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Marcelino de la Parra, Anarcho-syndicalist Guerrilla from León

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In the Ferradillo hills of León in 1942, a band of guerrillas of varying persuasions came together for a single purpose: ending Francoist rule. And so was born the very first post-Civil War armed anti-Francoist resistance organization in Spain. A CNT militant, Marcelino de la Parra was appointed as its military advisor.

Marcelino de la Parra Casas was born in Las Ventas de Nava (León) in 1911¹; he was a mechanic by trade and had been one of the most prominent León guerrillas active in the armed antifascist struggle ever since the collapse of the Asturias-León front back on 21 October 1937, together with labourer and UGT member Manuel Girón Bazán, who was born in Salas de los Barrios (León) in 1910. The lives of these two fighters ran in parallel with each other: they had both seen action in the Las Murias area with the army of the

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¹ Some say that Marcelino de la Parra was born in La Robla or in Leon city itself. We have plumped for the version mentioned in *Historia del anarquismo leonés* (León 1993, p 195)

Republic, operating behind the enemy lines on the León front, both of them being very knowledgeable about the terrain; together, they arrived in Asturias where they fought in the Recalde (or B) Division commanded by José Recalde Vela, again carrying out sabotage missions behind the enemy lines; they were still together when the war ended and, when the Northern Front collapsed, Marcelino de la Parra, Manuel Girón Bazán, Victoriano Nieto Rodríguez and some other former combatants set off from Pola de Leña and 14 days later reached Villaverde de la Abadía (León), Victoriano's home town. On arrival, Marcelino de la Parra was literally on his uppers and his comrade and friend issued him with new shoes.² From there, they headed for El Bierzo and Cabrer, the district of León best known to Girón. Up until mid-1939, a fair number of Asturian veterans had been massing in Casaio, that being a bit of a safe haven at the time, into which the forces of repression did not dare venture. From then on, Parra and Girón were inseparable. They were close friends and both had nerves of steel. Marcelino was an outstanding mechanic.

According to one socialist guerrilla (Marcelino Fernández Villanueva)³, Parra could take an ordinary handgun and turn it into a machine-gun.⁴ According to surviving guerrilla Mario Morán García⁵ who was constantly at Marcelino de la Parra's side, Parra and Girón were chalk and cheese in terms of temperament, but maybe that was the reason they got on so famously. For instance, Parra

² Secundino Serrano *La guerrilla antifranquista en León* (Siglo XX de España Editores, Madrid, 1968)

³ Marcelino Fernández Villanueva was born on 10 March 1914 in Olloniego (Asturias) and died in Argentina in 1999. He was one of the 29 guerrillas evacuated through the port of Luanco on 20 October 1948 and who were put ashore in St Jean de Luz (France) on 24 October.

⁴ Carlos G Reigosa, *La agonía del León* (Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1966, p. 51)

⁵ Mario Morán García was born in Mieres (Asturias) in 1915. He crossed into France on 26 December 1948 together with the guerrilla Benigno García González (aka *Viejo*). In 1951 moved to Mexico where he died in 1992. He was a member of the Socialist Youth.

had absolutely no sense of humour; whereas Girón was forever wise-cracking. Parra was cold and calm, whereas Girón was much more emotional. Girón was a chain-smoker with a cigarette always dangling from his mouth. Parra did not smoke. But they had this much in common; they knew how to give their all for a friend.

César Ríos Rodríguez⁶ another of those who came through the tragedy alive, corroborated Parra's calm, level-headed nature, for he stated that "if hungry, he ate, if sleepy, he slept, but he was not given to chat about ideologies and rarely engaged in any".

They remained in the hills above Casaio up until 27 July 1940, making final preparations for crossing into Portugal and on the chosen date Manuel Girón, Marcelino de la Parra, Enrique Oviedo Blanco (aka *Chapa*), José Vega Seoane (aka *Ánimas*)⁷, Eduardo Pérez Vega (aka *Tamairón*), Abelardo Macías Fernández (aka *Liebre*)⁸ set off along with a sizable group, but the persons named here turned back to the Casaio hills before reaching Portugal, whereas their fellow travelers pressed on, only to make their way back to the Sierra de Eje following a few set-backs and clashes with the Portuguese Republican Guard, sustaining a few losses. The Sierra del Eje was where the bulk of the Galicia-León resistance was. Since it was now plain that there was no way out for them, the need to organize guerrilla bands arose and this was a quite complicated matter, given the motley loyalties of the guerrillas, but a few of the ones from León, like Girón, Parra and Abelardo Macías Fernández, who had the greatest sway over the men up in the mountains, were resolute advocates of armed struggle against the Francoist regime.

⁶ César Ríos Rodríguez was born in Siero (Asturias) in 1915 and died in 1997.

⁷ José Vega Seoane (*Ánimas*) was born in Xares near A Veiga do Bolo (Orense) and died on 9 July 1945 in the Sierra de Corbaceira (Zamora). See Antonio Téllez: *A guerrilla antifranquista de Mario de Langullo* (Ediciones A Nosa Terra 2000, pp. 81, 86)

⁸ Abelardo Macías Fernández (*Liebre*) was born in Lago de Carucedo (Ponferrada) in 1912 and died on 12 March 1949 in Villasinde (Vega de Valcarce, León)

In the summer of 1941 a goodly number of bands were launched and these were the embryos of future guerrilla units in El Bierzo, the Trives district (in Orense), Casaio, etc. The La Cabrera group was under the command of Marcelino de la Parra Casas.

