis but formed the resistance in the South, called

the Maquis. It was they who liberated Paris in 1944. Incredibly

under the Nazis they had not only fought as partisans with France

but formed their locals, having a degree of trust among themselves others could not match.

The Organisation was thus able, immediately after the War, to regroup in exile as the Libertarian Spanish Movement (MLE), The

CNT had never been bureaucratically controlled (even when

virtually all Catalonia was collectivised, the CNT had only one fulltime paid secretary) , but many had entered the Covernment

bureaucracy during the Civil War and felt their subsequent standing in the CNT was "frozen" until it could hold fresh electin, ',S.

Others, such as Federica Montseny, led by virtue of the pn.. .ge

they enjoyed.

The groupings such as Friends of Durruti, Los Aguilchos and so

on tended to re-group in the Libertarian Youth (JJ.LL) , many until

late middle age, to avoid schism,.

Within Spain itself the reconstruction .of CNT locals was quite

separate from the exile movement and there were many differences

especially in regard to armed actions against Franco.

This led to people like Sabater, and those associated with him

being somewhat coldly regarded by some who should have

supported them. It also explains why the MLE, though regarding

4

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

itself as custodian of the revolutionary traditions, should have

baulked at present actions. (Equally, Vernon Richards, while in

"Lessons ofthe Spanish Revolution" a critic of every si!1gle aspect

of the CNT during the civil war, in his house organ "Freedom" ,

which ignored every post-war action of the Spanish Anarchists,

except for the rare, invariably scornful. comment as to the folly of

fighting at all, granted reluctantly "there may have been some sort

of resistance").

Now the World War was over, freedom fighters (carrying on in

precisely the same way as before, during and after the civil war)

became labelled "bandits". It did of course compromise those in

France who had made themselves responsible for the existence of

the exile movement. On the other hand, French (and British)

opinion had become more anti-fascist during the war, and open

support for fascism, or suppression of anti-fascism, might have

been electorally unpopular.

Some non-Spanish were involved in the anti-Fascist resistance,

including French, Italians, Argentines and one Briton, Stuart

Christie. He met in prison Miguel Garcia Garcia (serving a 20 year

sentence of which he served every day) inviting him to London.

From there Garcia carried on a campaign to aid the last of the

guerrillas of Spain, and to join the last of the groupings of the Civil

War dissidents (Friends of Durruti etc) with the International First

of May movement.

Looking at such caricatures as Prof. Hobsbawm's description of

Sabater (classified under Bandits), one is reminded of the German

Communists' approach to the Spanish war. They had, only three

years previously, possessed a Red United Fighting Front army

trained secretly in Russia which, back in the Weimar Republic,

paraded the streets with pride, without needing the massive police

protection the Nazis did. One day President Hindenburg and the

Catholic Centre opened the door to Hitler, he became legal dictator

and zip! The next day the Communist leaders were hiding in cellars

or being beaten up in concentration camps and not a shot had

been fired in anger. A disciplined force, deprived of leadership,

disappeared. The German Communist leaders went or were ar.

rested, some to appear on the Spanish scene as generals, to scorn

5

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

the naivety ofthe Spanish anarchists, uncontrollable and rushing

into battle regardless, at the indiscipline of which they and the

Communist academics like Franz Borkenau and Eric Hob$bawm

could hardly restrain their mirth. It wasn't the Spanish in particular

to whom they felt superior, it was the workers.

Certainly the civil war, world-war and post-war fighters this series

is determined to rescue from oblivion were laidback as well as

determined, as this narrative shows. One high-ranking British

police officer said, when investigating their activities, they were

"amateurs". Exactly so. Nobody paid them. They were ordinary

workers, not professional soldiers or professional revolutionists.

Where have those terrible twins ever got us?

Albert Meltzer

London

1992

6

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

Chapter One

The Resolution

Issue No. 50 of "CNT" (on 21st March 1946) , the organ of the

Movimiento Libertario Espanol (the name taken by the CNT in

France) carried, in a position of great prominence an article by

Federica Montseny Mane entitled, "Men of the CNT and the MLE...

Pedro Mateu", in the course of which she outlined that labour

hero's life of self-sacrifice.

The name of Pedro Mateu Gumido, born in Valls (Tarragona) on

23rd April 1897, became world famous when, in March 1921, he

took part in a revenge killing whose victim was Spanish Premier

Eduardo Dato. Dato was murdered in a last-ditch effort to protest

at the endless murders of miitants of tIle anarcho-syndicalist

National Confederation of Labour (CNT) in Catalonia (1). This

campaign of murder was conducted with impunity, first of all by

the hired guns in the pay of the police inspector Manuel Bravo

Portillo (2) and the German adventurer Fritz Golman (alias Baron

Koenig) and later on by the gunmen of the Sindicato Libre (Free

Union, a scab organisation) under the aegis of Barcelona's civil

governor, Severiano Martinez Anido and the Inspector General of

Public Order, Miguel Arlegui y Bayones.

Here are a couple of extracts from Montseny's article in CNT.

"Pedro Mateu, today, an exile as are we all and like all of us with

chapters of fresh persecution and heroism to show for his years in

France and for pursuing from French soil the struggle first engaged on Spanish, is a member of the Libertarian Movement - CNT

in France. After a gap of several years, we ran across him again at

the Paris Congress of Local Federations (1 st December 1945)

which he was attending as representative of the local federation of

Cordes (Tarn).

"Pedro Mateu is one of those men who shun the limelight but turn

up ever alert and full of energy intime of need. One ofthose taciturn

types who say little but do much, One of those men who are

forgotten or unknown yet one of those who live and ever shall live

for the people's movements and the beliefs that sustain them."

The article appeared at a time when a vacancy had arisen on the

7

DARE TO BE A DANIEL

National Comnmittee. The Co-ordinating Secretary, Angel Marin

Pastor, had travelled into Spain on organisation business and had

been arrested in Barcelona in October 1945. Whilst he managed to

escape from prison on 15rh Decenber 1945, he only returned to

France in17th March 1946. He arrived back in Toulouse to be

dropped from the National Committee. whereupon the organisation was sounded out on the issue of who was to replace him. After

Federica's article, the answer was a foregone conclusion and

Pedro Mateu Cusido was appointed by a majority vote.

A national plenum of regionals held in August 1946 confirmed

Pedro Mateu's appointment tothe post of Co-ordinating Secretary

on the National Committee.

The Second Congress of the MLE-CNT in France met in Toulouse

from 20th to 29th October 1947, and Mateu was returned by an

overwhelning vote in the elections to the National Committee.

Some 274 local federations representing 11 ,655 members voted for

him: his nearest rival was Juan Puig Elias, with 6,007 vote (3). Only

Jose Peirats Valls who was selected secretary-general polled more

votes than Mateu, and then only by 37 votes. Some 11,702 votes

were cast for Peirats by some 238 local federations, The Congress

was attended by delegates from some 470 local federations representing a total of 18,774 members... the largest single grouping

among the Spanish exiles.

Item number 16 on the agenda of the Second Congress was:

"Ways and means of intensifying the struggle against Franco and

the Falange to the point where they are crushed,and a tremendous

boost given to the Spanish revolution." The resolution finally

passed on this read:

"The way in which we can intensify the struggle against Franco

and the Falange .and reactionaries generally, to the. point where

they are crushed and the way to give a boost to the Spanish

revolution is for each and every militant to lend his personal, direct

and correctly marshalled assistance to the common cause, with

the utmost spirit of self-sacrifice.

