

Mass Graves from the Spanish Civil War in Prats de Lluçanès

Commemorative itinerary of the events of 3 February 1939
Sant Sebastià - Sant Andreu de Llanars



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On 3 February 1939, following a bloody battle, Franco's troops marched into the village of Prats de Lluçanès. The following day, 250 republican soldiers who had been defending the area, were executed. Days later, they were buried in mass graves by the townspeople.

Most of these mass graves are located around the Sant Sebastià chapel, following the ridge to Sant Andreu de Llanars. However, there are also others close to farmhouses and on the edges of fields.

This and other events that occurred in the town during the Spanish Civil War, such as the refugees who arrived from the war zone, were gradually forgotten.

The Plan of Mass Graves, which the Regional Government of Catalonia implemented in 2017, has led to the excavation of two of the seven mass graves located around Prats de Lluçanès. The remains of eighteen soldiers have been exhumed: four from the Sant Andreu de Llanars mass grave and fourteen from the Sant Sebastià mass grave.

There are six types of mass graves in Catalonia, according to the reason for which they were dug. The type found around the town of Prats de Lluçanès falls into the fourth category: the graves of soldiers, which are the most numerous in the region.



Puigvistós Mass Grave: Pilot Test in Catalonia

The mass graves of Sant Andreu de Llanars and Sant Sebastià were not the first to be excavated in Prats de Lluçanès. When the Catalan Parliament unanimously approved, on 27 March 2003, motion 217/VI on the recovery of historic memory, particularly with regard to people who went missing during the Spanish Civil War and post-war period, work began to open a mass grave as a pilot test in the district of Prats de Lluçanès, following several studies that assured the location and possible identification of one of the people buried there.

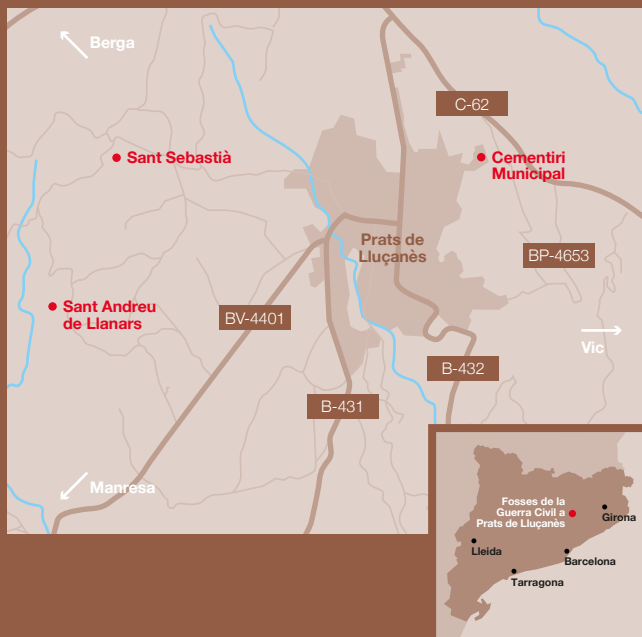
The project (June 2004) led to the location and excavation of the Mas Puigvistós mass grave. The remains of seven individuals were recovered, six soldiers and one civilian, between the ages of 22 and 39. The remains of the 33-year-old civilian were identified using anthropological techniques and DNA testing, which compared them with a close family member. The remains of the six soldiers currently lie in the Prats de Lluçanès cemetery.

All seven were executed on 3 February 1939 by Franco's troops during the occupation of the town.

On 23 December 1938, when Franco's troops began the occupation of Catalonia, the republican troops started to retreat towards the French border, to protect the civilians who were escaping Franco's army and to slow down the occupation of the region by the rebel faction. Given this situation, the republican soldiers had no time to bury their dead and abandoned them where they fell to avoid being taken prisoners themselves.

Mass graves of republican soldiers can be found across Catalonia because, after one, two or three days of the town's occupation by the rebel faction, the townspeople set out to recover the bodies of the dead soldiers and take them to the cemetery, where mass graves were dug in which to bury them.

