

## Biographical Notes for “Forget-me-Not”

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In late January/early February 1939 at least half a million Spanish civilians and soldiers fled to France. The word “Retirada” (Spanish for Retreat) was used to signify this exodus, which was the biggest single influx of political refugees ever known in France. This humanitarian catastrophe followed the collapse of the democratically elected Second Spanish Republic and the brutal victory of General Franco, aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The last major Spanish city to fall was Barcelona on 26 January 1939 after predictable military defeat of the “ad hoc” Republican army at the final battle along the beautiful Ebro river. “Predictable” because Franco was part of a military coup organized between 1934 and 1936 under the leadership of several Spanish army generals so that Spanish republicans were left without any regular army from the very beginnings of the bloody civil war in July 1936. This hopeless situation was made worse by the growth and disorganized action of countless revolutionaries (communists and anarchists) as explained in George Orwell’s book “Homage to Catalonia”. During the night of 27<sup>th</sup> January thousands of Republicans, having been mercilessly pursued by Mussolini’s bombs, were struggling to get in to France at the frontier towns of Cerbère, Le Perthus and Prats-de-Mollo – this during a vicious winter.



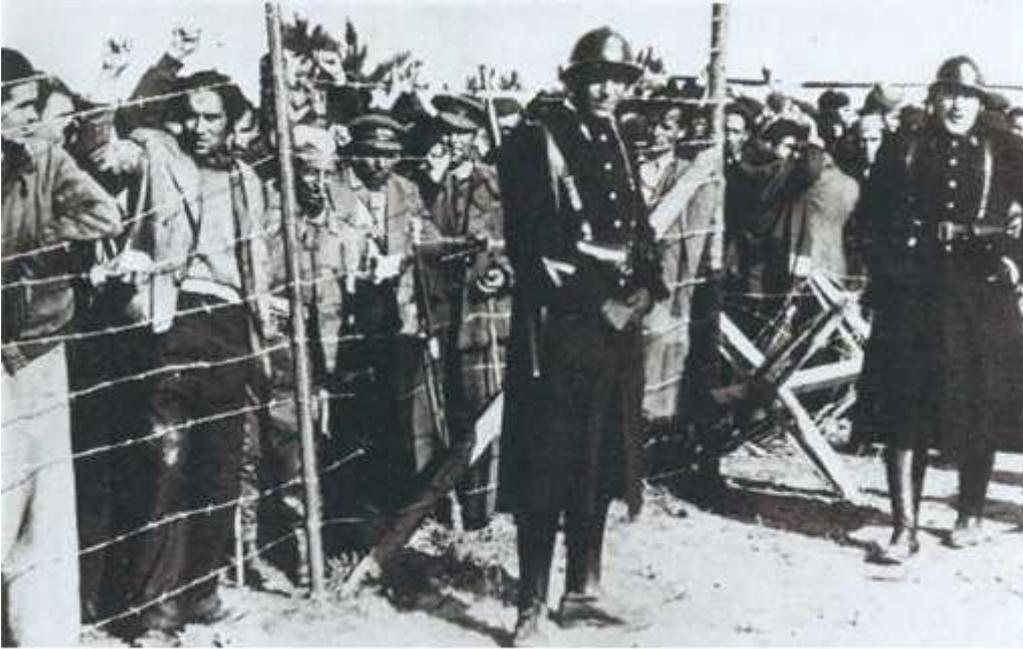
They had come from all over Spain including Asturias and Santander, Euskadi, Extremadura and Castilla la Nueva, Andalucía, Aragón, Catalunya. Inevitably many of them were Spanish freemasons because general Franco had declared them sworn

enemies of the Catholic military crusade condemning to death some eight thousand of them (official numbers of the Gran Oriente de España – the premiere Spanish Grand Lodge at the time) only recognized some four thousand members. Among those desperate freemasons who entered France – only to be declared as “foreign undesirables” – was a then young man from Catalonia, Lluís Salat i Gusils, who some 40 years later was due to become the first MWGM of the regular GLE (Spanish Grand Lodge or Gran Logia de España). Many women and children were allowed in on that same night, and then between 5 and 9 February all the “Reds” (so-dubbed) were put into unprepared internment or concentration camps; between 60,000 and 100,000 men were herded together on the beach at Argelès-sur-Mer. Their only welcome was barbed wire fences, ‘Gardes Mobiles’ (a special branch of the gendarmerie) and brutal Senegalese troops.

