

**In memory
of a
revolutionary
spanish
anarchist**





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A biography of
Vicente Ruiz Gutiérrez

Compiled and translated into English by Vicente Ruiz (hijo)

Preface

It was well after both my parents had deceased that I discovered within the contents of numerous large cardboard boxes a series of quarter size sheets, some were handwritten by my father and others were typed up, and I am certain they were done on his very old Remington typewriter. I am not sure, but I can only assume that this was the start of my father compiling his memoirs, and I suspect that this project was initiated shortly before he became a victim of Alzheimer and his mind was completely unbalanced. Obviously this phenomenal undertaking was abandoned and my mother stored everything into boxes not telling a soul. The only concern I have is that I am not sure as to how many of those quarter sheets that correlated my father's memoirs were destroyed by my mother, whom, a few months before passing away got into the habit of burning many photographs and documents the two of them had accumulated over the years.

When I accidentally discovered what she was doing, due to the smell of burnt paper in the house, she responded by saying that the documents had to be destroyed because the fascists were coming. Nonetheless, she never told me from where she was getting the documents and photographs.

I thought I knew my father's life, as well as the horrendous hardships he had incurred. Upon reading those pages I realised there was a lot more to his life. Subsequently my stubbornness and desire to learn more about him took over and

I initiated my research into his life and militant activities. With the result that in October 2010 I began writing and compiling the book “Recuerdos, vida y muerte de un libertario desterrado”, which was published in the Spanish language at the beginning of September 2015.

The pages that make up this small booklet are a translation of the first section of the book, which reflect his youth, the development of his libertarian ideals and his militant activities, the eruption of the revolution and the battle for the defence of Malaga, his going onto the Huete front and then onto Madrid, and finally the *retirada* and the road into exile.

Ensuing the initial publication of the book, I have been fortunate enough to receive and obtain additional documents and photographs which I have incorporated into this English translation.

Vicente Ruiz (hijo)

July 2016



Vicente Ruiz Gutiérrez was born in the middle of the 1912 summer (1), in Villa de Guadalcázar, a small village not too far from the city of Cordoba, he is the third of five siblings, Carmela, Rosario, Vicente, Francisco (Paco) and Fernando.

He was the son of Vicente Ruiz Oliva born in Nerja (2), a railway worker by trade, and of María del Pilar Gutiérrez Álvarez born on the 24th November 1883 in Beni-Saf - Oran, Algeria, daughter of Spanish immigrants that arrived in the city of Oran around the 1870's.

When only a few months old Vicente's family moved to Malaga taking up residence at number 20 of the Calle San Andrés, a three storeys apartment block with a central patio at ground level.

Like the rest of the working families that lived in Malaga during that era, the education of a child was an enormous luxury, and although being the first of three males he was the third of five children. All of the sibling's education became an

exorbitant luxury because Vicente's parents were not of the conviction that women did not require to be educated because they would get married and take care of the house and children, they therefore made sure that all the children received the education they could afford within their financial means.

Vicente studied the plumbing trade, profession he abandoned when he obtained employment in the railway yards. From a very young age Vicente showed a love for reading and when he could he would spend hours reading books and magazines. This he continued doing until he got ill in his old age.

He would always say:

“reading and instructing oneself is the best weapon a worker can have, and the secret is to read numerous authors with regards to the same topic, because history is an interpretation of the author that writes it and the person that reads it”.

His knowledge in history, philosophy, politics, economics, literature and poetry were unbelievable. He loved debates, talks, discussions and conferences. I can recall one particular event as if it was yesterday, in 1973 a public meeting was organised, at the Collingwood Town Hall, Melbourne; by the Spanish Communist Party to introduce one of its cadres, Manuel Azcarate, to the Spanish speaking community. Azcarate spoke for almost one and a half hours, after which the person chairing the gathering asked if anyone had a question or wished to make a comment. Vicente stood up asked permission to speak and in less than 10 minutes demolished Azcarate's speech. No doubt you can visualise and imagine what transpired thereafter.

As a railway worker Vicente's father would bring home the anarchist literature that would be distributed around the railway yards. It was reading these newspapers and magazines that Vicente by the age of 14 would begin to discover and sympathise with the anarchist ideas.



*standing left to right: Paco, Carmela, Fernando, Rosario and Vicente
sitting left to right: their father and mother*



*left to right: Fernando, Rosario, Vicente, Paco, their father
and a cousin from Nerja.*

Upon beginning his employment in 1929 with the railway yards he initiated his militancy with the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (C.N.T.) (3). He was asked by his compañeros to accept the responsibility of secretary of the sub-section of the railway workers of Malaga. Suffering severe reprisals and being black marked following numerous industrial conflicts (4), Vicente had to obtain employment as a mechanic. He joined the metal workers *sindicato* of the C.N.T., and here again he was nominated by the compañeros to be the secretary of the *sindicato*, position he held until the militias were organised.