"The means by which we may contribute to the goal we set

ourselves are contact with the people and the workers, creation of

the proper climate, and encouragement of mutinous and rebellious groups everywhere, boosting of resistance and direct action,

8

DARE TO BE A DANIEL

and sabotage, and by perfecting the organisation of the fight,

dealing effective blows to the enemy on every front and to these we

should add whatever methods we may apply, provided that the

Movement and its Defence Commission deem them compatible

with our honour."

Laureano Cerrada's plan to assassinate Franco was thus perfectly in tune with both the spirit and the letter of the resolution on

action against Franco ultimately approved by the Spanish Libertarian Movement in Exile.

Chapter Two

Mateu and the Assassination

of Eduardo Dato

On the evening of 8th March 1927, emerging from a senate

sitting, the Spanish Premier, Eduardo Dato e IréÌdier, instructed his

chauffeur to drive him home. It was going onfor 9 p.m.

As it. passed the Plaza de la Cibeles, alongside the Palace of

Communications, a motorcycle with sidecar containing three

armed men slipped into position just behid the Prime Minister's

official vehicre. As they arrived at the Plaza de la Independencia,

quite near Dato's home which was on the corner of the Calle

Lagasca and the Calle Alcala, the motorcycle edged forward until

it was parallel with the right hand side of the Premier's limousine.

'There was a burst of handgun fire and then the motorcycle and

'sidecar raced off at top speed along the Calle Serrano.

'Adjutant Juan Jose Fernandez, who had been sitting alongside

the driver, suffered slight head wounds while in the back seat the

blood-saturated figure of Dato lay slumped. The chauffeur, unscathed, made for the first aid post at No.1, Calle Salustiano

Olozaga (the present Calle de los Heroes del 10 de Agosto) (4) in

the Buenavista district quite near to the scene of the attack, but

Dato was dead on arrival. One of the bullets had entered the

occiput exiting through the front of the head, killing him outright.

9

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

A second bullet had entered through the mastoid area on the left

hand side exiting via the cheekbone while a third had pierced the

body at the level of the seventh rib. There were upwards of twenty

bullet holes in the car, not counting those bullets which had

shattered the windshield.

Eduardo Dato was buried in the Pantheon of Illustrious Men in the

basilica of Atocha, where three other premiers were interred. They

were General Juan Prim y Prats, killed on 27th December 1870 by

a number of men on foot who opened fire on his coach in the Calle

del Turco (now the Calle Marques de Cubas) in Madrid; Antonio

Canovas del Casti 110, killed on 8th August 1897 in the spa of Santa

Agueda (Guipuzcoa) by the Italian anarchist Michele Angiolillo (9)

and Jose Canalejos y Mendez, killed by the Aragonese Manuel

Pardina Serrato (6) in the Puerto del Sol in Madrid on 12th

November 1912

Subsequent inquiries led police on 11th March 1921 to a cottage

at No. 77 Calle Arturo Soria in the Ciudad Lineal, on a farm which

had apparently put up for a night the native of Sabadell, Matteo

Morral (7) wh~, on 31 st May 1906, threw a bomb atthe royal carriage

as AlfonsoXIII and his wife Victoria Eugenia of Battenberg were

making their way back to the palace after their wedding. The royal

couple emerged from the attack unscathed, but Morral's bomb

claimed the lives of 23 people, from some of the soldiery and the

spectators. A further hundred or more were injured.

Inside the cottage, police discovered the motorcycle, bearing

false number plates. It was an "Indian" with sidecar. They also

found five handguns of different makes, a huge quantity of ammunition and several ammunition clips. Acting on a lead, they discovered that the cottage's tenant was a certain Francisco Mateos who

lived at No. 164 Calle de Alcala under the name Jose Pallardo. On

Sunday 12th March, a trap laid there caught Pedro Mateu Cusido,

aged 24. His accomplice had been Ramon Casanellas Uuch and

Leopoldo Noble. It was left to the Barcelona police to disclose the

latter's true identity as Luis Nicolau Fort.

Casanellas managed to get away to the USSR (his subsequent fate

being unknown). But Nicolau Fort was arrested in Berlin, along

with his wife Maria Luisa Concepcion, and in 13th February 1922,

the Spanish authorities having applied for their extradition, the

10

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

couple were handed over to thèm. Nicolau wound up in the Model

Prison where Mateu was already incarcerated. His wife, having

spent some time in the female prison in the Calle Quinones, was

rele.ased when it was established that she had nothing to do with

the killing of Dato.

Several people were arrested as accessories. They were Mauro

Bajatierra árid Ignacio Delgado, on charges of having supplied the

weapons; Jose Miranda, on the grounds that he had offered shelter

to the accused; Adolfo Diaz, for supplying Nicolau with the

passports he used in his escape attempt, and Tomas La Llave"

owner of the farm on which the motorcycle was discovered,

The accused were defended by Paulino Cid, Jose Serrano Batanero, Eduardo Barriobero Herran, Luis Noizader, and Angel Galarza

Gago.

The trial began at 4.30 p.m. on 1st October 1923, by which time

Spain was under the rule of the military dictatorship of General

Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja. Sentence was passed on 11th

October; Mateu and Nicolau were sentenced to be executed while

the other accused received prison terms. On 23rd January 1924.

the death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment.

Mateu and Nicolau were released on 23th April 1931 , the very day

after the Republic was proclaimed. Ramon Casanellas died in a

motorcycle accident near Barcelona on 27th October 1933; as far

as anyone can tell, Nicolau was killed during the civil war. Pedro

Mateu survived, living in France.

Chapter Three

The Idea of an Attack on

Franco

From what Cerrada said, the idea for an airborne attempt on

Franco's life came originally from Pedro Mateu and the MLE-CNT's

Conspiratorial Commission.

Cerrada stated: "There was some ambiguous talk about the

11

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

possibility 01 purchasing an aircraft as a means of 'doing something important'. They were also on the look out for a pilot capable

of carrying out a delicate mission of the utmost importance. But

the organisers would tell me nothing. Everything was shrouded in

the utmost secrecy and whenever I tackled Mateu he became

evasive and mentioned something about lack of finance. In the

space of a year th~y were no further on, having done no more than

meet once a fortnight for coffee and lalk about revolution,"

Cerrada had access to the money needed for the purchase and, of

course, the men needed to implement the plan. Hè set about

devising his plan without delay. .

Laureano Cerrada SantOs was born in Miedes de Atienza

(Guadalajara) in 1903. He joined the CNT very young and was an

active militant of the anarcho-syndicalist union. He worked for the

Spanish National Railway Network (RENFE) and, once civil war

broke out, gave ample proof of vast organisational talents.

In exile, having been active in the underground during the German

occupation, he held positions of responsibility in the CNTand in

the FAI.

On 6th June 1944, Allied troops landed on the Normandy coast

and on 15th August the operation was repeated on the Mediterranean coast on the St Tropez peninsula., The Germans began to

withdraw from the Pyreeneean area on 19th August, Paris was

liberated on 24th August. Laureano Cerrada Santos emerged as

secretary -general of the first CNT Committee of the Northern area

(Paris and Normandy). The CNT's press organ for the area, Solidaridad Obrera, began to come off the presses on 24th September

(8).

