

Floreal Barberà Blanch

Stuart Christie

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I've just heard [2019] from Xavier Montanyà that Floreal Barberà Blanch, another of the unsung heroes of the anarchist anti-fascist struggle, has died at the age of 98. A veteran of the 117th Brigade of the 25th Division on the Levante front where he fought until the final exile in France. His extraordinary life story is too action-packed to compress into a few paragraphs, but suffice it to say among other things he was a key member of the Ponzan escape network (sometimes known as the Réseau Pat O'Leary). As a 23-year-old he saved the lives of a caravan of sixty members of the Jewish Combat Organisation (OJC) who had been abandoned by their guides crossing the Pyrenees into Spain, preventing them falling into the hands of the German border police. Barberà had been particularly tasked with safeguarding the life of a man he knew only as Dika, who was in fact Captain Jules Jefroykin, founder of the OJC, a man desperately wanted by the Gestapo. "In the event of a confrontation with the Nazis in the mountain, leave everyone and save Dika, who must not fall alive into the hands of the Germans." Those were his secret orders.

In July 1944 he was arrested in the Cerdanya on another mission for the CNT and remained in jail, in Barcelona, until the Christmas of 1945. During this time he and others set up the FRI, the Resistance Forces of the Interior, a short-lived organisation that sought to unite all the anti-Francoist resistance groups under one flag. It was later endorsed by the government of the Spanish Republic in exile, headed by Álvaro de Albornoz, who named Floreal Barberà as its agent in the interior. It was the last time the government of the Spanish Republic in exile claimed to want to activate the armed struggle in the interior. The government endorsement was also the cause of its demise!

Floreal Barberà subsequently went into exile in Venezuela, his passage paid for by Dika, where he worked for the reunification of the CNT and collaborated with Venezuelan organizations against the dictatorship of Perez Jimenez. He also worked closely with Garcia Oliver and Octavio Alberola, then exiled in Mexico, to reinvigorate the anti-Francoist struggle which resulted in 1962 in the founding of Defensa Interior (DI) the clandestine body that reactivated the armed struggle against Franco inside and outside Spain.

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