Lluís Salat spent just over a month there, and (in his own account) was allowed out with the generous help of some French Brethren. This event is not well documented and I could find no historical evidence for it, besides verbal reports and witnesses. These camps had no protection from freezing temperatures and biting winds apart from a few improvised flimsy shacks. Most men slept in holes dug in the ground. There was no water, no sanitation and scarcely any food.

According to one of the most famous early photojournalists the American Robert Capa, “for sport many mounted and armed French guards beat up dying men ... One night in February seventeen had died of exposure and were buried where they lay.” Other Spanish republican freemasons were less lucky than Bro. Lluís Salat and even eminent individuals like the poet Antonio Machado (whose poems were quoted by Spanish new king Felipe VI on his very recent Proclamation) died. Bro. Antonio Machado is buried in the little and beautiful village of Colliure just across the border in the Pyrenees

Others, like the President of Catalonia, Lluís Companys were allowed to reach Paris and other cities only to be eventually captured by the Nazi SS squads and sent back to Spain (where he was sentenced to death by Franco and executed in Montjuich close to Barcelona Olympics stadium) or sent to Nazi concentration camps in Austria, Poland, Germany.



Lluís Salat I Gusils managed to escape from France, avoiding the Nazis, and settled in Bogotá, Colombia. He was born on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1914 in a well established family of Catalan industrialists (the “Salats”) and was initiated as a FM in October 1935 at Lodge Thenis number 13 of GOE in Barcelona. In the troubled January of 1937 he was made WM of his lodge. When in Latin America, Bro. Lluís became involved in Colombian FH (Gran Logia Nacional de Colombia) becoming their Grand Secretary during one year (1951-52). He returned to Spain in 1974 (Generalísimo Franco died in November 1975) and became involved in underground FM until his lodge “Perseverança” became recognized by the GLNF in 1979 as their lodge number 246. Together with two other Spanish lodges (Sant Joan de Catalunya number 208 of GLNF and Sant Jordi 227 (meeting in Perpignan just across the French border) became the embryo of the GLE, with Mof GLNF Jean Mons recognizing Lluís Salat as the GM of the Spanish District of the GLNF. Among the very early English freemasons to attend such lodge meetings I cannot fail to acknowledge WB Eric O’Hara who brought a lot of ritualistic knowledge and spent great time and effort (and personal money) to help Lluís Salat and others.



Finally on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1982 Lluís Salat asked the GLNF for formal recognition of the Gran Logia de España (GLE) and MWGM Jean Mons created the GLE with Decree 656 of the GLNF thereby establishing the first regular grand lodge in Spanish History; without of course counting number 50 of the Grand Lodge of England founded by the Duke of Wharton (previously one of the early GM of the Grand Lodge of England) who signed the Constitutions in 1723 in London and exiled to Spain in 1728 created the first English lodge not on in Calle San Bernardo of Madrid called “French Arms”.

Recognition of the GLE by the UGLE had to wait until 1986. In a 1984 interview in the Spanish newspaper El País Lluís Salat said: *Yo debo a la masonería "todo lo que he hecho en la vida y lo que soy. Ha sido lo que me ha mantenido con ánimos hasta en los momentos más difíciles". Comenta que la masonería en España ha estado muy politizada, que se utilizó con finalidades políticas y en luchas religiosas, cuando en realidad, según él, no tiene nada que ver ni con la política ni con la religión.*

Very little is known about his personal life and his business life, and he left very few written documents and (as far as I am told by GLE) no published books or papers.

### References

[http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luis\\_Salat\\_i\\_Gusils](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luis_Salat_i_Gusils) (official CV by the GLE)

[http://elpais.com/diario/1984/12/26/ultima/472863606\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/1984/12/26/ultima/472863606_850215.html)

(biographical article published on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1984 by the Spanish newspaper El País)