He was an active member of the “Grupo Faro” of the local federation of Malaga, and the “Grupo Devenir” which was a direct action group of the F.A.I., in Malaga. (5)

During that constant period of active anarchist and confederal militancy he was able to be amongst a group of individuals that established and organized the “Ateneo de Divulgación Social” (6) and the “Ateneo Libertario”. Vicente was one of numerous organizers and founders -together with his friends Juan Santana Calero, Ramiro Ramón, Antonio Raya Diaz and Salvador Cruz- of the Juventudes Libertarias (Libertarian Youths) established in Malaga in 1932.

A meeting of the metal workers section of the C.N.T. of Malaga held on the 16th of March 1936, was attended by 300 militants, and Vicente was asked to chair the proceedings. During this meeting Bernardo López criticised the manner in which the government was implementing the recently declared pardon for all prisoners, he expressed that the speed at which prisoners were released, should not be accepted by the CNT because the militants were still in jail, and that all the other petty criminals in jail were victims of society. Furthermore, the majority of the so called delinquents only committed the so called crimes which incarcerated them because they were hungry. That the majority of them were victims of trumped up charges written at police

stations or Guardia Civil barracks.

Following a lengthy debate, it was also agreed that the C.N.T. metal workers militants of Malaga had no inconvenience in forming an alliance with the UGT, as long as this socialist union accepted the principles of the Social Revolution. (7)

He was elected by the *compañeros* of the *sindicato* as the delegate to represent the metal workers section of Malaga at the C.N.T., Zaragoza Congress in May 1936.

Following the military insurgency and the initial defence of Malaga by the spontaneous formation of volunteers into *grupos* (8), both Santana Calero and Vicente proposed on behalf of the Libertarian Youths the realization of what would afterwards become the “Batallón Juvenil Libertario” (the Libertarian Youths Battalion). Vicente was an integral part of its organising committee and was the Political Delegate until the fall of Malaga.

The other very important work carried out by the anarchist and C.N.T. militancy of Malaga and its province was the constructive work of assisting in the establishment of both land and industry collectivisations. Unfortunately not everything has been said or written with regards to this vast topic, the majority of books written focus on the collectivisations of Aragon, Catalonia, Extremadura and Levante. It has only been in the past 30 years that writers and researches from different anarchist groupings have dedicated themselves to record the verbal memoirs of many Andalusian peasants who lived the exhilarating experience of taking charge of the economy.

With the assistance of the group “Memoria de la CNT Histórica de Málaga y provincia”, I have been able to obtain a copy of minutes from the Provincial Historical Archives of Malaga, the contents of which reflect the proceedings of a meeting held in the township of Cártama on the 3rd of December 1936, for the purpose of collectivising the surrounding farming lands.

The second paragraph of this document records the intervention by Vicente Ruiz Gutiérrez from the metal workers section of the CNT Malaga, suggesting that the local secretaries of both the CNT and UGT advise all those present as to whether there has been any local agreement entered into by the two local *sindicatos* so as to ensure that all the participating workers in this undertaking would be responsible for the management of both the economic and social life of the collective.

ACTA DEL ACTO-ASAMBLEA CELEBRADO EN CARTAMA el día 3 de Diciembre de 1936.-

Se abre la cesion a las nueve de la noche, tomando la palabra el compañero Martin, el cual dá una orientacion de los motivos que han inducido a la organizacion U.G.T. a citar a los compañeros de la C.N.T., pidiendose dos delegados de las Federaciones locales de ambas organizaciones con objeto de discutir sobre una denuncia presentada en las mismas por la organizacion de una colectividad de campesinos.-

El compañero Vicente Ruiz Gutierrez, del Sindicato Metalurgico de Málaga, pide la pabra y despues de concedida, expone que con objeto de discutir el asunto en cuestion, se nombre una mesa de discusion y que los compañeros Rodriguez, por la Federacion Local de la C.N.T. y Madrid, por la Federacion Local de la U.G.T. den antes de comenzar la discusion una pequeña orientacion sobre el pacto de unificacion hecho por las dos centrales Sindicales.-

Se nombra la mesa de discusion recayendo por acuerdo unanime de la asamblea en los compañeros siguientes: José Martin.- Presidente de la U.G.T.- Antonio Gomez.- Secretario, de la C.N.T. y Cristobal Agüera y José Dueña de la U.G.T. y C.N.T. respectivamente.-

El compañero Rodriguez de la Federacion Local de la C.N.T. diserta sobre el pacto de unificacion de todos los trabajadores y dá una orientacion de la labor de los campesinos en la retaguardia, todas muy atinadas y que a juicio de la asamblea son las unicas para que la revolucion social llegue al feliz termino que nos proponemos.- Acto seguido pasa a disertar sobre colectividades tratando diversos puntos de esta nueva organizacion economica.-

Seguidamente se pasa a discutir sobre la denuncia presentada por la organizacion de la colectividad campesina origen de esta asamblea, pidiendo la palabra uno de los compañeros que trataban de formar la misma y manifiesta que la presentacion de la denuncia obedece a que han sentido miedo a continuar desarrollando su labor, sin acertar a explicar en que ha consistido este miedo.- Expone como motivo que cuando celebraban una reunion para fijar las normas a seguir, se presento ante ellos una comisión compuesta por varios Obreros afectos a la C.N.T. y que creyeron que llevaban intenciones de hacer abortar su reunion.-

