

Occupation, Repression and Flight in Sierra Sur de Sevilla, Antequera and Ronda.

The Francoist military coup of July 1936 was accompanied by the need to suppress through force all of the areas that remained loyal to the government of the Second Republic, and the order to implement terror through a trail of blood and destruction was fulfilled to the letter.

In Andalusia, the beginning of September saw the commencement of a little known military operation that had the objective of dominating the entire route of the Algeciras-Granada railway line, both cities already in the hands of the rebels, with the exception of a long section that had its epicentre in Ronda.

The consequences that arose from these operations directly affected three regions: Sierra Sur de Sevilla, Antequera and Serranía de Ronda. Four months later the entire zone of Valle de Abdalajís, Valle del Guadalhorce and finally Málaga would fall.

Thus was the start of the bloodiest episode these regions had ever known in their entire history. The death tolls of victims were tremendously high.

The investigation contrasted the documentation and existing testimonies with the chronicles compiled by the priest Bernabé Copado, who accompanied the column of commander Redondo in its occupations in the area. This operation, which was not an isolated event, formed part of a military advance of great magnitude that sought the subduing of new territories.

The offensive began on three different fronts, with two of them converging on the road from Campillos to Ronda. That is, the first that corresponded to the column of commander Redondo departed Osuna towards El Saucejo, and once this town had been subjugated, it was the turn of Los Corrales, Martín de la Jara, Villanueva and Algámitas then on to the northeast of Málaga by Almargen and from there to Cañete. The second departed from Antequera, under the command of Varela and commander Corrales, occupying Campillos and Teba to subsequently merge with the first, also at the Cañete crossing. Finally, the third column acted from the Cadiz municipalities of Arcos de la Frontera and Ubrique, taking small mountain towns including: Benaoján, Montejaque, Algatocín, Cartajima, etc, equally closing in on the objective. The latter was led by Commander Arizon.

Thursday 3 September saw the commencement of the new mission in Osuna, which ended on the 17th with the bombing of Ronda and its streets full of bodies.

With the operations concluded, the fronts in southern Andalusia drew a new dividing line that reduced the republican zone to the part that remained behind the El Chorro reservoir, going down the Abdalajís valley, including Ardales, Carratraca, Alora and Cártama up to Estepona. From there it followed the entire coast of Málaga towards Almería and Levante. Refugees fleeing the occupied towns reached this zone in their thousands.

The control of these municipalities changed hands in a matter of weeks, and the local fascists, with the authorisation and blessing of the military commands, found themselves with the power to decide and act without limits overnight. The majority could not imagine up to what point the punishment would be carried out, or the *clean up* operation enforced.

Vengeance was left in the hands of armed groups that began to act immediately. The crimes of their victims were extremely diverse. Any detail was sufficient for the lesson to be taught.

But the punishment being carried out on those who stayed behind still awaited those who fled and, given their houses remained shut, the looting and pillaging was underway from the very first day.

In January 1937, Queipo de Llano decided to recover military prominence, setting his sights on widening the southern front with the conquest of Málaga. For the rebels, the fall of this enclave meant controlling an important strategic port from where to dock the essential Italian support. To this end, Queipo boasted a large contingency of land, sea and air forces, sufficient to cause terror in an area where there had never been a direct confrontation with them.

In the face of the coming situation, on 7 February it was ordered to evacuate the capital, and the mass flight began. The only escape route available was the road towards Almería that was unused to avoid land assistance. The impressive human river of some 200,000 people left the city under the crossfire of shelling from the sea and machine gunning from the air. The assistance that was attempted from the air by republican planes was not enough to avoid one of the biggest massacres of the war, estimated at over 5000 civilian victims.

A large number of people from the north of the province and La Sierra Sur de Sevilla had also arrived in Málaga, fleeing the advance of the troops. Many of them suffered the bombings on the road to Almería.

A worse fate awaited those taken prisoner in the capital. Their identity, unknown by the victors, was left in the hands of reconnaissance operations.

A series of reactionary parties began to travel to the city from the different occupied towns, seeking and identifying *los rojos* from their municipalities among the prisoners. Upon their arrival they made the detainees walk out onto the patio and from a window the visitors identified them. They were executed that same night.

Following the defeat of this emblematic zone of the Republic, the majority who were not prisoners, at the front, or who had managed to get to Almería, began to return to their towns, without imagining what awaited them. Many of them could expect the rigorous application of the *Bando de Guerra* (War authority).

With all of those arriving, the local fascists, always under the command of the military in the zone, restarted a second repression of terror and death, now boasting the presence of a *Special Permanent War Court* that quickly carried out trials and executions without any type of guarantee.

At the end of the war, the defeated who had managed to flee their municipalities found themselves in very diverse situations. A number had fallen captive in prisons, others in concentration camps, others outside Spain, and the majority in places where they simply formed part of the multitude. To those returning to their places of origin via their own means, as soon as they were seen arriving there was no shortage of informers running to report to the Civil Guard station, attributing all types of crimes to them.

The arrests were on a mass scale and the prisons used in the municipalities overflowing. The reports were sent to the military courts. The prisoners were then transferred by the Civil Guard to be directly incarcerated in the Provincial Prison or work teams, while they waited for a court martial. The proceedings could last months or years depending on the requests emanating from the *Auditoria de Guerra* (judge).

Various months following the end of the war, the *search and clean up*

operation of all of the suspects found, street by street and town by town, was almost over. The hundreds of thousands that filled the local and provincial prisons were now under control. An iron dictatorship was in place, the human, social, political and economic consequences of which we are still investigating.