In many other cases, such as that of Prats de Lluçanès, the townspeople buried the bodies of several soldiers together in the place where they had fallen. Very few of the soldiers carried any type of documentation.



Mass Grave Projects

The Directorate-General for Memory, Peace and Human Rights receives and processes requests from families, memory associations and administrations, regarding the location, recovery and identification of the remains of people who went missing during the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship and regarding the recognition, commemoration and recovery of burial places as memory spaces.

It also:

- Manages, updates and publishes the map and website of mass graves from the Spanish Civil War and Franco's rule,
- Provides and receives information about mass graves, either confirmed or probable, that exist around Catalonia, and
- Receives information about surface discoveries of human remains dating from the period of the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship.

For all these cases, current legislation is applied.

Addresses of interest:

Democratic Memory:
memoria.gencat.cat/ca/organismes/memorial-democratic/
National Archive of Catalonia: anc.gencat.cat/
Exile Memorial Museum: www.museuexili.cat/

Occupation of Prats de Lluçanès. The Attack by Franco Troops According to the Report by the 54th Division

The 54th Division, led by General Marzo and part of the rebel army's Army Corps of Aragon, occupied Lluçanès between 1 and 4 February 1939. According to the war diaries, they left Súria, where the artillery division was based with three regiments (1st, 2nd and 3rd) that rotated.

On 1 February 1939, the 1st and 3rd regiments place the frontline to the south and to the north of Lluçanès, respectively. The 1st regiment advanced to Gaià-Cornet-Avinyó and established the frontline between Sant Miquel de Terradelles and Sant Feliu Sasserra, close to Oristà. The 3rd regiment was at Sant Esteve Vilaramó. The count for the day was 93 prisoners captured.

On 2 February 1939, the 2nd regiment advanced through La Torre d'Oristà and, in the direction of Prats de Lluçanès, came across resistance and halted. The 1st regiment advanced along the northern left flank and met with resistance at the chapel of Santa Eulàlia de Pardines and at La Pedragosa. By nightfall they were in Santa Maria de Merlès, 3 kms from Prats de Lluçanès. Meanwhile, the artillery division operated from Sant Feliu Sasserra. The number of rebel casualties was one dead and 24 injured, whilst the 54th Division's war diary notes that, "The enemy, seriously shaken, retreats in the early hours to the hills surrounding Prats de Lluçanès, where they set up their defence line leaving behind 70 dead and 139 militiamen among those that surrendered and those taken prisoner."

Finally, on 3 February 1939, the rebels occupied Prats de Lluçanès, surrounding it to the north and the south west. The 1st regiment left Santa Maria de Merlès and advanced to the limits of