El compañero Antonio Gomez, despues de serle concedida la palabra, dice: Que es contrario a que se forme esta colectividaa que se discute, por que en ella no vá la representacion genuina del proletariado y si solo la de algunos propietarios y arrendatarios, que se proponen al fundar esta colectividad el saboteo de otra formada por obreros autenticos.-

El compañero José Dueñas, tambien diserta sobre este mismo punto, exponiendo los mismos razonamiento que ya expuso el compañero Gómez.-

Acto seguido el compañero Ramon Madrid, tras una larga disertacion mal oida por la asamblea por sus escasas facultades aulonicas, dice que esta colectividad debe formarse por tratarse de que los que la tratan de formar son pequeños propietarios y arrendatarios a los que se les debe dar facilidades.-

Varios compañeros piden la palabra, exponiendo razones en pró y en contra de la formacion de esta colectividad, acordandose la formacion de la misma, siempre que una comisión de obreros de la C.N.T. y U.G.T. que serán nombrados por sus respectivos Sindicatos, lleven el control de su marcha economica y social.-

No tratandose de mas asunto el Secretario levanta la cesion a las once de la noche que firma la mesa de discusion.-

Cartama 3 de Diciembre de 1936.-

El Sindicato unido
José María
CARTAMA UNICO
de CARTAMA (Málaga)

The following paragraphs within which Vicente recalls how events evolved in the city of Malaga beginning in the afternoon of the 17th July 1936, were first published in March 1975, in number 79 of “El Demócrata” the journal of the Spanish Democratic Club of Sydney and Melbourne.

Malaga: The Sacrificed City

In the afternoon of the 17th July 1936, at approximately 6pm a component of the regiment number 1, took to the streets of Malaga to declare a siege of war. They were also awaiting the landing of troops from Melilla to support their feat, these were to arrive in the troop carrier “España No.5”. By now the rumours of a military insurgency in Morocco were confirmed.

The first confrontation by the above mentioned soldiers occurred along the *Acera de la Marina*, the promenade along the harbour, when a tramway conductor yelled *Viva la República*, “long live the republic”, making him the first victim of the assault onto Malaga by the fascists.

The resolution in response to the crisis was straight forward and simple; rally the working class by means of the two syndicalist organisations the C.N.T., and the U.G.T., as well as the left-wing political parties to bravely oppose the reactionary trilogy of capitalism, the military and the Church. Each Member of the mentioned syndicalist organizations and the various left-wing political parties became a delegate in function to engage and develop contacts with representatives of other left wing organisations. It was agreed that from 10pm that night, the syndicalist militants and the leadership of the various political parties would gather at their respective meeting halls from which they would resist as best as possible. At the same time the various Confederal Defence Groups prepared simultaneous action to requisition the weapons from the various gun shops around the city, emptying them of hand pistols, and shot guns as well as ammunition, at least we had some weapons, better than being empty handed.

That Saturday night the atmosphere was somewhat tense within the military barracks, the officers, congregated in small groups, would comment upon the possible fortunes of the insurrection. The same thing was happening amongst the non-commissioned officers and the soldiers, you simply needed the presence of a group of workers for the entire incident within the barracks to dissipate. The officers were divided within 3 factions, the republicans, the fascists and those that were neutral.

The bulk of the law enforcement forces, both the *Carabineros* as well as the armed *Guardias de Asalto* could be looked upon as loyal to the republic, due to the reforms instigated by the republic. Not the same thing could be said about the *Guardia Civil*. During the course of Saturday night they positioned themselves in the most strategic localities of the city, one of the many was in the building of the business Orellana, from which they had perfect vision of whomever came out of the offices of the U.G.T., that were located in the laneway of Santo Domingo.

Through the waves of Radio Malaga, we heard:

The army betraying its pledge, has taken to the streets to fight against the Republic. It is a moment when freedom and many lives are at risk both in Malaga and the rest of Spain. In Cordoba fascism has almost taken over, although the battle continues, the same thing is happening in Huelva, Cadiz and Granada, in Seville the fighting within the working class suburbs is horrendous... this is happening all over Spain.

Malaga honouring its coat of arms, "first to freedom", initiated a fight to the death, groups of fighters have retaliated by setting buildings alight, we could say that Malaga is in flames, and by 10 o'clock this morning of the 19th of July, Malaga is completely liberated from fascism.

The advancement onto the convents, churches and numerous houses in the centre of the city was slow but firm. Unfortunately the windows from which the fascists, the Civil

Guards and the priests were shooting at us turned out to be deadly and difficult hurdles. The drive by the workers who were now mixed with the Guardias de Asalto increased their attacks onto the various positions using the tactics learnt and used in the past during previous confrontations with governmental forces.

The city was in flames. From the bell towers of churches and from aristocratic houses shots would be fired indiscriminately onto groups of workers and at mothers with children. From buildings that were renowned fascist meeting halls, individuals would bet to see if they could kill an innocent person walking past. Many children were murdered that morning; by shots fired from the steeples of churches and the balconies of opulent houses.

