

# Franco's victims fight again in a war of the obituaries

Young Spaniards are seeking delayed justice for the losers in their grandparents' conflict

by Javier Espinoza  
Madrid

AS SPAIN prepares to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the first mass terror bombing of a civilian population, the German and Italian attack on Guernica during the Spanish civil war, an extraordinary battle is taking place through the country's obituary columns.

It began with the decision last year by the family of Commander Virgilio Leret Ruiz, General Franco's first victim, to commemorate his death. It is a process that has brought back the language and the painful memories of a struggle that pitted the left-wing republican government against a military-led fascist rebellion – with its tragic consequences.

In the years of dictatorship that followed Franco's victory in 1939, relatives of the republican dead were prevented from publishing their obituaries. Now, amid huge soul-searching in Spain over the war, the belated obituaries have dredged up accusations and enmities long since buried.

The opening shot in this reborn civil war was fired by Carlota Leret, daughter of the army pilot executed on 18 July 1936, when she published a half-page obituary in *El Pais*. The notice, costing €7,000 (£5,000), read: 'Commander Virgilio Leret Ruiz was a victim of Francoist



Virgilio Leret Ruiz, left, the army pilot who was the first victim of the uprising launched by General Franco, below. Carlota Leret, Hulton Archive

terrorism. He was shot at dawn on 18 July 1936 after surrendering. As a result of a pact of silence that is unacceptable in any democratic society, Spain still has a debt of justice, truth and the memory to the victims.'

Speaking to *The Observer*, she said: 'Franco's own heroes have had many tributes and I feel that the relatives of the republican dead also have the right to remember our loved ones. The obituary signifies a scream of pain and a claim for justice. There can never be real reconciliation without establishing the truth first and making a restitution honouring the victims.'

Llani Alvarez, granddaughter of a republican captain killed days after the uprising for refusing to take part, said: 'We, the losers, never really had a proper compensation for our pain. Wounds were never really healed.'

Leret's obituary prompted a flurry of

counter-articles using language such as: 'Vilely assassinated by the Red hordes'; 'He gave his life because he was reluctant to compromise his faith'; 'They gave their lives in the name of God and Spain'. Republican obituaries contained lines such as: 'Attacked for defending the legitimacy of the republic'; 'Killed by the Franco occupying forces'; 'Shattered by the bullets of Franco's repression'.

Francisco Ferrandiz, an anthropologist studying the language of the obituaries, said that they 'reflect the latent clash between the memory of the defeated and the memory of the winners'.

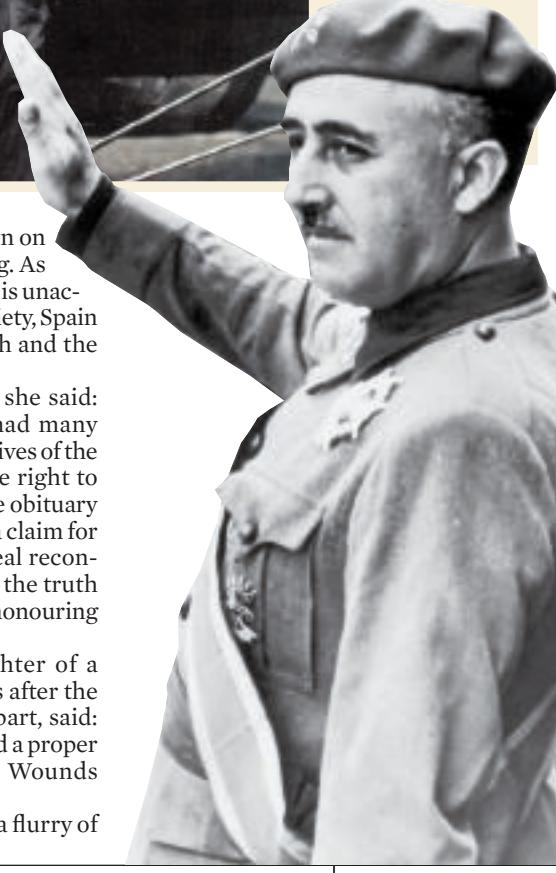
Groups linked to the political right claim that the obituaries are just a form of reopening old wounds instead of looking into the future.

Emilio Silva, president of the Commission for the Recovery of the Historic Memory, said: 'Many myths have been created around this issue and it is time that we know what really happened. There are wounds still waiting to be healed.'

Silva's grandfather was killed by Franco's troops in the early days of the war.

Nuria Teson, a reporter for *El Pais*, said: 'Spain is waking up after a long lethargy. In part, thanks to the massive amount of publications on the civil war on TV, films and literature that tell "the other side of the story".'

'Besides, people are beginning to read and question the history they took for granted during the 40 years of dictatorship. The generations of the grandsons and granddaughters of the civil war generation want the truth and justice. In a way, they are using the obituaries to get just that.'



WORLD BRIEFING

MOROCCO  
Attack on US offices

Two suicide bombers died in an attack on US diplomatic offices in Morocco's commercial hub, Casablanca, the scene of three suicide blasts four days ago. The first blast was close to the US cultural centre and the second went off about 60 metres from the US consulate. Police are hunting a third man seen running from the scene, who was suspected to be rigged with explosives. A senior police source said security fortifications stopped the two getting closer to the two buildings.  
Reuters

NORWAY  
Tugboat salvage starts

Work has started to salvage the stricken tugboat which capsized alongside an oil rig off Shetland. Attempts by Royal Navy divers to find the bodies of five Norwegian crew members still missing ended in failure.

One of the missing crew is believed to be the skipper's 15-year-old son, who was on work experience, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency said. The bodies of three people killed in the accident have been recovered. Seven of the crew were rescued.  
Reuters

TURKEY  
Rally against PM

More than 200,000 people protested against Turkey's Islamist prime minister, demonstrating the intense opposition that Recep Tayyip Erdogan could face from the country's secular establishment if he decides to run for president next month. They chanted: 'We don't want an imam as president.'

Many fear that, if he were to win the presidency, the government would be able to implement an Islamist agenda without opposition.  
AP

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