

PRELUDE

My great-grandfather was there! That's a great sentence for me. He was one of the thousands of soldiers who fought for liberty and against tyranny in the bloodiest battle of the 1936-1939 Civil War. We should pay tribute to all these brave people for good. Now I am going to narrate his story in the best possible way.

A soldier, Agusti Cartoixa

It was the 25th of July 1938. It was a dark night in the city of Tortosa. It was all dead silent. The only sound came from the waves of the river. Suddenly, the first shot started a historical and long battle. The famous *Pas de l'Ebre*, Crossing of the Ebro, took place at the harlot of Font de Quinto, ten kilometres from the city. The members of the XIV International Brigade, called La Marseillaise, also known as La Commune de París, were the ones who led the crossing. Hundreds of soldiers passed away, most of them Belgian and French in just twenty hours. Hence, in their memory, there were a few survivors that have been able to tell us that terrible event, which covered our beautiful river in blood. One of them was my great-grandfather, Agustí Cartoixa, one of the soldiers that fought bravely for the Republic in the bloodthirsty Battle of the Ebro.

He was seventeen years old when the leaders of the republican army called him to enrol the army and become a stretcher bearer in Tortosa. That was an extremely young age to take part in a war as a member of the famous *Lleva del biberó*, known as the levis, the baby bottles in the Catalan language. When I think he was just one year older than I am nowadays, I start shivering.

I daresay the bombs fell without asking any people's age and killing everybody who happened to be in their way. He only had a gun so as to shoot the enemy and attempted to repel the soldiers of the franquist army, but he could have killed twenty of them.

The Republican army was falling into pieces. As a matter of fact, tearing apart. The nationals were winning and killing a lot of republicans, civilians too. They were thirsty for revenge.

Brave Agustí and his mates had to withdraw because of the defeat. Tired of walking they stayed in the sewers of Barcelona, to try to save their lives but the nationals found them and arrested them cruelly.

In a few days they were taken to a concentration camp in Astorga, in the León province. They had to sing the nationalist hymn "Cara al Sol" every day, which was a horrible way to humiliate them. Their enemies took them only a sardine and a piece of bread to eat. They were starving, but had to do forced work for the fascists.

After six exhausting years, Agustí could finally leave the concentration camp. But he was forced to do military service for three years. The nightmare was going on. Therefore, he spent ten years of his life being a soldier or a prisoner when he actually was a farmer, an event that marked his life and the one of all of his friends.

After these sinister ten years he was able to lead a normal life, he married and built a nice family. Unluckily, he was never happy. He passed away in 1993, submitted to alcohol and smoking too much in order to try to forget that hard adolescence where he had to kill people and saw his friends dying. Those images he was never able to erase from his mind.

Now, his great-grandson, I, has been able to talk about this hard story that thousands of teens had to live through in 1938. There were hard times that a lot of families had to see and

our work is to raise awareness for everybody to prevent this bloody event from happening again. Never again!