At 10 o'clock in the morning, on Radio Seville, the drunkard Queipo de Llano spurted "Spread the terror".

This was the first battle that the population of Malaga had won. When the fighting, after 10 o'clock in the morning was escalating, there were volunteers from all left wing persuasions gathering, as well as people that could not remain passive when confronted with such an epic and passionate struggle.

The red and black flags had multiplied appearing in balconies and building rooftops. The password in the streets was C.N.T. - F.A.I., as were the words spoken through the loudspeakers fitted on cars that were also painted with the same initials.

Numerous metallurgic workshops were already under workers control and some of them began the manufacture of hand bombs whereas others began the construction of the first armoured cars. The workshops of the Andalusian Railways, which were also under workers control, began to build armoured trains.

The Local Federation of the C.N.T., together with the Prisoners Defence Committee, went to the Provincial prison to liberate everyone that was incarcerated. At the gate of the prison the men, women and children awaiting the arrival of those impris-

oned, melted into an emotional scene of hugs and embraces.

At about 11 o'clock in the morning, the soldiers together with the officers loyal to the republic rioted and took control of the military barracks. They opened the gates and allowed, the workers and Carabineros who had managed to encircle the barracks in the early hours of the morning, enter and take control of the garrison. It was a different story with the barracks of the Guardia Civil, due to the untrustworthy sentiment towards them the decision to restrain them to their barracks was taken (9). Within a period of just over 16 hours the population of Malaga had completely beheaded the fascist uprising.

When the fall of Malaga to fascist troops was officially proclaimed 7 months thereafter, the shock and surprise was astounding. No one believed that a city of 140,000 people in normal times and with the influx of refugees from the nearby localities increased its population to well over 200,000, could so easily fall into the hands of the fascist insurgents. For such a reason, I want to make sure that the historical truth of proceedings is known, as I was directly involved in many of the events and also witnessed the unfortunate and rapid deterioration of this city's defence.

The exciting circumstances demanded that all the members of the Malaga War Committee, which was made up of anarchists, socialists, republicans, communists and a military delegate representing the republican government, Colonel Simon, be sincere and able to recognise the failures and errors of their respective organisations, and be able to reprimand their own militants should the circumstances demand it.

Unfortunately, from the very beginning, Malaga and its protectors were the victims of many betrayals and interference from the powers to be. We had established in the sierra (the mountains) a front of 200 kilometres from Granada all the way to Estepona within which we had 8,000 volunteers. For those 8,000 fighters we had 300,000 bullets. The column lead by compañero Mora had 1,000 volunteers, but they only had 500 rifles. Those that had no weapons would wait for their



The population of Malaga took over the streets of the city on the morning of the 19th July.



Milicianos outside the Town Hall of Malaga.



Some of the members of the "Batallon Juvenil Libertario"
Vicente is marked with an X.



Vicente (marked with an X) speaking at a gathering of militants in 1936 - Malaga.

compañero to be shot so that they could use the rifle.

This shortage of weapons was due to the fatality of hopeless circumstances, and whether we like it or not we must accept this fact. Nonetheless, Malaga was the casualty of a systematic refusal by the government of Madrid first, and Valencia thereafter, to provide the necessary armaments for its defence.

And yet, Malaga was the most strategic location in the southern geographical region of the republican territory which needed to be defended, it was the first major port in the southern Mediterranean. The possibilities of the fascists sending and disembarking military personnel and ammunition, made this port the crucial place from which Andalusia could be conquered. The republican navy fleet could have used the capability of this port as a sheltered location from which the troops being sent from the Rif to Algeciras could have been attacked, as well as a base from which the military posts in North Africa could have been bombed.

But the politicians were more concerned with another dilemma. Malaga maintained *-in the eyes of the republican central government-*, an independent and different outlook, not because it had any separatist ideals, this different outlook was influenced by the defensive difficulties we were experiencing with the lack of weapons and ammunitions both of which were becoming scarcer as the battle prolonged.

The war committee of Malaga had determined that upon receiving the necessary weapons and ammunitions to halt the fascist offensive along the front of Estepona, to create a counter offensive and take Algeciras, from there march onto Sevilla and then go up to Cadiz. Requests, pleas, imprecations, all were in vain.

The Ministry of War rejected every single request we sent, and instead weapons would be sent to other fronts, at the time we could not understand the logic. Today, with perception it is all very clear to me. Of all the militias fighting along this front in the *sierras* defending Malaga, three quarters were militants of the C.N.T., of the F.A.I., and of the Juventudes Libertarias. The

majority of the elected delegates of the *pelotones*, the *centurias*, the battalions, the guerrilla action groups and the elected leaders of the columns were all libertarian *compañeros*.