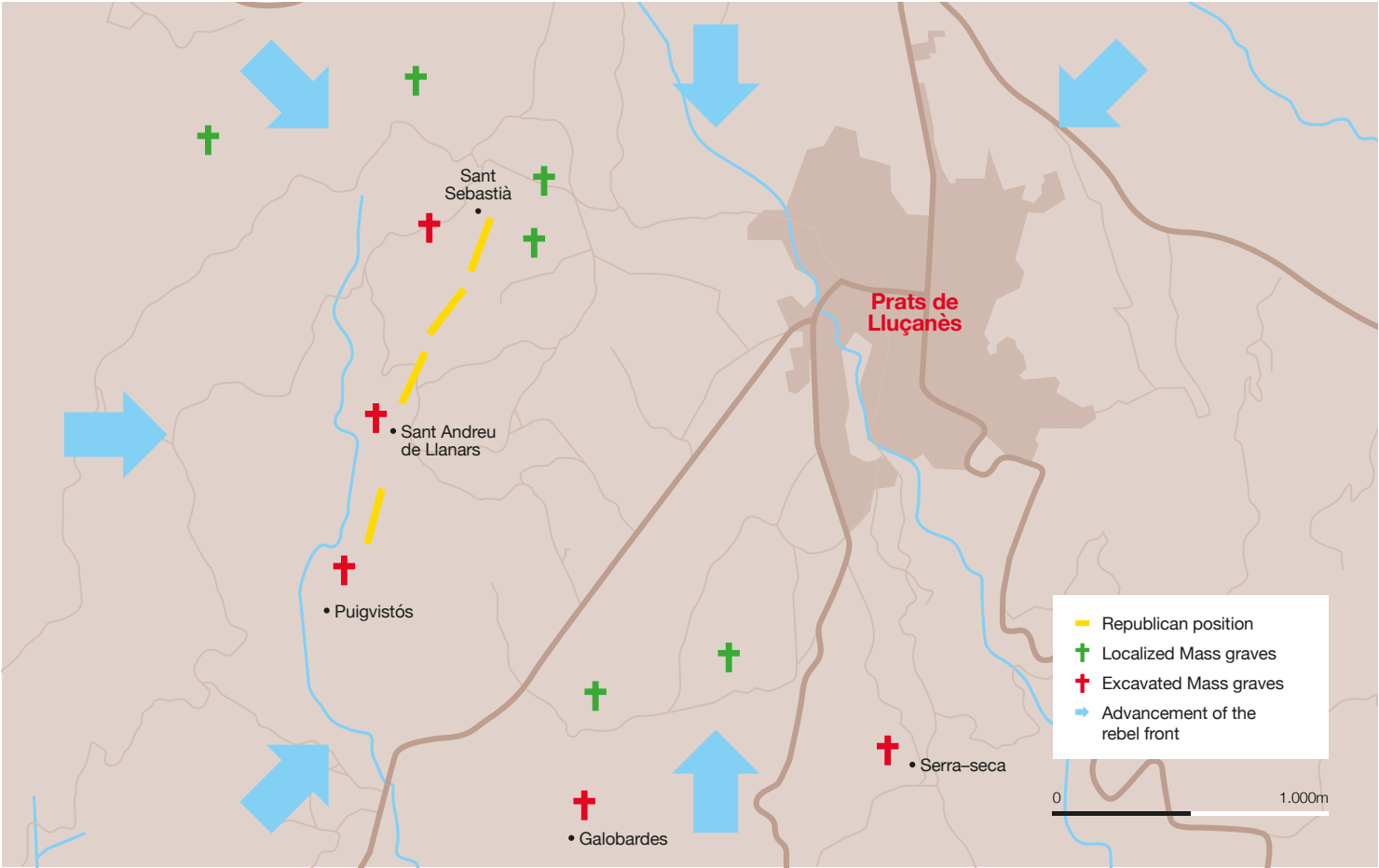
the chapel of Sant Sebastià (to the west), the hamlet of Roca d'en Feliu (to the south) and Grau (to the north) of Prats de Lluçanès. The assault battalion was then sent in to take the chapel of Lourdes (to the east), entering the town where battles were fought with the republican army, who resisted with the help of six tanks and two armed vehicles. In line with the 1st regiment, the 2nd regiment advanced in the south, reaching spot heights of 733 – 728 and 731, around the chapel of Lourdes and, at the same time advanced from the right flank (west), only managing to reach kilometre 27 of the Prats-Vic road, due to republican resistance. Regardless, the siege was completed with success.

Result of the Battle: Republican Army: 250 dead and 50 taken prisoner; Rebel Army: 7 dead and 33 injured.

The following day, 4 February 1939, setting out from Prats de Lluçanès, the 2nd regiment overcame resistance, crossed the Lluçanès stream and cooperated with the 3rd regiment, who in turn had advanced along the northern left flank and occupied Santa Creu de Jutglar and Santa Maria d'Olost. Together they took Maçaneres and the Serral de Can Magre. The Division's Headquarters were moved from Balsareny to Sant Feliu Sasserra. Result of the Battle: Republican Army: 200 dead and 237 taken prisoner; Rebel Army: 7 dead and 33 injured.