The Spanish guerrilla fighters of the so-called "National Union"

under Communist Party control, having helped liberate the south

of France, launched an attack across the Pyrenees and infifltrated

into Spain on 17th October 1944, intending to establish a bridgehead in the Aran Valley from which to launch the "reconquest of

Spain".

Among the units that had landed at St Tropez was the Number One

Shock Battalion organised in North Africa. One of its members was

Antionio Ortiz Ramires (9), the very same Antonio Ortiz who,

during the civil war in Spain, had set out for the front at the head

12

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

of the second anarcho-syndicalist column in July 1936 and had a

distinguished record on the Aragon front. Having liberated Toulon, the Number One Shock Battalion pushed northwards via

Montelimar, Valence, Grenoble, Lyons, Dijon and Vescul. When

the Spanish guerillas launched their attack across the Pyrenees,

the Number One Shock Battalion was enjoying a brief rest in a

village near Lure (Haute Saone).

The unit's founder. Colonel Fernand Gambiez who had in fact

sampled Soanish prison life in Figueras and Miranda del Ebro

whilst escaping from France in order to carry on the fight against

the Nazis, brought Ortiz the news òf the guerrillas' attack and

encouraged him to go fight alongside his "own people".

"What are you waiting for? What good are you doing here now?"

"Let me have a leave pass."

"Y ou've got it. But where to?"

"To Paris."

" Paris, you say? But it's on the border that ..."

"I know all that, but they're communists down there. First I want

to sound things out. Then I'll be back to take a lorryload of gear."

"Fine!" exclaimed Gambiez. "We'll all gol"

Ortiz found Cerrada in Paris in the CNT's offices at No.6, Rue de

la Douane (now the Rue Leon Jouhaux). The pair had known each

other for a long time. In 1931 Cerrada had been watchman at a

RENFE halt in the Calle de Aragon near the Monumental Bull Ring

in Barcelona where he had been sent as a reprisal for his active

participation in a rail strike. Ortiz was also about this time involved

with strike activities of the Wood Syndicate and Cerrada was

storing "gear" for them which they would claim whenever they

needed it.

What Ortiz discovered about the party political activities of the

Spanish communists in France and about the vaunted "National

Union" led him to return, sorely disappointed, to his battalion (10),

there to continue the fight against the Germans until he was

wounded ~nd subsquently discharged on 5th August 1945~

Returning to Paris, he was urged by Cerrada to stay and help him

out for Cerrada wanted to set up a combat organisation of carefully

selected volunteers which would be able to act "freely" against the

Franco regime without compromising the official CNT organisa13

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

tion which. was caught up in the legalities of the situation and

obliged to obey the restrictive French legislation. For his part,

Ortiz believed that a training school and traning camp for the

fighting men was simply vital and this complemented Cenada's

schemes.

At the time Cerrada was, mistakenly, confident that the Organisation would give him its blessing and that he would be able to put

his plans into effect, If the plan materalised, Ortiz was ready to

bring it his help and the benefits of his vast experience but as

"negotiations"dragged on, he realised that "palace business moves

very slowly" and chose to go off to Bordeaux and get down to

business. A little later, alol1g with Jose Perez Ibanez (EI Valencia)

(11), a distinguished anarcho-syndicalistfighter and veteran of the

"Los Aguiluchos"column organised by Juan Garcia Oliver (12)

and later ofthe 25th Division commanded by Antonio Ortiz himself,

he set up a sawmill in Saverdun (Ariege).

Cenada was still secretary ofthe regional committee. He had been

re-elected to that position at a Plenum of Comarcals of the Xlth

Region held in Paris on 7th January 1945 and at which 97 local

federations with a total membership of 5740 were represented.

Another Plenum held on 8th September 1945 saw him surrender

the secretaryship to Jose Blanco (13) whilst he took over responsibilityforthe position of "Co-ordinating" Secretary (a euphemism

for the secretary whose task it was to co-ordinate subversive

-activities). In October 1946 at another regional plenum, he submitted his resignation and devoted hitns"elf exclusively to the Seccion

Famento, a body whose essential task was to recover the scattered

resources which had once belonged to the Organisation.

Chapter Four

Preparations for the Attentat

In August 1948 Ortiz received a message from Cerrada asking him

to visit him in Toulouse~' They met at No.4. rue Belfort, the

headquartersofthe National Committee ofthe MLE-CNTin France.

Along with Jose Maria Larrinaga Astariosa (14), Cenada was by

14

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

then on the Liaison Commission of the FAI and was beginning to

be subjected to pressure from the committee of the Libertarian

Movement who disagreed with his methods and wanted to have

him hand over the resources. he had at his disposal and to call a halt

to his activities, which they regarded as highly "unconventional."

"Look, Ortiz," said Cerrada. "If these people had it in them to do

something, I would not hesitate an instant before placing it all at

their disposal, but all they want to do is to kill the goose... after

having gorged themselves on the golden eggs..."

At this point Cerrada placed on the table some plans and photograph of San Sebastian, and told Ortiz that Franco would be in the

city for the annual regatta in September. He informed him, too, that

he had a good pilot on hand (introduced by Pedro Mateu) and more

than enough money to purchase an aircraft. He showed Ortiz a

catalogue of tourist aircraft from SNCAN (Societe Nationale de

Constructions Aeronautiques Nord-Aviation) from which he had

made his choice.

"But it's a push-bike!" exclaimed Ortiz when he saw the specifications of the model Cerrada was thinking of buying.

The four-seater aircraft had a wingspan of 10.22 metres with a total

length of 7,.22 metres and stood 2.76 metres high. Unloaded

weight, 652 kilos, its technical name was a "Nord 1202/11 Norecrirn

II" and it had a range of 900 kilometres and a top speed of some

250 kilometres per hour.

"In the skies over San Sebastian," said Ortiz,"There will undoubtedly be fighter planes,. What information do you have regarding

years past?"

According to Cerrada there were quite a lot of small planes in the

air over La Concha bay during the regatta and his would be able to

mingle, unnoticed, with the rest. The model he had chosen was the

one most likely to allow him to bring off the attempt on Franco's life

successfully.

Ortiz was very insistent on the need to check out this crucial

information and he also recommended that Cerrada check on the

location ofthe airfields nearest to San Sebastian so thatthey could

work out the best way to "mingle" without raising the alarm. They

scrutinised the details ofthe scheme and arranged to meet in Paris,

three days later, to tryout the aircraft they had agreed upon.

15

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

In Paris, Cerrada introduced Ortiz to Primitivo Perez Gomez, who

was borqjn Los Santos (Salamanca) ón 23rd June 1917, and had

been a :ffghter pilot during the civil war. He was a young, goodnatured fellow deeply enamoured offlying and anything to do with

it.

The fir~t steps towards the purchase of their "push-bike" had

already. been taken and the would-be owners were expected at an

airfield near Paris where the plane would be put through its paces'

for their benefit. The owners' agents were very solïcitous and after

the customary formalities they headed for the runway.