Along this front you had people such as Pedro López, author of numerous studies on revolutionary warfare, a very well-known militant and highly respected by the land workers of the Ronda region and a very able delegate. The military command at the front would consult him regarding attacking strategies, Colonel Simon would say that he simply lacked the stars of a general. *Compañero* Mora, a brilliant young person -he was 24 years old-, had the experience of so many different fronts, Triana, Badajoz, Cáceres, Talavera, Toledo, Madrid, and whom Largo Caballero, had authorized to move to the front of Malaga with his militia volunteers and weapons. The brothers Arcas, one of whom was killed during one of the first conflicts. The brothers Raya, with the column "*La que siempre rayó*" -the one that always struck like lightning-, one of the brothers Luis Raya, a very close friend of mine, was killed at the front of Antequera, in charge of an artillery section. The "*Batallón Juvenil Libertario*" which included the *compañeros* Ramiro Ramón, Salvador Cruz, Juan Santana Calero, my brother Paco Ruiz and myself, as well as an infinity of other *compañeros* whose names I unfortunately cannot recall.

Commander Romero, the military chief of the entire front, was transferred to another post, because of his sympathetic attitude with the anarchists. Colonel Simon was also transferred, however due to the overwhelming complaints expressed by the militias along the front he was returned to his post.

In the mountains, the militias would resist and initiate attacks. They more than doubled the number of surprise attacks, or what is better known today as the guerrilla warfare attacks, but no one gave credit to this strategy of attack then. They also increased the number of bayonet charges, of which Franco's Moorish troops were petrified. Yet, the weapons would not arrive. In the military barracks in the city of Malaga more than 7,000 volunteers were awaiting and ready to join the fight. Now, everything is extremely clear, it was imperative to do

away with this large and solid revolutionary force in a very diplomatic way. Malaga was constantly bombarded by the German aviation, which would take off from a fleet of German ships that were permanently located along the coast of Malaga. Not once was this German fleet attacked by either the republican aviation or navy, we were however sent by the central government a reflector so as to protect ourselves.

Such was the state of affairs which the militias defending Malaga had to cope with when trying to repel the attacks from the Spanish, Italian, German and Moorish fascists. After six months of resistance with hardly any weapons the militias had no alternative but to retreat from the mountains into the city. Should the need arise to evacuate from the city, there was only one exit, the infamous road "Carretera de Almería" along the coast, and of which we had no idea as to whether it had been blocked by the German fleet or whether the fascists had landed troops to intercept any possible escape.

Starving for quite a few months, constantly bombarded by the German aviation, the population of Malaga fled, with thousands dying along that infamous and infernal road. These innocent victims were mothers, children, youngsters and elderly. When Malaga had fallen into the hands of the fascists and the majority of the civilian population found itself along the road to Almeria, the republican government sent reinforcements, weapons and ammunitions.



Unarmed *milicianos* in a marching drill through the streets of Malaga.



Unable or maybe not wanting to exile himself Juan Santana Calero was returning to Malaga with Juan Lozano following the walking tracks along the mountain ranges, as they were approaching the locality of Almeria they stumbled onto a fascist patrol. They were killed in April 1939.



Vicente's brother, Paco on the right of the photograph with a compañero.

In the paragraphs that follow Vicente narrates his last days in Malaga his arrival at the Huete and Madrid fronts, the last days of the war, his escape in the “Stanbrook” which would take him to Oran, Algeria.

“The first thing I did was to go and see my parents, have something to eat and have a sleep in my own bed. Not long thereafter I was awoken by the sound of canon fire, on opening my eyes the first thing I saw was my mother's terrified face. On the 5th of February the city was constantly bombed. My brother Paco was able to convince my parents to evacuate the city and take refuge in Almería. It was agreed that on the following day, the 6th of February, they would leave at dawn with the whole family (10). I said my goodbyes to my parents and as previously agreed I went to meet compañeros of the Juventudes Libertarias.

This was the last time I saw my parents on Spanish soil.

The fascists overran Fuengirola and took the road to Malaga, we prepared our defence strategies. On the 7th of February the fascist troops entered the outskirts of the city, at the same time a phenomenal aerial bombardment began. Our resistance was futile. With the “Batallón Juvenil Libertario” having been disbanded after suffering severe losses (11), quite a number of the *milicianos* joined the International Brigades or joined other columns. I selected to join the Railway Workers First Battalion that was located in the Huete front in the province of Cuenca.”

“I can recall that not long after arriving in Huete a compañero of the Juventudes Libertarias from Malaga informed me that my brother Fernando who was barely 16 years old, had been arrested by the *falangistas*, taken to the Civil Guard barracks and beaten during two days so that he would inform on the whereabouts of my brother Paco and myself. Because he had no idea as to where we were they sent him home half dead.”

“Following the events at the beginning of March with the

“Semana Comunista” from the 6th to the 12th of March 1939(12) and the constituted Council of Defence, the anarchist movement organised a national committee incorporating the three entities, the C.N.T., the F.A.I., and the Juventudes Libertarias, this being the committee that on the 18th of March proposed a retreat of all the anarchist militias towards the Mediterranean coast upon seeing the demoralisation of the volunteers at the front following the announcement of surrender and retreat from the front by the Council of Defence. The news also spread like wildfire that for quite a few days many of the communist leaders had been deserting and taking flight into neighbouring countries.

