

# *Reis naar de My journey to the Spanische Burgeroorlog Spanish Civil War*

Een verhaal uit een oorlog die  
vergeten dreigt te worden

*A report of my visit to  
Spain, september 2016*

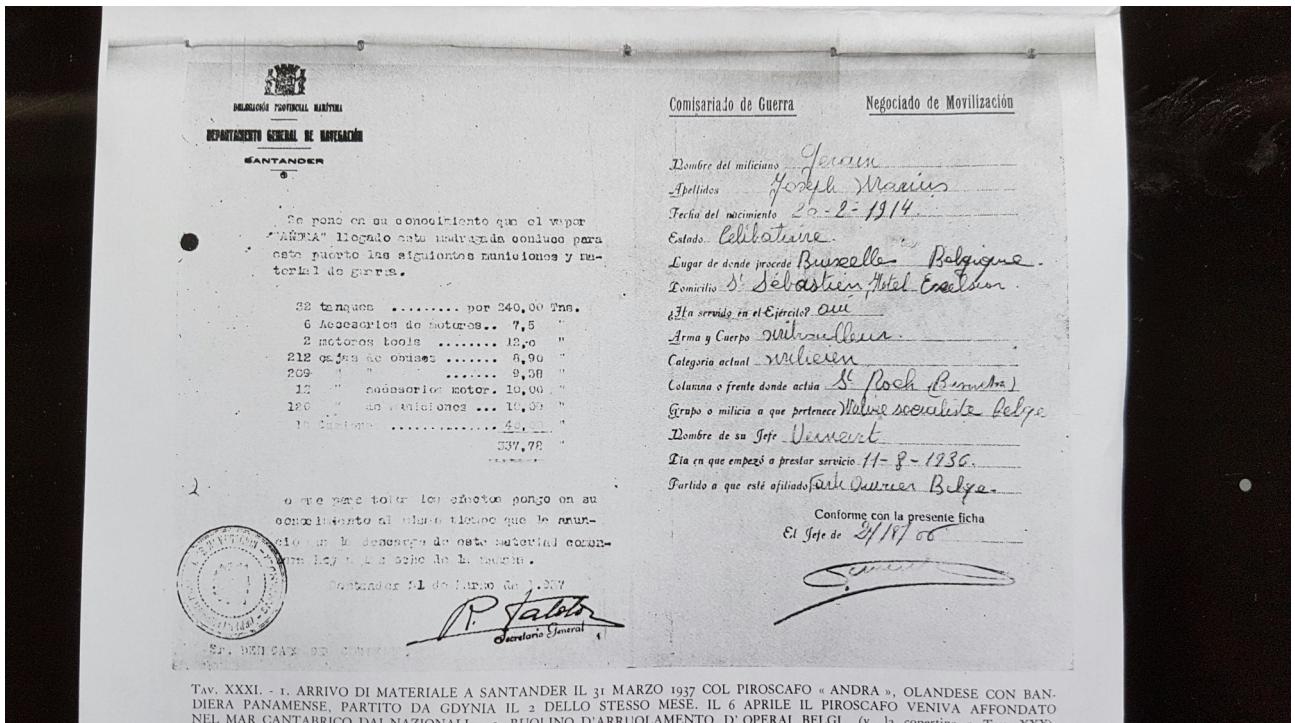
Cor Faber

Grandpa was a sailor and had lived adventures. But no-one in my family knew any details because grandpa never talked about those adventures. That is, until four years ago I got in the possession of a dairy in which he wrote about one of those adventures.

The Spanish Civil War took place from 1936 to 1939 and in the diary grandpa describes how he, as a sailor, helped smuggling arms to Spain in 1937, in favour of the republicans fighting against the nationalists under Franco.

It took over a month to reach Spain, due to the bad condition of the ship, the Andra. So she had to enter a foreign port twice for repairs.

In Santander, Spain, the cargo was unloaded which contains of 32 Renault tanks.



*A copy of the signed receipt in Santander uit 1937*

When the Andra left the port again after a few days, she was intercepted by the navy of Franco. The ship was shot upon and sunk, two crewmembers lost their lives in that event. The rest of the crew, including my grandfather, had to spend two months in prison under very bad conditions and an almost daily threat of being executed.

After a lot of diplomatic hussle they could finally return to their homes.

I used the diary to write an historical novel with the title **Journey to the Spanisch Civil War** with the subtitle **A story form a war that is bound to be forgotten.**

(in Dutch: Reis naar de Spaanse Burgeroorlog, een verhaal uit een oorlog die vergeten dreigt te worden)

It was about time to visit the area in Spain myself and try to find out more. This report is about that visit and although I already knew, that war is still going on. Not as bloody as back then but still.