Primitivo took a seat alongside SNCAN's own test pilot, Ferdinand

Dupere, whilst Ortiz sat behind with a Catalan cbmrade by the

name of Soler, who was a mechanic. After a few pertinent re'marks

about the function of the various instruments, the pilot started up

the engine and, as the plane taxied along the runway, went into a

few details. He accelerated the engine (a Regnier 4LO, 135 h.p.,

2,280 rpm) and the plane took off. The pilot lifted the undercarriage,

the two main wheels folded outwards whilst the nose wheel folded

back. The plane was very modern, for it had only gone into regular

production that very year. It climbed at a speed of 300 metres per

minute and had a ceiling of 5000 metres.

They did a few circuits of the airfield and, as the pilot was

beginning the descent, Primitivo asked him to go around again at

top speed and then make a steep descent and land in as little time

as possible. Normally, the Norecrin, at a speed of 85-90 kilometres

per hour, needed a landing space of 170 metres.

"That is forbidden," said the Frenchman.

But Primitivo insisted and the pilot finally gave in to please him.

He opened the throttle to a speed of 300 kilometres an hour and in

a mattrer of seconds the plane tOLlched down making a noise like

a thousand saucepans clashing together. The propellor blades

had almost brushed the runway and disintegrated. But they had

landed in just 160 metres.

"Nom de Dieu! What about that?" exclaimed the pilot, holding his

head in his hands. A jeer. and an ambulance were racing towards

them. They calmed the pIlot by telling him that everything was fine

and they would take the plane. The same thought was in all their

minds justthen. Their "push-bike" could, if need be, land in a beanfield.

16

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

Chapter Five

liD-DAY Minus"

That evening they met Cerrada, told him the outcome of the trials,

and urged him to go ahead with the purchase. Then the conversation moved naturally to the execution of the attempt on Franco's

life and Primitivo and Ortiz were debating the details when Cerrada

put in: "No, no, Ortiz. You can't go!"

"May I know why not?"

"We may need you later."

"What, I'm not go to go then? Maybe you have someone available

with some knowledge of this flying husiness?"

"Actually, no," answered Cerrada.

"Then let's hear no more about it and let's get on with it... Because

I am going!"

Ortiz went back to his job in Saverdun to wait for them to let him

know. His friend Jose Perez (EI Valencia) was the silent type and

had not said a word. Finally, he could stand it no longer and when

he was done with Ortiz, he burst out:

"And I'm going, too!"

"Where?" asked Ortiz teasingly.

"With you! I won't let you go with anyone else. Do you take me for

some kind of idiot? I'm going.. I'm not going to be left behind here

- or perhaps you don't trust me after all these years and everything

we've been through?"

Ortiz tried to get out of it by making a few evasive remarks. He

reminded Perez he had a wife and a young daughter but EI Valencia

was sticking to his guns. Finally, in an allusion to an old Spanish

proverb, he told him:

"Mistrust doesn't come into it, but the fact is you've never gone up

in a balloon."

"Does that matter?" answered Perez, all'!lost shouting. "If I have

to go up, go up I shall and even if I have to take up camel-riding..."

So Ortiz had to accept, in principle, that his friend would be

coming along, but he warned him that he would have to make his

maiden flight first.

17

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

A few days later word arrived from Cerrada. Time was short for the

regatta was all but upon them. All concerned met in Paris. Cerrada carried a small case containing 1,600,000 francs with which to clinch the sale. Also present

were Georges Fontenis, secretary of the FAF (French Anarchist

Federation) and managing editor of Le Libertaire, who was to be

their agent in a purchase which could only be made by a French

citizen, and Jose Villanueva Lecumberri (15), a close friend and

confidant of Cerrada, plus Antonio Ortiz and Jose Perez (EI

Valen'cia). Cerrada knew Perez well and when he saw him, he

merely said, "How are you, Valencia?" And then he added, "Are

you the one that's going along with Antonio? So much the better,

keep it all in the family."

For the past two days Fontenis had been teasing Cerrada, saying

that he would only agree to buy the plane if he . \Jn~ertook to take

a test flight with him. And so, on this day, when the sale was to be

finalised, Fontenis insisted, "If you want my signature you'll have

to go up in the plane with me."

Cerrada cursed and swore that he had never been in a plane and

nothing in the world would make him go up in one. By this time, the

group were in one of the approach roads tothe airfield and Cerrada

was still complaining, "Where did Fontenis get this crazy idea that

we should both take a test flight in the plane? Äl)ything but that!"

EI Valencia, when all was said and done, was éllsoworried by the

fact that he had never flown, but to everyone's surprise he spoke

up. "Let's go, Cerrada, bettter up there than on the ground."

Fontenis, labouring the point, insisted, "Well, what's it to be? Do

we go up or do we go home?"

But Cerrada had reached the spot determined "to make the

ultimate sacrifice" if need be. After scratching his head, chest and

even his legs, he wandered oft a few paces with Jose Villanueva,

handing him a number of sealed envelopes with a flourish and

issuing a list of instructions.

Then he called Ortiz to one side and told him, "Stick with Villanueva and don't let him out of your sight for an instance. Those

envelopes I handed him contain all my secrets."

It was clear that Cerrada had taken the precaution of making out

a will, "just in case", and a laughing Ortiz encouraged him, saying,

18

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

"Rest assured -I'm sure you're going to like it."

Fontenis and Cerrada strode off towards the runway to make their

purchase whilst the others made for another airfield a fifteen

minute drive away where the official handing-over of the plane was

to take place;

Villanueva, EI Valencia and Ortiz got into one of the two cars which

had arrived and Ortiz made a few wisecracKs about the documents

Villanueva was carrying and about his own '''mission'' of keeping

. him under a constant watch. With a heavy sight that drew a burst

of laughter from his friends, Villanueva exclaimed, "Dear God,

don't let anything happen to Cerrada"!"

From the field, they could see the Norecrin arriving. After a few

manoeuvres it landed quite normally. Fontenis got out, laughing,

followed by Cerrada, his face alight like a child's with a new toy. His

evident satisfaction, however, did not make him forget the envelopes he had entrusted to Villanueva and he récovered them

immediately.

The finishing touches were put to the handover and Primitivo took

charge of the aircraft, registration F-BEQB, to fly ittothe airfield at

Saint Jean d'Angely (Charente Maritime) about thirty kilometres

northwest of Cognac (Charente), the club through which he had

won his pilot's licence in 1945. Now it was Valencia's turn to show

that he had a head for flying.

Jose Perez was worried about how his bowels might perform for

he was afraid they would let him down and fail him in the test. He

c,limbed in beside the pilot with a white handkerchief like a sheet

and he probably had others in reserve. His face was whiter than the

handkerchief.

The weather was fine and there was little turbulence. Uttle by little

the novice regained his colour until the handkerchief was finally

thrust deep into his pockets, As the Norecrin touched down in

Saint Jean d'lngely, Valencia's face bore a look of indescribable

joy.

Primitivo warned them that, lest they arouse suspicion, they

should stop by the pilot's mess for a few drinks and a yarn with the

French fliers. So they did and after a few rounds of cognac the

atmosphere quickly became easier and for one reason or another

the conversation turned to the War. One of the Frenchmen asked

19

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

Ortiz if he had been in Rougemount Ie Chateau, where in fact the

Number One Shock Battalion fought a tough engagement on 27th

November 1944.