Within a few days we were advised that an evacuation had been organised for the entire front and that ships were waiting for us in Valencia. Debating with my consciousness I had to make a decision stay in Spain and hope for the best or escape and continue the fight. I knew quite well that staying in Spain would mean either imprisonment or the firing squad, we all knew the surrender conditions laid down by the fascists. Within my conscience I kept asking myself, what had happened to my brother Paco? What had happened to my parents, my sisters and my brother Fernando? I must confess that both terror and uncertainty as well as fear took hold of me, and after discussing our predicament with my compañeros in the battalion I elected to head towards Valencia.

I left Madrid on the 26th of March with a group of friends and compañeros from the battalion whose names I shall never forget; José Granado Ruiz, Julio Granado Ruiz, Andrés Alles Díaz, Juan Prían Olivera, and José Santiago Robles. I could never have imagined that this would be the start of a new chapter in my life. Upon arriving in Valencia compañeros informed us that everything was lost and that the safest thing would be to head towards Alicante where there was a probability of being able to board a ship. Without wasting any time we took the road to Alicante arriving in the township well after 5 o'clock in the afternoon on the 28th of March. We immediately went to the offices of the local federation of the C.N.T., here we were strongly advised to go to the harbour where there were two ships and we should be able to board

one of them. The compañeros from the local federation handed us some documents and we went to the harbour.

On arriving at the pier we found ourselves with a wave of human beings, women, men, children, and elderly, all trying to escape, from what we much later found out was a genocide. It took us quite a while to reach the boarding staircases, once on the boat we saw with our very own eyes that some of the sailors began disconnecting the stairways.

We could not believe it, the only word I can use to explain the emotions we felt at the time is fury. The six of us looked at each other in disbelief with what had just occurred, suddenly screams, complaints, grievances, insults could be heard, people were simply exhibiting their feelings of despair and helplessness.”

“A group of people near us began tying up ropes onto secure railings, tossing the other end of the rope onto the pier and yelling at those on the wharf to tie themselves and that they would pull them up onto the ship. The six of us joined the task of lifting quite a number of more people on-board. It was about quarter to eleven at night when the ship began to move away from the quay. Only at this moment did I sense the reality of what was happening, and more so when I noticed that Julio Granado who was standing next to me, had tears gently falling from his eyes. An immense silence imposed itself over the entire ship, I could also feel a knot in my guts, I had no idea what to do, whether to vomit or to cry my heart out. My nervous system took over and I remained spellbound on the spot, for how long I do not know. All I can recall is reacting when I heard several explosions, by this time we were exiting the harbour. The compañeros nearby told me an aeroplane bombed the spot where the ship was docked.

I am positive every single one of us had an incredible internal fear manifested by the uncertainty of what could be our future. Another war plane could arrive and bomb our ship, or we could cross path with one of Franco's war ships. Internally I had a battle raging between staying awake and fatigue, I am

not sure what time it was, but exhaustion won and I fell asleep cuddled up in a corner.

The word spread that we were heading towards Oran, I felt more relieved because I had on my mother's side, relatives that had been living in that city for quite some time. I cannot say how long it took us to complete the journey, my mind had lost all concept of time due to my mental and physical overtiredness.”



Vicente's safe conduit from the Grupo Faro of the local federation of Malaga



Photographs of the civilian population of Malaga along the road to Almeria





Gravure by Helios Gómez from his series, "The horrors of war", illustrating the atrocities suffered along the road to Almeria.



Vicente with the Railway Workers First Battalion in Huete.



Vicente in Barcelona during January 1938.



Vicente in Madrid.



On board the "Stanbrook" during the crossing from Alicante to Oran.
"The beginning of the rest of their lives in exile"

This was the start of Vicente's exile, an exile filled with atrocities and sub-human existence until the liberation of North Africa by the allied forces. Vicente spent the next 26 years in the land of the Magreb, arriving in Australia in 1965. He died in the city of Melbourne on the 15th July 1998. During those 59 years of exiled life he remained true to his anarchist ideals and never returned to his beloved Malaga.

I lived and evolved into the person I am alongside him. We would eat together, we would talk, we would debate, we would argue, and we had our differences.

But I hold onto, vivid memories of his opinions, his character, his outlook and his writings.

He kept his rebelliousness, dragging his nonconformity to the circumstances, to technology and the greediness of modern society. Like all the refugees scattered throughout the world, he also carried within him the collective sadness of being exiled. Yet there was this faint hope that one day he would be able to return to the land where he evolved his anarchist ethics.

I want to ignore what might have occurred in the last days of a life that was filled with struggles, incarcerations, punishments, disappointments, joys and bitterness.

I want to ignore, when, during those brief moments of sanity in the last few days of his life, he would plead with me to bring him a revolver so that he could commit suicide.

I want to ignore if he said or did anything in those last months of his insanity that were contrary to what he fought for throughout his life.

Instead, I want to keep in my memories the image of Vicente the propagandist, the activist, the militant, the anarchist writer although more a man of action than a writer, the Andalusian at heart and at the same time an internationalist anarchist.