When I talked to people in Spain chances are you will get the question what side you are on, the republicans or the nationalists. A wrong answer means end of conversation, it happened to me a couple of times. And therefor the title of this report: My journey to the Spanisch Civil War.

This journey took me to the following places:



- Santander
- Bilbao
- Mungia
- Gernica
- San Sebastián / Donostia (the latter is the Basque name)
- Tolosa

As you can see on the map, I found out the exact location of the wreckage of the Andra.

## **11-09-16, sunday - Charleroi, België**

The cities and villages in Belgium are filthy, you can see the difference as soon as you pass the border from Holland. In my case by train since the airport of Santander is only reachable from the airport at Charleroi, a small town south of Brussels.

In a small village nearby Charleroi, Courcelles, I step off the train, a couple of hundred meters from the hotel where I will spend the night. The platform is not even paved. The next morning I will be on the plane from Charleroi and I will not make it in time when I would leave my hometown Hoogeveen that same day.



At the hotel the guy behind the counter is very friendly and helpfull. We speak all sorts of languages: Dutch, French, English and even Spanish. And so we can both practice our languages, he mainly his Dutch, me my French.

## **12-09-16, monday - airport at Charleroi, then to Santander, Cantabria**

At the airport there is still a lot going on about security due to the recent attacks at the airport Zaventem. Before you get to the entrance of the terminal, you have to pass through a very large white tent. You get searched and some people have to open their suitcases already there. Normally you are able to get in front of the entrance by car but that is now prohibited. Two meter high fences are all around.



After passing security at the terminal, I get in touch with three Belgian girls on their way to a holiday in France. Two of them smoke, as do I. But on this side of security you are not allowed to smoke anymore. It will take a few hours for all of us before our flights depart and if you are not allowed to smoke, there is only one thing you want to do: smoke.

And so I ask someone from security if I could go back and later pass security again. I can and she will escort me outside. Before we do I run up to my Belgian friends and tell them how it is done, they almost start cheering. When I am sitting in front of the building, smoking of course, they join me and tell me I will be their friend for life - smokers, an odd people.

A couple of hours later I take my seat in the plane and it feels like my journey has only now begun. An hour and a half later I am in Spain for real.





I am sitting on a terrace at Santander with a glass of orange juice, most likely from Spanish oranges. It will take another hour before I can go to the house of Esther, my place to stay for the next five days. Esther is still at work as a teacher in English so I will have to give it some time before I can go there. I can stay there through a contact I managed through the internet, a site called **couchsurfing**. There are no costs this way, very nice since this is a private enterprise and I am on a tight budget. It is also a very good way to get in touch with locals, contacts I need for my research.

A funny thing happened at the airport. I decided to take a taxi to my stay and in somewhat less Spanish I told the lady-cabdriver to go to Calle San Sebastián (calle = street). But she does not get that "calle" and calls the dispatch to ask how much a trip to the city of San Sebastián is, about 150 kilometers - a conversation in Spanish and my Spanish is not sufficient enough to understand what is going on. She then tells me the trip will cost € 265. Now my stay is only about 7 kilometers and I do think this is bit expensive or is it? We manage to solve the misunderstanding in time within the first kilometer. This trip costs only € 17, a much better amount.

Not that I expected to speak Spanish fluently after having had 10 lessons back in Holland but I do want to be able to introduce myself in proper Spanish and stand a chance to be able to understand some of the conversations to be. In Spain people hardly speak any English and turns out to be true.

On my way to Spain my selfconfidence in speaking Spanish diminishes to a very low level and I had already accepted I would have to manage with English. But to my surprise most of the Spanish language comes back to me and my selfconfidence returns to a acceptable level. Not that I expect to speak it fluentey but it will be sufficient enough and workable.

After an hour on the terrace it is now back to the Calle San Sebastián.

Now I have to find my way back, something that goes terribly wrong and I walk through streets that are not, like in Holland, nicely leveled but are mainly very steep, mostly up of course. I get lost and the map they gave me at the touristinformation is not much help either. Asking people is not also, they seem to know little about their own neighbourhood.



*My place to stay in Santander*

Through Whatsapp I get in touch with Esther. Of course she asks me where I am and I tell her the name of the street - she knows where that location is and says she will come and pick me up.

A couple of minutes later she appears around the corner and signs me to follow her. It turns out I was only two blocks away from her place.

She also tells me that an approach from the other side of her street would have lead to escalators running up - I would have liked to have that information a bit sooner.



At Esther's place we already have a talk about why I am here and one of the things she tells me is that the nationalists/fascists here in Santander were pretty high in numbers - and still are. That kind of surprises me because up to april 1937 Santander was still in the hands of the republicans. With large number of Francquistan supporters one might think the city would have fallen into the hands of Franco pretty soon after the uprising started. Esther does not know the why's of that, tomorrow I will find out.