"I drive a light tank there; said the pilot.

"The chap in the tank was wearing a sailor's cap and had quite a

lot of pinard (wine) in him," Ortiz answered, fixing him with a stare.

"Nom de dieu!lt's you. You're the fellow who was walking

alongside?"

"The very same."

The conversation continued for some time, and when it seemed

that the effects of the alcohol had worn off, the Frenchman

grabbed Ortiz by the arm and, with a very serious look, said,

"Brother! Let's step outside for a moment. It's very stuffy in here."

Once outside, still holding Ortiz by the arm, he turned and said to

him, "Brother!

Forgive me if I'm sticking my nose into something that doesn't

concern me. You are Spaniards and you have a plane here - a petit

velo.- I'm a pilot and I do reconnaissance flights On several

occasions I've been told to get lost in the Pyrenees. Let me assure

you that the border is covered by ràdar and the 'wolves' are always

in the air, and they shoot to kilL"

Ortiz laughed as he assured him they had not the slightest

intention of flying across the Pyrenees, but the Frenchman, growing more and more serious, burst out, "Brother! It's your neck. My

conscience is clear and we're quits for Rougemont Ie Chateau."

They waited in Saint Jean d'Angely for Soler to arrive. He was

discreetly to fit the plane with bomb doors, in other words, a gap

in the floor on the left side behind the back seat, which would be

fitted with a tube a metre across, just the right size for the bombs

and a neat job inside. On the outside, a prop in the middle would

helpsupport it on the floor and allow them to adjust ittothe desired

,angle for launch. Later, Primitivo would take the plane to Tarbes

and thence on to Dax (Lanes) from which their expedition would be

setting out.

Some of Cerrada's cronies also turned up along with Soler. And

this was an unnecessary risk, for their comings and goings

attracted the attention of an airfield official who chased them off,

and then took steps to check the departures of the plane and the

20

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

identiy of its crew. To divert them as Soler got on with his work,

Primitivo, who lived nearby, took them on a short tour of Cognac

and its countryside.

Once the plane had been "fix.ed", Ortiz and EI Valencia presented

their documents at the airfield office before leaving for Tarbes in

the aicrcraft piloted by Primitivo. The two passengers left the

capital of the department of Hautes Pyrenees by train for Dax, for

a look at the airfield from which the "bomber", arriving the next

day, would be setting out. "D-Day", the second Sunday in September, was fast approaching.

A comrade, one Agusti, sought out Ortiz and took him to Mont de

Marsan where he was to check out the gear". In the attic of a house

he was able to admire thirty aircraft bombs of four kilos each, plus

four ten-pound incendiaries, all of which had been stolen from a

dump at Orleans (Loire) during the German occupation. There was

also a machine gun, The bombs were in perfect condition, with

safety fuses. Ortiz examined the d.etonators of half a dozen of

them; they were all in perfect working to order.

Saturday finally came around: D-Day minus one. They had all

checked into a guesthouse in Dax and Cerrada was waiting for

telephone calls. Two comrades, Luis R and Jose Martia L had been

entrusted with co-ordinating things on the Spanish side and it was

they who phoned at the last moment from San Sebastian tosay that

the regatta was to go ahead as arranged and that Franco would

preside.

The guesthouse owners were puzzled by the solemn attitude of

their guests and they seemed upset to see them so preoccupied.

They fed them and gave them a few bottles of wine, played some

music and doubtless in an effort to be agreeable to them, played

the record "Adios, pampa mia." Some dancing followed and it was

quite late when everybody went off to bed.

21

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

Chapter Six

The A,b()(ted Attempt

On Sunday 12i:h September they róséat8 a.m. Primitivo was as

cool as could be. EI Valencia's face wore its ~sual. serious expression, Ortiz was having difficulty disguising his excitement, whilst

Cerrada was complaining of his feet,because he .I1åd been dancing

with the owner's wife the night before. They arinpùnced that they

were going for a stroll around the town, and would hardly be home

before nightfall. Then they made straight for the airfield. The sky

was overcast. The runway of the Dax field was a stretch of ground

with a line of trees at each end and was anything but over-generous

in terms of length.

Primitivo taxied the plane to the far corner of the runway, as far

away as possible from prying eyes. The truck carrying the"'gear"

arrived. The first thing they did was to fill the fuel tanks to the brim:

92 kilos in all, inclusive of oil.

The truck's driver, EI Pelat, was rather nervous at first but later he

calmed down. They had to be in the skies over San Sebastian at 1

p.m. They passed the bombs to Ortiz, who positioned them on the

floor by the back seats. Ortiz loaded four incendiary bombs and

twenty shrapnel bombs, for the optimum capacity of the plane, not

counting the 75 kilos allocated for the pilot;s weight, was 231 kilos.

It was not a hard sum: Ortiz plus EI Valencia, 150 kilos, the bombs

140 kilos, making a total of 290 kilos, not counting other bits and

pieces. The total loaded weight had not to exceed 1,050 kilos and

the figures mentioned gave a surplus of sixty kilos. The machine

gun stayed in the truck, for there was just no way to handle it inside

an enclosed cockpit with plastic windshields.

Cerrada warned that they would have to cover the plane's registration and other markings with sticky paper, as planned, but they

were already behind schedule and had no time to do so. In any

event the plane would not be coming back to France. At the end of

its mission it would put down at a pre-arranged spot in Navarre

where it would be destroyed and its crew picked up and taken to

safety by a resistance commando group.

22

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

EI Valencia sat alongside the pilot, with a camera with which

photographs of the coup would be taken, plus some packages of

handbills signed by the "Los Elegidos International Groups".

These were to be scattered over San Sebastian after the bombing

run. Ortiz, carrying powerful binoculars, sat right behind Primitivo.

Primitivo swung the plane's tail towards the line of trees and began

to rev up the engine. The aircraft began to trundle along the apron,

then struggled into the air. Carrying a normal burden, a Norecrin

needed a runway of 250 metres. The line of trees was hurtling

towards them and was right in front of their noses., Bùt they swept

upwards, brushing the topmost branches.

After gaining some altitude, the pilot headed for Biarritz asnd the

open sea. Ortiz was acting as navigator. The plane banked and

followed the compass needle. EI Valencia was sitting with arms

folded as if sitting in a theatre seat. Ortiz asked the pilot to read off

their speed and altitude. They were flying at a height of a thousand

metres at a cruising speed of 220 kilometres per hour, heading for

the open sea. In twenty minutes they would bank tothe left. The sky

was still overcast. Visibi lity was very poor and havi ng no radio, the

plane was cut off from the outside world.

"Look,Ortiz! There she is!" cried Primitivo.

In the distance they could just discern the vague outline of the

coast. The nose of the plane was in line with Monte Igueldo.

Primitivo cut their speed and lost height until he was just 300

metres off the ground hoping to mingle with the other light aircraft

which would be overflying La Concha bay.

"Valencia!" cried Ortiz. "Give me a hand!"

The safety straps holding fast the bombs had begun to come

loose and EI Valencia, who was quite short, had to indulge in some

tricky acrobatics before he could clamber into the back seat.