In April 1942, some 25 guerrillas from León, Asturias and Galicia, representing the full spectrum of anti-Francoist sentiment – Marcelino de la Parra being one, of course – gathered in the Ferradillo hills near Ponferrada (León) to launch the León-Galicia Guerrilla Federation. The political breakdown of those attending were: 4 anarcho-syndicalists (Parra, Abelardo Macías Fernández aka *Liebre*, Abelardo Gutiérrez Alba aka *Abelardo*⁹ and Victoriano Nieto Rodríguez¹⁰; 5 socialists, 6 members of the UGT, 4 communists and 5 of no particular political affiliation. With the exceptions of one blacksmith and one mechanic, they were all miners, labourers and farmers. Their statutes were approved unanimously. A Steering Committee was elected, chaired by Marcelino Fernández Villanueva (aka *Gafas*), chief of staff and top leader and Marcelino de la Parra (CNT), Mario Morán García and César Ríos Rodríguez (socialist) were appointed as advisors. At the time the communist members of the Federation were very

⁹ Abelardo Gutierrez Alba (*Abelardo*) was born in 1912 in San Miguel de Cervantes (Lugo). He took to the hills during the very first days of the army revolt, together with his brothers Baldomero and Jovino, his sister Domitila, his mother Consuelo Alba Digón and an uncle Segundo Alba Digón. By late 1939, along with Marcelino de la Parra and Manuel Girón Bazán, he was leading an important guerrilla band. In 1947 he crossed into France with his two brothers thanks to a CNT escape network in the Basque Country. He later returned to Spain on two occasions to help the remainder of his family out to France.

¹⁰ Victoriano Nieto Rodríguez was born in 1911 in Villaverde de la Abadía (León). In 1948 he was in charge of an independent group that refused to abide by the communists' directions. On 17 March 1949, Victoriano Nieto was caught unaware, along with his partner Elpidia Morán Alonso and the guerrillas Abelardo Macías Fernández, Hilario Álvaro Méndez and Oliveros Fernaández Armada (*Negrín*). Nieto and *Negrín* managed to escape, but the others perished. He then managed to cross into France before emigrating to Mexico.

Cañuto, a Civil Guard agent and infiltrator who received a 74,000 peseta reward for his treachery.

that his departure from the country was imminent. He had sought shelter in the home of a sister of his, but she had disclosed his identity to her sweetheart who was a policeman. Marcelino de la Parra was transported to the capital of León and confirmed what the authorities already knew about the organizational model of the now extinct Federation. A lot of police reports on León opened with this formula: “According to Parra’s testimony ...” Some people say that Parra spilled a lot of beans, but if that was the case he was telling them nothing, for his information related to a now bygone stage and none of the guerrillas he named were (as Parra was quite well aware) in the province of León any longer. Parra uttered not one word about those whom he knew were still out there in the hills of León.

Marcelino de la Parra was sentenced to death and garroted on 8 November 1948. He was buried in León’s civil cemetery. The burial records stipulate that death was from “strangulation”.

By the time Marcelino de la Parra was being executed, Marcelino Fernández Villanueva (*Gafas*) and César Ríos Rodríguez were already some days safely on French soil. A month later, Mario Morán García managed to slip across the Spanish-French border precisely where Parra had failed to get across.

Other guerrillas – like the CNT’s Abelardo Macías Fernández (*Liebre*) and Victoriano Nieto Rodríguez or the communist Oliveros Fernández Armada (*Negrín*)¹⁵, among others – decided to carry on with the struggle.

Manuel Girón Bazán outlived his pal Parra by two and a half years and was only eliminated through an act of betrayal. He was murdered on 2 May 1951 in Molinaseca (León) by José Rodríguez

¹⁵ In 1947 Oliveros Fernández Armada (*Negrín*) belonged to the guerrilla band of Silverio Yebra Granja (*Atravesao*), one of six bands belonging to the Second *Agrupación* of the “Guerrilla Army” set up by the Stalinists and which shattered anti-Francoist unity in León and Galicia. *Negrín* managed to cross into France in 1950.

much a minority, too few to aspire to membership of the Steering Committee.

This was the very first armed resistance organisation opposing Francoism launched in Spain following the civil war (it had about fifty members in all). The Communist Party was unable to exercise any hegemony over this first guerrilla organization, but it did manage to sink it later on. That was in 1942 with the appearance on the scene of the “false flaggers” (*contrapartidas*), teams of Civil Guards in guerrilla get-up, living in the hills just as the anti-Francoists did; these played a very significant role in the anti-guerrilla campaign. 1942 was the year when losses were sustained on both sides. On 4 September 12 guerrillas were to intercept a bus belonging to the Truchas-La Bañeza (León) line, but they were not to know that the bus was carrying a couple of Civil Guards. What they did know was that there was a tax-collector on board that day. At Kilometre 12 near the townland of Morla, the bus was stopped, but a fire-fight erupted in which the two Guards and four other passengers lost their lives, with a further five wounded. The attack was immediately chalked up by the authorities to lots of people who were then rounded up, and it was stated that the attackers had included Marcelino de la Parra, together with Enrique Oviedo Blanco (*Chapa*), acting on the instructions of Marcelino Fernández (*Gafas*). But the very next day, the military governor, Severino Pacheco amended this report, specifying that many of the alleged perpetrators were merely guerrilla couriers and that the responsibility for the incident would be clarified at their respective councils of war.