## 13-09-16, tuesday

Around half past nine in the morning a lot of cafeteria's are already serving. They turn out to be open from eight in the morning, people in Spain eat out a lot and having breakfast is included.

Santander has a mentality I am not unfamiliar with: people do not greet each other when they pass, not even a spares look. But even more than I expected, people seem to even make an effort of not looking at each other when passing. I experiment and say "hola" a couple of times when passing someone (the "h" in "hola" is not pronounced by the way). But I get zero responses and after a while I give up and decide to join the local habit: who is best in ignoring the other.

Again I am sitting on a terrace, this time next to a large cathedral and the name of cafeteria is of course La Catedral. I order a cafe solo, Spanish for an espresso, an order I picked up by watching other tables at the terrace.

A story comes to my mind I read several years ago: how to act when being in a strange environment. There are three roles you can play in that case: tourist, explorer and infiltrator. Each role has its own way of behaving and different results. Of course it is not always like that but it gives a nice way what role you decide to play according to what you want to achieve.

As a tourist you are easy to recognise: the camera hanging around your neck, the map you hold in your hand or just by your appearance - the latter two apply unmistakably to me.

As a tourist you are allowed to ask stupid questions, they will most likely forgive you. But you will not be taken seriously and you will always stay on the outside of things. You might even see a show that has little or nothing at all to do with reality.

As an explorer you are looking for information. But be aware, before you know it you might be asking about taboo's and that is something that is not appreciated. You try to open doors that are only accessible to locals. They will never trust you completely and you might end up as Captain Cook did in New Zealand.

I did however find out a variation on being an explorer: instead of just opening doors, I can first ask if I can open a door. However, a "no" will have to be accepted without asking questions. In fact I have behaved as a "friendly" explorer instead of a "brutal" one. The goodwill you get this way is great. And "no's" I also got and accepted them willingly.

The last role, infiltrator, is the hardest and will definitely fail given time. The thing is to get acquainted with local things as quickly as possible to blend in with the community. This way you will be invited in homes, get to see things a tourist will not, not even an explorer will.

But sooner or later they will see through you and you will be considered a traitor, you fooled them. They will chase you away, never to be allowed to come back.

Of course I did not act as this last role, I would not stand a chance, if only because of my non-Spanish appearance - and I do want to come back some day.

And so I sometimes behaved as a tourist and sometimes as a "friendly" explorer.

When I had finished my cafe solo I walk up to the cathedral for a visit. After having paid a euro (churches always seem to be in need of money) I walk up the courtyard and then enter the church.

Like in all churches the atmosphere is one of silence, loud sounds are not appreciated as tells the sign at the entrance. The church is still in use and original nuns are walking around. Still, the acoustics have to be tested and so I make some noises - I do not get expelled.

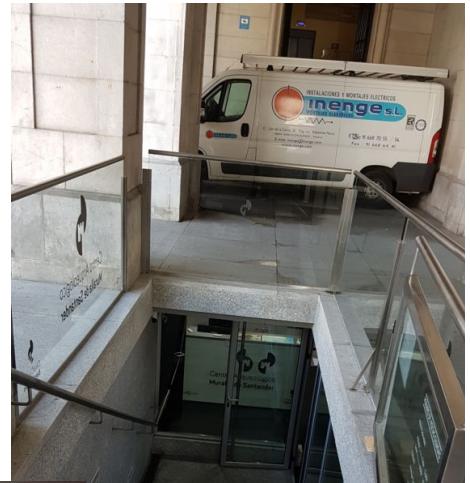
Some pomp and circumstance here, large wall hangings, paintings meters high and statues covered with gold.



It all impresses me but not really in a good way. In the streets of Santander you will find people begging to survive and here they pretend there is no limit to wealth. The contrast is - not really surprisingly - large.

## 14-09-16, wednesday

I have a broad interest in history and so I visit the local museum for archeology. This museum is located beneath a large square - Plaza Porticada - and there you can see remains of the city walls from the middle ages. The square and everything around have been built just on top of them. In 2006 they have excavated the ancient walls and turned it into a museum.



The excursion is performed by a enthusiastic lady, of course in Spanish. But she is more then willing to answer my questions in English.

Afterwards I ask her if she knows anything about the Spanish Civil War. She does but there is also someone else who knows much more about it, an historian that is associated with this museum.

I am in luck, Fernando is present and also has time for me. The thing I am most interested in are the harbours and how they must have looked back in 1937. This way I might find out what the most likely place is the Andra was at. Fernando shows me a large aerial photograph, hanging on the wall. Instead of the present harbours there used to be only one large one where as the Andra would have been. Together with the description in my grandfathers diary we come to conclude what the location would have been. I will visit this location later this week.