As the plane lost height the clouds parted and the sea became

open to view. They could make out two warships. Judging by the

size, they must have been minesweepers and they were circling

out to sea as if on anti-submarine duty, They could make out the

bay, protected by the island of Santa Clara, where the port of San

Sebastian lay. Both enrtrances to La Concha Bay were sealed by

lines of boats and in front of them, two motor launches which

appeared to be carrying guns.

23

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

It all happened very fast. EI Valencia, thanks toh.is acrobatics,was

halfway into the rear of the plane.

"Let's go to itl" cred the pilot, his gaze fixed on the coast.

All of a sudden, just as they were passing over the peak of Monte

Igueldo, the clouds parted and a seaplane appeared bearing down

on the Norecrin at the same altitude. Primitivo veered to the right

as if intending to overfly the coast, whilst the seaplane veered

leftwards, circling over the interior of a Concha Bay on a protective

course. Meanwhile, EI Valencia had managed at last to clamber

into the back seat.

Small craft from Fuenterrabia and Pedrena, taking part in a sea

race, were out in the middle of La Concha bay, racing towards

Monte Igueldo, almost neck and neck. A short distance totheir rear

came a large motor-boat which followed them as if it were carrying

the regatta referees. Franco and his wife, along with various

ministers and VIPs, were doubtless watching the yacht races from

the Commandancia de Marina.

And there, right at the back, was an impressive dais at the Club

Nautico, full of VIPs from Madrid and the provinces.

Without overflying the bay, the Norecrin cruised along the coast

slowly two or three times in both directions, always flying parallel

to the watchful seaplane which was doing the same. sweeping in

a semicircle along La Concha bay. Above the Norecrin flew four

fighters, two by two, at different altiutudes and in different positions, while from below, the anti-aircraft turrets on the ships

followed the movements of the light aircraft.

All of a sudden another two fighters appeared and there was not

another private aircraft in sight.

"What do we do?" asked EI Valencia.

Primitivo banked again and suggested that they climb as high as

their plane would permit and jettison their bombs from there.

"But where will they fall?" Ortiz asked himself, while it occurred

to him that, if the pilot so desired, the plane could become a flying

torpedo.

Two fighters buzzed them, signalling with their wings for Primitivo to follow them. Without a moment's hesitation Primitivo dived

towards the sea at 300 kilometres per hour and pulled up jl}~t a

couple of feet from the waves and made for France.

24

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

Chapter Seven,

The Aftermath

Once over French waters, Jose Perez and Antonio Ortiz dumped

the incendiary bombs into the sea to avert the risk of their

exploding as they landed. They fastened the bomb rack holding

the other bombs and began to descend over Biarritz.

Cerrada 'and the other comrades were waiting for them on the

airfield at Dax. Luis R had already informed them"ófthe,failure to

accomplish the mission,

"What happened?" asked a worried and disappointed Cerrada,

but one look at the faces of the plane's passengers and he needed

no further explanation.

Everybody rushed to unload the bombs but while they were

preoccupied with that operation, they noticed the airfield controller approaching in his jeep. Ortiz set out to meet him, lest he come

too close to the aircraft, as he had been watching the operation

from a distance and could now see them unloading something

which left no room for doubt. Slapping Ortiz on the back he cried,

"Manque de potl" (Tough luck) , turned on his heels and sped off.

The truck took the bombs away as well as the "ground crew". The

three fliers put the aircraft in storage for the night and strolled off

to their hotel.

There they huddled into a corner, ordered some refreshment, and

once their thirsts had been slaked, the pilot set about explaining

what had happened. Cerrada asked question after question in an

effort to find out with exactitude whether they were giving him the

whole story.

Then Ortiz spoke up saying, "Look, Cerrada, if ever anyone really

wanted to see Franco getting his head blown off it was me, but one

can't leave things to providence. We need to have accurate

information. There were none of the light aircraft you said would

be overflying to La Concha bay, but we did run across six fighter

planes and a Dornier. Cast our mind back to what I said to you when

we set off about what that French flier told me at Saint Jean

d' Angely..."

25

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

Primitivo and EI Valencia looked at their colleague in surprise

while, not without reason, EI Valencia asked:

"How come we weren't told anything?"

"What was the point?" answered Ortiz. "We all knew the risks."

They had something to eat and continued discussing the episode.

The three thwarted air-raiders decided to make for Tarbes by plane

and head back to Saint Jean d' Angely. Cerrada would see to it that

the "gear" was stored away for another day.

At 3 p,.m. they flew out of Dax en route for Tarbes. Their flight was

uneventful and whiie Primitivo was filling out the forms with his

flight plan, they were informed they had a telephone call. It was

Cerrada. He urged them to get the plane back to Dax without delay,

They did so, and by nightfall reached the hotel again.

Sitting onçe again in a corner, Cerrada ordered coffee and cognac

for them all, then explained his brainwave. "Before dawn we shall

load up the plane so that you can make San Sebastian before first

light. The bombs are to be dropped on the Palacia de Ayete where

Franco will presumably be sleeping,"

Cerrada's idea came as a a relief to his friends and they went on

talking about various things.

"How do we fly tomorrow?" Ortiz asked the pilot.

"Low over the sea and clinging to the coast so that they can't pick

us upon radar."

They a!1 burst out laughing though none of them considered a hair

raising night flight without adequate instrumentation a walkover.

Dinner time came and one of the waitress was very attentive to

Ortiz that day, After they had eaten and had coffee, the hotel

owners put on some music. Ortiz danced a few tangos with the girl,

who grew more and more amorous,clinging ever closer to her

partnèr, Ortiz.

Everybody went off to bed, save for Ortiz. Facing such an uncertain tomorrow, he preferred to spend the few hours of night with

the girl, who, in addition to being friendly, was quite pretty.

Everybody was up and about at 4 a.m.

At 10 p,.m. that night a torrential downpout had begun and it

continued without let-up. They made for the airfield by truck only

to find on arrival that the runway was awash and that the plane's

wheels had sunk unto the mud as far as the axle. They put their

26

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

shoulders tothe Norecrin in the hope of pushing it on to more solid

ground. They had intended to load only ten bombs on board so as

to ease take-off butthe whole airfield was a quagmire and the rains

showed no signs of letting up. They were still waiting there at

10a.m. for the rain to stop.

EI Valencia and Ortiz set off that very day to Saverdun. By the next

day it was work as usual for them in the sawwmill. Cerrada went

about his business while Primitivo stayed inDax until he was able

to take off with the plane and land it on the Guyancourt field near

Versailles, where it remained until confiscated by the French

authorities. (16)

Aside from a protest note sent by Madrid to Paris and complaining

about "violation of airspace", the airborne expedition was totally

ignored until February 1951. The plane still remained and its pilot

had renewed his flier's licence the year before.

From Luis A it was discovered that before the plane was even

visible from San Sebastian the radio controller had made a statement something along these lines. "We have information that a

light plane is approaching from the direction of the sea. If they are

friendly we shall invite them to partake of this jug of wine which we

have here for our refreshment."

So it is highly probable that the Norecrin, picked up by radar, was

the reason for the launching .ofthe Spanish pursuit planes, and if

these were "court~ous" towards the intruder it was precisely

because the aircraft's registration and the painted-on flag of a

neighbouring state were clearly visiblê on the fusilage. We can

only suppose that an "anonymous" light plane would have emerged

rather less well from such an adventure. The failure to cover up the

plane's identification, due to shortage of time, was undoubtedly

the factor that saved its passengers' lives.