Total impact of the occupation of Lluçanès (from 1 to 4 February 1939): Republican Army: 520 dead and 280 taken prisoner; Rebel Army: 12 dead and 150 injured.

Taken from *Informe sobre la prova pilot d'obertura i exhumació d'una fossa comuna* - Report on the Pilot Test of Opening and Exhuming a Mass Grave, Regional Government of Catalonia (2004)



Refugees

During the Spanish Civil War, Prats de Lluçanès remained in the republican rearguard and therefore became a destination for many refugees from Spain and other towns and villages in Catalonia.

Between November 1936 and August 1938, 460 people came to the town from various war zones, a third of which were children under the age of 12. The rest were women of different ages and old men.

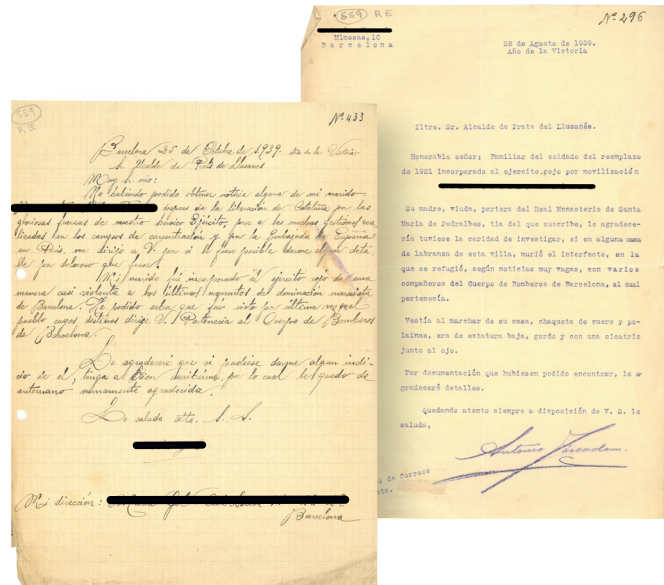
They came in waves and as war refugees and, therefore, with rights to shelter and food. Looking at the arrival dates and their places of origin, the advances of the front line can be traced. Many of the refugees had previously stayed at other villages and towns but as the front line crept closer they were forced to move on.

The war refugees in Prats de Lluçanès received an allowance from the Town Council, collected by the townspeople, for food and shelter. Many of them stayed at the rectory, others at the Dominican School and others were taken in by families around the district. During their time in Prats, there were a number births and deaths recorded among the refugees.

The first to arrive, at the end of 1936, were from Madrid. In summer 1937, the majority of the refugees that arrived were from Cantabria, the Basque Country and Asturias. As of 1938, most were from Andalusia and Aragon.

Letters from Families

For years, the Town Council of Prats de Lluçanès received letters from the families of soldiers who went missing in the surrounding area. Parents, wives, children, siblings... had to live with the agony of not knowing what had happened to their loved ones. Even today, there are more than 5000 families registered on the Regional Government of Catalonia's List of Missing Persons waiting for news of their family members.



Shells and Projectiles

In the area around the ridge of Sant Andreu de Llanars and Serra-seca there still remains today a large number of shells. The post-war children collected them and sold them to the ragmen. The ones shown in the photos are of different origin, one was made in Germany and the other in Russia. The shell is the lower part of the projectile, the part that remains after it has been fired. Both armies used weapons manufactured by the different countries that supported them, such as Russia who supported the republicans and Germany who supported Franco.

Personal objects

Among the personal objects recovered there are whatches, fountain pens, zips, razor blades, keys, lighters, identity tags, as well as various pieces of cloth.

This button, with the inscription Cuerpo de Bomberos (Fire Fighter Corps) and the coat of arms of Barcelona, was found, together with others, in the Sant Sebastià mass grave. It provides conclusive evidence of the participation of the Fire Fighter Corps alongside the republicans. The Regional Government's List of Missing Persons during the Spanish Civil War includes six firemen from the Barcelona Fire Fighter Corps who disappeared in Prats de Lluçanès.