NOTES:

- (1) His birthday was always celebrated amongst compañeros and family on the first of August, the date reflected on all documents accumulated from the inception of his life in exile, and the date that also appears in his last Refugee Certificate issued by the United Nations authorizing him to travel through France, Italy and finally Australia.
Yet, there exists some confusion with regards to his correct date of birth. His birth certificate which I have been able to obtain from my cousin shows the date as the 29th July, his National Service documents (which I have obtained from the Military Archives) show the date as the 31st July.
- (2) None of the grandchildren know his date of birth nor have we been able to obtain any information from regional archives, although by some of the documents we have acquired, we assume it may have been in 1879.
- (3) In 1929 the CNT was an underground entity, it was not until the following year 1930, that the government allowed it to once again operate openly and publicly, with the result that on the 10th of August 1930 they opened their offices at number 5 Calle Don Cristian. On the 1st December 1931 additional offices were opened at number 7 Calle Tejón y Rodríguez. (*Archives of the Historical CNT of Malaga and Provinces*)
- (4) A collision path was established between the CNT in Malaga and the Republican government due to numerous repressive incidents against workers during the course of the local elections on the 28th June 1931, resulting in the death of a member of the Transport Workers Section who was shot by the police. The following day a general strike was jointly declared by both the CNT and the UGT in protest to what had happened with workers marching through the streets of Malaga, by the end of the day 5 workers had been shot and killed by the Civil Guard. The UGT staid on strike until the 3^d of July, whereas the CNT militancy continued until the 4th of July. The political tensions and oppressions experienced during those few days in Malaga provided the required drive for the more radical wing of the libertarian movement to begin their campaigns promoting the ideals of the social revolution and channelling the language of the F.A.I. within the various sections of the CNT.

This is exactly what happened within the Federación Nacional de la Industria Ferroviaria (the National Federation of the Railway Industries) which was affiliated to the CNT, a *sindicato* to which the majority of the Andalusian railway workers were affiliated. On the 16th of October 1931 a strike was declared in the Andalusian region seeking better conditions of employment with the participation of 8,500 workers. On the 19th of October

the strike committee was arrested in Malaga and once again all the offices of the CNT were closed. The following day, Tuesday the 20th only the locals of Malaga, Puente Genil, Jerez, Sevilla, Ronda and Bodadilla maintained the strike which eventually was concluded on the 28th of October 1931.

The next major strike action, was the General Strike declared on the 29th of March 1934, which was also a protest against the brutal treatment of prisoners by the Guardia de Asalto. In retaliation, quite a number of the militants were jailed and sacked from their places of employment. In addition the offices located in Calle Tejón y Rodríguez were closed down by the authorities.

(This information was extracted from two issues of the journal "El Popular", one dated 4th of August 1931, the other 28th of October 1931, the book by Gutiérrez Molina "Una visión genérica sobre la represión ejercida contra los ferroviarios andaluces", published in 1994, and the archives of the Historical CNT of Malaga and Provinces)

- (5) These were affinity action groups that would operate with a membership of between 3 and up to 10 individuals, all bound by family ties, friendship and ideals. Contact amongst the groups was established through the normal channels via the local federation, the regional committee or the national committee.
(Archives of the Historical CNT of Malaga and Provinces)
- (6) The "Ateneo de Divulgación Social" was established on the 18th September 1931, and had its meeting hall in the avenue Alameda de Colon.
(Archives of the Historical CNT of Malaga and Provinces)
- (7) The details of this meeting were transcribed from documents held at the Provincial Archives of the City of Malaga.
- (8) During the first few hours of the uprising the workers would organise themselves into *grupos* of about 10 people, being the simplest form of organising a fighting unit to confront the insurgents.

As the fighting progressed the C.N.T., the F.A.I., and the Juventudes Libertarias began establishing battalions and columns based on the principles of assemblies whereby decisions were made through the process of direct democracy, avoiding any form of hierarchical command. They were structured in the sequence of *grupo* or *peloton* made up with 25 volunteers, the volunteers of each *grupo* or *peloton* would through direct democracy elect a delegate who could be recalled at any time. Four *grupos* would make up a *centuria* who in turn would elect a delegate to represent the *centuria*, and five *centurias* would make a battalion who

would also elect a delegate. A minimum of two battalions could constitute a column.

(Archives of the Historical CNT of Malaga and Provinces)

- (9) (additional historical information) A different story was written by the Guardia Civil garrison located at the barracks of Antequera who remained loyal to the republic. On the 20th of July 1936, the Lieutenant Colonel of the garrison, appointed second class cavalry civil guard Bernabé López Calle as the garrison's liaison officer to deal with the republican army and the Mayor of Antequera. No doubt his selection to the role was influenced by his natural negotiation abilities although more than likely it would have been by the fact that his brother Pedro López Calle a militant of the CNT had just been appointed Mayor of Montejaque, and within the first days of the revolution was able to establish a column which, from the township of Montejaque controlled the mountain ranges of Ronda.

It was during those early days of the revolution that at last Bernabé was able to join the CNT, something unthinkable until then for a Guardia Civil.