In the book quoted earlier, Eliseo Bayo, in a reference to statements made to him by Laureano Cerrada, wrote: "Years afterwards, by which time he (Cerrada) had been expelled from the

Organisation, he was to learn something surprising. In defiance of

his instructions and in breach of security, one member ofthe team,

27

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

whose identity is well established by now, disappeared from the

guest-house for a number of hours. Cerrada, who was asleep in the

adjoining room, was quite unaware of his departure. But he had an

even greater surprise in store. Only he and the pilot knew the exact

words 'el pescadç>r de agua dulce' (the fisher in calm waters).

However, when he was arrested in 1957, he heard this from the lips

of Inspector Benamour: 'You should really be more careful in your

choice of playmates, Fishers in calm waters always come out on

top. '"

Sothe team member, whose identity is "well established", was the

pilot, but the connection between the indiscretion and the revealing of the codeword seems very tenuous, for when the plane was

discovered in 1951, Primitivo was questioned for a long time. So

Benamour's "inside knowledge" may have dated from over three

years after the event.

When the author questioned Antonio Ortiz about the aforementioned paragraph from Sayo's book, he answered as follows:

"Sayo's text is sheer fantasy. Comes from the obsession with

always finding a Judas on whom to blame Cerrada's death. In

those days Franco was still on a war footing and radar was

known... and let's hear no talk about the naivety of the information

on the basis of which the operation was planned."

For his part, Jose Perez had this to say:

"Cerrada was simplifying things if he spoke about a team of just

three men. True, there were three of us actually in the plane but the

pilot had been introduced to Cerrada by Pedro Mateu. Then there

were the comrades who helped out with the purchase of the plane

and all the ones who visited us at Sai nt Jean d' Angely; in the truck

which transported the "gear" there were three or four comrades

who followed us everywhere; plus the comrade in Mont de Marsan

who stored the bombs in his home; the mechanic who fixed up the

aircraft; and then only moments before loading up the plane we

met with eight or ten comrades in a cafe; our people in Spain were

likewise au fait with our plans. As were all those I have left out. Se

that as it may, I regard the Judas theory as sheer fantasy."

What cannot be doubted in the least is that, had there been an

informer, the plane would never have made it back to France, for

in the last analysis the pursuit planes would have shot it down over

28

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

the sea quite easily and it is quite obvious that was never their

intention.

Attacks upon Cerrada and other comrades from within the organisation revolved always abol,Jt the question of the seeming incompatibility of obligatory CLANDESTINE activity and simultaneous

LEGAL functioning, a dilemma which the exiles were never able,

or willing, to resolve. These .differences escalated to the point

when, in January 1950, Cenada was expelled from the Libertarian

Movement in Exile.. 6y this time his luck was beginning to run out

on him. On 10th Mày1949, in aprintshop set up in a garage atNo.4

Passage Goix in Paris's XIXth. district, police arrested six Anarchists engaged in forgery. They seized a veritable arsenal ranging

from revolvers to anti-tank mines. The printing press was one of

Cerrada's "projects" but was not in his name, so he could not be

charged.

In connection with the arrests, the Liaison Committee(17) of the

CNT's Parisian Regional Federation issued a cir.cular to members,

dated 10th September 1949, in which it was stated:

"Some time ago, a number of comrades were arrested, as a result

of which there was a danger of the Organisation finding itself

implicated in the matter which led to the arrests. All of the

committees took steps to ensure that this, which could have

turned nasty for the Organisation,did not come to pass.

"Now, in the wake of our efforts to avoid the above, we found

comrade Jose Villanueva still making representations on behalf of

the arrested comrades (something we find highly laudable and are

not criticising). However, setting sentiment to one side, it is our

view that, as a member of the Committee he ought not to have been

involved in something which we, for the good of the Organisation,

were concerned to dissociate from our organisational activities.

Forn this reason, we were impelled to ask for his resignation,

which he agreed to do, perhaps in the realisation that our request

was well founded."

At the time the place was discovered at the .civil airfield at

Guyancourt, Cerrada was in prison at Evreux (Normandy) after the

discovery a month before at Gaillon (Eure) of an underground

press on which he was forging plates.

In 1957 he was arrested again while carrying ten million phoney

29

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

pesetas. On 27th May 1970, by which time Cerrada was 67 years

old, he was again arrested at No. 19 Rue Emile Landrin in Boulogne

Biilancourt, a Paris suburb (18). The police uncovered a printing

works where he was forging French identity papers and driving

licences. He was r.eleased in August 1970.

In 1976, the journalist Eliseo Bayo managed to persuade him to

publish his memoirs, but a few weeks later, the man who said that

"Franco's most crushing victory was his dying in bed", and that for

the Spanish dictator "20th November 1975 was a more distinguished victory than the victory of 1st April 1939", was murdered

irí"a Paris street.

Bayo has this to say of Cerrada's opinion of personal attacks:

"The analysis is elementary. Personal attentats are effectiye to a

degree determined by the powers wielded by the victim. To take the

life of a constitutional king through conspiracy and not through

revolution is to change nothing, except for his heir. But if someone

had eliminated, say, Adolf Hitler in 1939, which of us can say that

his death would not have been of benefit to Europe? When we tried

to liquidate Franco back in 1948, we were persuaded that in doing

so we would be changing the course of Spanish history utterly. At

that point Franco had not yet managed to legitimize his system."

NOTES;

(1) Between 1919 and 1922 upwards of 30 CNT members were

murdered in this dastardly campaign ordered by the Madrid government

and the authorities and capitalists of Catalonia.

. (2) BravoPortillo was gunned down at 1.30 p.m. on 5th September 1919

. iilthe Calle de Corcega.

(3) Juan Puig Elias was born in Barcelona in 30th July 1898. He was a

rationalist schoolteacher and disciple of Francisco Ferrer i Guardia.

During the civil war he was on the CENU - Council for the New Unified

. Schcool and was under-secretary for Public Education. For a four year

period in France (1945-48) he held posts on the MLE's National

Committee. In 1952, he moved to Brazil where he died in Puerto Alegre

on 5th September 1972.

(4) At the end of July 1980, some 27 Madrid thoroughfares reverted to

the names by which they were known prior to 1931. The Calle de Heroes

30

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

de 10 de Agosto is one of these.

(5) Angiolillo was executed by the garotte in the prison square of Vergara

(Guipuzcoa) on 27th August 1897.

(6) Pardina (for some reason he used to spell his name most times as

Pardinas) committed suicide after his attentat.

(7) Morrala, a 26year old, managed to escape but was recognised on 2nd

June in Tarrejon de Ardox, fifteen kilometres from Madrid, whereupon he

fired a shot into his breast to avoid capture, and died from the wound.

(8) Cerrada also issued a printed monthly Cultura Ferroviaria, the

internal bulletin of the National Federation of the Railway Industry. The

four page newssheet was 15.5 x 21.5 ems.

(9) Antonio Ortiz was born in Barcelona on 13th April 1907.

(10) Forthe story of this unit, see Raymond Muelle, Le Premier Bataillon

de Choc (Presses de la Cite, Paris 1977).