In June 1943 the guerrillas assembled in the Ferradillo hills again for the Federation’s second congress, attended by guerrillas operating in El Bierzo, plus the leaders of bands from eastern Orense and from northeastern Lugo. The Steering Committee was transformed into a High Command, with Marcelino de la Parra, Mario Morán García and top man Marcelino Fernández Villanueva reappointed to their posts.

A further Federation congress was held in the Casaio hills during 10 to 12 October 1944 and those three guerrilla leaders were again confirmed in their posts. But the communists, whose influence had been boosted by activists arriving from exile, saw to it that Francisco Elvira Cuadrado was appointed as High Command deputy commissar as representative of the PCE, the object being to establish communist hegemony within the Federation in short order. The congress was attended by a delegate from the Spanish National Union (UNE) and by Eusebio Azañedo Grande, representing the CNT.¹¹

In mid-July 1945 in the La Bruña valleys (in the Casaio hills) another congress, dubbed the “reunification” congress was held; it was supposed to bring all the various factions together as one, especially the communists who backed the Spanish National Union (UNE) and others who preferred the ANFD (National Alliance of Democratic Forces). While the congress was in progress, a *contrapartida* killed Francisco Elvira Cuadrado and Arcadio Ríos Rodríguez in combat.¹²

Even though the congress reshuffled the High Command and endorsed the ANFD, thereby “solving” the issues of unity and pluralism within the Federation “on paper”, in actual fact it set the seal upon a split, since the death of the two communists named (they had been staunch supporters of unity) thwarted any chance of agreement with the Stalinists and on 18 August a split occurred, led by Evaristo González Pérez (*Roces*) and Guillermo Morán Gar-

¹¹ Eusebio Azañedo Grande served as acting general secretary of the CNT National Committee in 1942. Arrested in 1943, his place was taken by Manuel Amil Barcía who was just out of prison. Azañedo served again on the CNT National Committee under Manuel Villar Mingo in 1947 and, the same year, was jailed again. An inmate of Ocaña, he was involved in the 8 May 1948 break-out by 12 CNT militants.

¹² Francisco Elvira Cuadrado, a native of Guadalajara, died on 27 July 1946 together with Arcadio Ríos Rodríguez in the Sierra del Eje (Casaio, Orense). The latter had been born in Evia in 1911.

cía,¹³ with the launch of an alleged and much trumpeted “Guerrilla Army of Galicia”. After that, most of the communists, be they militants or sympathisers, quit León and flooded into Orense province. Guerrillas disinclined to join said “Army” remained on the soil of León; they included people such as Enrique Oviedo Blanco (*Chapa*), Victoriano Nieto Rodríguez, Abelardo Macías Fernández (*Liebre*) and many others. However, Marcelino Fernández (*Gafas*), Manuel Girón Bazán, Marcelino de la Parra and Enrique Oviedo Blanco had, in the wake of the “reunification” congress, withdrawn to Casaio; they did though, make one last attempt at securing unity and, on their behalf, Marcelino Fernández Villanueva travelled up to Lugo in late 1946 in an attempt to enter into talks with the leaders of the Communist Party of Galicia so as to settle the issue of alliances and put forward a uniform plan for armed struggle; however, he was unable to get to talk to the Spanish Communist Party leaders and a number of circumstances prevented his returning to León.

So the ‘Reunification’ Congress set the seal on the end of anti-Francoist unity and thus also spelled the beginning of the end of the León-Galicia Guerrilla Federation. Some of its leading fighters managed to slip out of Spain during 1948¹⁴ and 1949, by a variety of means, but Marcelino de la Parra Casas, CNT member and advocate of a robust guerrilla organization, a man of great prestige in the armed struggle against Francoism, was not so lucky. He tried fleeing across the Catalan border, only to find himself arrested in Tarragona on 14 May 1948 just as he was in a post office in the act of sending off a letter to his guerrilla ex-comrades informing them

¹³ Evaristo González Pérez (*Roces*) and Guillermo Morán García perished on 20 April 1949 in Chavaga in the Monforte de Lemos district, in a clash with the Civil Guard. See Antonio Téllez, *A guerrilla antifranquista de Mario de Langullo* (Ediciones A Nosa Terra, Vigo, 2000, pp. 131–134)

¹⁴ Early in 1948 Laurentino Álvarez Rodríguez, Casimiro and Amable Fernández Arias, Hilario Martínez Largo and Etelvino Fernández Méndez managed to cross into France. Amadeo Ramón Valledor followed suit towards the end of that year.