Bernabé López Calle went on to become the leader of the resistance fighters in the south of Andalucía, from the mountain ranges of Ronda and Grazalema down to Gibraltar. He was known as Comandante Abril (Commander April). On the morning of the 31 December 1949, Bernabé was killed by the Guardia Civil following the betrayal by one of his own men Francisco Fernández Cornejo on the promise of a pardon.

His brother Pedro López Calle arrived in Casablanca at the beginning of the 1950's, and immediately made contact with his old friend Vicente, when the Asociación Cultural Armonía was established in 1959, Pedro was a regular guest speaker at conferences and talks organised at the venue of A.C.A.

(Archives of the Historical CNT of Malaga and Provinces, as well as personal knowledge of Vicente Ruiz (hijo).)

- (10) (additional historical information) During the month of October 2015, I was fortunate enough to spend a few days with my cousin Mari who had to exile herself into France at the end of the 1950's. She is the eldest of all the cousins on my father's side of the family, daughter of my auntie Carmela. At night we would seat until all hours of the morning at the kitchen table drinking unsurmountable cups of unpalatable French coffee with a few sweets, and talk about the lives of our parents and grandparents. It was during one of these sittings that the topic of the evacuation of Malaga came up. My cousin who was 5 years old at the time said she would never forget the horrifying days they experienced

whilst travelling along the road to Almeria.

“You would think that having just turned five I would have erased that period of my life from the memory banks of my mind, instead, they remain with me and more than likely this will be the case until the day I die.

It was early in the morning of the 6th of February, our *abuelos* (grandparents), *tita* (auntie) Rosario and *tito* (uncle) Fernando, had gathered out the front of their house in the Calle San Andrés awaiting the arrival of my parents with my brothers and myself. I can remember that it was a long walk before we reached the seaside and began the climbs and descents of the winding road that followed the coastal line.

Whenever I would complain about being tired I would be picked up and carried by either *tita* Rosario or *tito* Fernando, I can still feel the horror, we had been walking for quite some time and abruptly people began yelling to lay down on the road and out of nowhere aeroplanes appeared and began shooting at everyone, suddenly there were explosions and people were screaming. When the aeroplanes disappeared we got up and continued our slow march towards Almeria.

I can also remember being picked up into the air and gently seated onto the shoulders of a tall man when I looked down it was *tito* Paco. He was heading to Almeria with some of the *milicianos* and he walked with the family for a few hours.

That night hunger struck and my mother gave me a tiny piece of bread which was as hard as a rock. We slept on the side of the road huddled up to keep warm with my brothers and I nestled in the middle and the rest of the family surrounding us.

The next day we were awoken by the sound of aeroplanes and I remember *abuelo* throwing himself over the top of my brothers and me. When the planes had left the area we continued walking, I was constantly crying because I was hungry and tired, my feet were hurting and every now and then one of the adults would put their hands over my eyes so as that I would not see the dead people along the side of the road. Suddenly a lady gave me a piece of sugar cane, she told me to chew it and reassured me that everything would be fine, it was your mother, *tita* Matilde, who was also walking along the road with her parents and siblings. I remember *tita* staying with us for quite some time because I was holding onto her hand, and whenever we went past a sugar cane plantation she would get me some.”

It took quite a number of days before the civil population of Malaga, tired, hungry and terrorised by the constant attacks from the German and Italian aviation surrendered and began their long walk back into the jaws of the fascist troops who now were in full control of the city. It is estimated that between 100,000 to 150,000 people fled the city of Malaga. Some sources also estimate that approximately 5,000 people died on the road to Almeria.

(11) (additional historical information) The three libertarian branches in Malaga (the CNT, the FAI, and the Juventudes Libertarias) kept very much alive the project of continuing the social revolution using militias with no military infrastructure or hierarchical order of command. Subsequently the government's project to militarize was very strongly objected to and resisted by the militias from Malaga which were very strongly influenced by the anarchist organizing methods. The order to militarize in the region of Andalucia was given on the 10th January 1937, however the defiance in following military orders displayed by the *milicianos* during offensives in the fronts of Cordoba, Granada and Malaga delayed the project of militarization until after the region fell into the hands of the fascists. During these last few days of January 1937 the organizing committee of the "Batallón Juvenil Libertario" prepared an offensive to retake Granada. During the offensive they were heavily bombarded by the enemy aviation in the "boquete de Zafarraya" suffering severe losses. The survivors returned to Malaga and were part of the militias that defended the city to the last moment. The entire anarchist militancy of Malaga took refuge in Almeria and from there dispersed onto different localities where volunteers were needed.

(Archives of the Historical CNT of Malaga and Provinces)

(12) For those interested in doing further reading on the final days of the civil war, I recommend the following books which are available in English:

The History of Spanish anarco-syndicalism by *Juan Gómez Casas*.

Anarchists in the Spanish Revolution by *José Peirats*.

The CNT in the Spanish Revolution by *José Peirats*.

The last days of Madrid by *Colonel Segismundo Casado*.

The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain by *Pierre Broué and Emile Témime*.

This next book I have only been able to find in Spanish:

Los últimos días de la república by *Xavier Costa Clavell*.