(11)ln his memoirs, EI eco de los pasos (Iberica de Ediciones y

Publicaciones, Barcelona 1978) Juan Garcia Oliver mistakenly names

EI Valencia as Antonio Martinez.

(13) Jose Blanco was a veteran millitant who had risen to prominence

during the stormiest days of Spanish revolutionary syndicalism (192033). In December 1947 he joined the Organisation in Spain itself. Early

in June 1948 he was arrested in Madrid and a court martial in September

1949 sentenced him to thirty years in prison. He died in prison.

(14) Jose Maria Larrinaga, who was an active participant in the preparation of the attentat, died in his native Bilbao in 1979.

(15) Jose Villanueva Lecumberri (born 13thJanuary 1895 in Mieres,

Asturias) died in Paris in January 1977.

(16) The French press (specifically, Le Figaro) said on 13th February

1951, 'The police are looking for a second craft belonging to the

organisation. It is known that it exists but that it must be located in North

Africa. n

(17) After the Second Intercontinental Conference of the MLE in exile,

held in Toulouse from 6th February 1949 on, the Interdepartmental or

Regional committees took the names Liaison Commissions.

(18) The journalist Antonio Sergio Berrocal, apropos of this arrest,

published a lengthy illustrated article on Cerrada in No: 717 of Gaceta

Ilustrada (5thJuly 1970)

31

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

The Death of Cerrada

(From "BLACK FLAG" Vol IV, No.13, 1977F'~';'~,

MURDERED!

Coming out of a bar in theboulevard Belleville in a

working class suburb of Paris last October, comrade Laureano

Cerrada Santos, one ofthe last ofthe old guard anarchi~F activists,

was ambushed and murdered by a police agent who ha'ét managed

to penetrate the ranks of the Spanish Resistance. Cerrada had discovered the activities of this despicable character who was acting

for the Spanish secret police in France (working in close association with the French police) and was preparing to publish details,

when this hero of fascism discovered he was known, and shot

dead our veteran comrade, an unarmed man of 74.

. "

organ

ANARCHIST ~ :~:. . ";,

BLACK CROS5Ät, .

..., No\_n \911 \5\"

''1/0\'\''

MURDERED!

Cerrada's death is a double blow to the anarchist movement

because, apart from his drive and energy, he was also a skilled

forger whose talents were dedicated to the struggle 'against tyranny and the State. .

Laureano Cerrada Santos was one of the few remaining survivors

of a generation who were prepared to - and countless numbers of

".I

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

r '- ":..ii, ..~

Tht pril1tthop in. which Cmadð prir.t~ hundrws of (J/flci:11 cammlor IN.'$ {alttrin,

Mtional identification)on tAt gtnml principle 0/ the Spanish atJ41'ChÎ1t rts[stfJ/'ICt - the

rich paid. the poor (and reslmlnct fighttn) didn't.

Caption to photos

A selection of Cerrada's work as exhibited by the French police.

The printshop in which Cerrada printed hundreds of official

carnets for Jews in France (altering racial identification) and

documents for Spanish resistance fighters, on the principle of the

anarchist resistance "the rich pay, but the poor and resistance

fighters don't." Miguel Garcia has revealed in "Franco's Prisoner"

that members of the Spanish Resistance (including Cerrada and

Garcia) were taught these skills by. British Intelligence agents

operating in war-time, in return for aid given to Allied military

escapees.

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

them did - risk their lives in the struggle for social justice. He had

been one of the founders of the railway union of the CNT, a disciple

of Francisco Ferrer and a comrade of the legendary "Sugar Baby"

(Salvador Segui) the fighting secretary of the anarcho-syndicalist

union movement, He fought, it goes without saying, in the civil

war, and afterwards joined the resistance which spread through

France where he was one of the most dangerous to the Francoist

regime.

He upset many 'puritans' in the movement during the period of

Resistance because of his forgery on a widespread scale and a

huge black market operation, It was felt that forgery gave the

anarchist movement a bad name, but it did help keep the movement and the'Resistance alive, and the fascist State maintained its

pervasive influence in part by the control it had over rationing.

Among thè ~ttempts against Franco's life in which Laureano

participated was the abortive attack on him while in the company

of Hitler, and also another in San Sebastian in 1948.

He held his anarchist ideas to the end, one of the many who held

back the march of tyranny and did not live to see the dawn.

What of his assassin? He is named as 52 year old Ramon Benicho

Canuda, alias Ramon Leriles, nicknamed 'el Leriles'. He has been

smuggled out by the French pOlice,into Canada. Does Canada

then, admit terrorists? We heard a lot from the Canadian Cabinet

last year about their determination to keep terrorists out of their

country when the editor of this paper was to be flown for a TV

interview with CBC, Not this kind however! They can be congratulated on their new citizen who should make a suitable recruit for the

Mounties - if they can be quite sure he's not acting for someone

else's Intelligence. (Note: This was an inspired guess. In fact,

Leriles was subsequently named in Toronto as working for a

foreign power in Canada, but disappeared).

How the fascist gangs of Spain and the secret police of three

countries must have enjoyed their Xmas when they heard the

'notorious public enemy' Cerrada was killed! Their triumph is a

tribute to our comrade who was going to retire to write his memoirs

which in turn would have been a major inspiration to all who fight

for freedom. Laureano Cerrada Santos - we salute your memory!

THE UNSUNG STRUGGLE

This pamphlet is dedicated to all those

anti - fascists who turned up at Waterloo Station,

london, on the 12th of September 1992, 44 years

to the day after Cerrada's inspired attempt on

Franco's life, and gave the fascists a

hammering, the only language they

understand.

A:-:,sernble:

Saturday 12th September 1992 at 4.30pm

W3terloo BR

"Personal attentats are effective to a degree determined by the

powers wielded by the victim. To take the life of a constitutional

king through conspiracy and not through revolution is to

change nothing, except for his heir. But if someone had eliminated, say, Adolf Hitler in 1939, which of us can say that his

death would not have been of benefit to Europe? When we tried

to liquidate Franco back in 1948, we were persuaded that in

doing so we would be changing the course of Spanish history

utterly....." Laureano Cerrada Santos

Postscript

KATE SHARPLEY LIBRARY AND ANARCHIST

ARCHIVE

This pamphlet is the first in a series on the Spanish Resistance

1939-51. It forms an integral part of the Pages from Anarchist

History series of the Kate Sharpley Library. The Library and

Archive exists to preserve and illuminate aspects of anarchist

history and thought, and by doing so challenge the "official"

history of anarchism put forward by people allegedly within but

almost invariably outside our movement. We are available for

consultation and host a massive collection of anarchist pamphlets, books, newspapers, magazines and documentation from

all over the world, to be open to subscribers at a date to be

arranged. We are named after an anarchist militant who was active

in the anti-war struggle of 1914-18. She doesn't appear in any of the

"official" histories yet as George Cores wrote (in the first booklet

we reproduced), "most of the work which was done was due to the

activities of working men and women, most of whom did not

appear as orators or as writers in printed papers." The truth of this

is further illustrated by the story here told.

A copy of our news letter is available by sending a s.a.e. to our

address, We welcome any interested correspondence.

the kate sharpley library

8M \ Hurricane,

London, WC1 3XX.