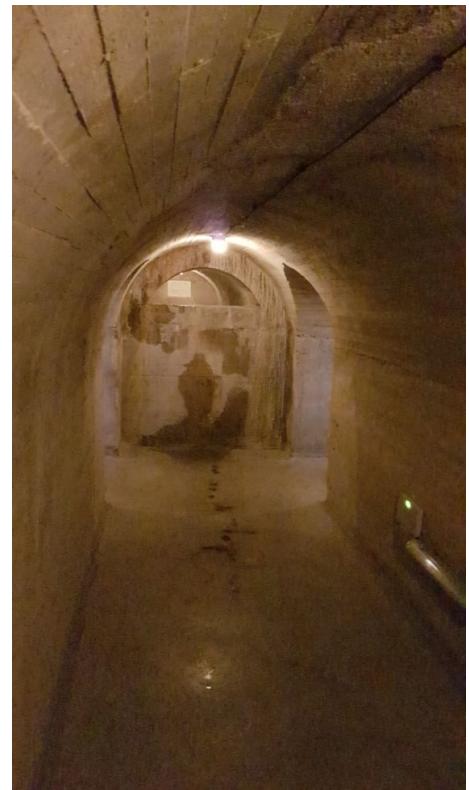
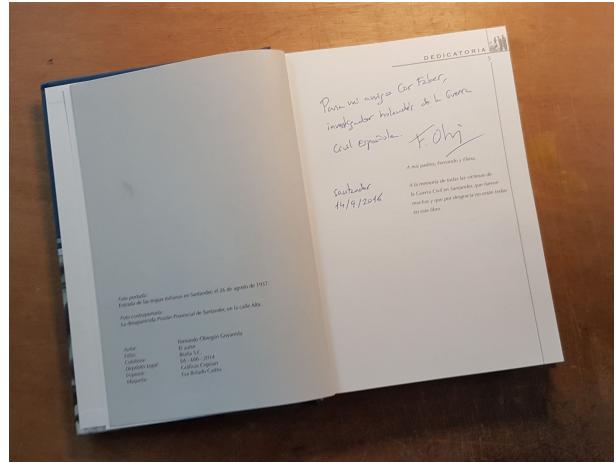
Fernando does know a little about the Andra and her story and the information I can provide him with is welcome.

He also shows me a book about how Santander lived through the civil war. The first name of the author is the same as his and when I point that out and look at him with a questional look in my face, I get a big smile from him: this Fernando is the actual author of this book.

He tells me I can have the book as a present and he even writes something in it - his "amigo" he already calls me. The book is in Spanish but I will be working on that language. We agree to stay in touch and my first nice contact in Spain becomes a fact.

Fernando also explains to me why the nationalists, despite their numbers here in Santander, did not take over the city and surrendered it to Franco: the republicans were the ones with the most weapons and so they did not dare and kept quiet. That does not mean they did nothing, they just kept their activities below the radar.

After my visit to the museum I went to a shelter they preserved from the Spanish Civil War.



It is still in its original state and guide Alex tells all sorts of things about back then. He too is in Spanish but while the rest of the visitors are watching a video (I have given up learning Spanish for now) he is more than willing to answer my questions in English. Later that day he sends me the information of a professor at the university in Santander that knows a lot of the Spanish Civil War. Later this week I will introduce myself by email.

In the shelter the lights are flickering and sounds can be heard like people back then experienced it - very impressive.

My hostess Esther knows someone that knows a lot about the resistancegroup Maquis that was active back then. She will try to get me in touch with that person.

All and all a very good day. I'm tired but it was worth while. Just after two days my visit to Spain is already rewarding.

## 15-09-16, thursday

This morning I went to the hospital. No, nothing to do with me feeling sick but because my grandfather and a few other crewmembers were invited by the mayor to take a tour through Santander. Of course that was to show the rubbles and misery in the city to have them tell about it back in Holland. Maybe this way people and governments would understand it was about time to intervene - a wasted effort as it turned out.

Part of that tour was a visit to the hospital. A substantial number of people had bandages around their heads and the story that was told they were victims of the Moors. The Moors were a harsh soldiers that annihilated complete villages and kill everyone. But often they let one or two people alive to tell the story to other villages. As a piece de resistance they did however cut off their ears. A number of them made it to hospitals like this one.

Not all of the hospital from back then is still there, a couple of small building are and there is a large modern building now.

And so I go up there, hoping to talk to someone who knows more about the history of the hospital, maybe some archive stuff, pictures? Bad timing: today is a bank holiday and there is nobody at the office so I am told by a lady behind the counter. I can't understand all she is telling since she only speaks Spanish but I do understand what she is telling me. You don't have to translate every word and still be able to understand..

And so, it's up to the harbour near by. There are only a few locations the Andra would have been but I am pretty sure I have walked where my grandfather must have. Maybe some of our steps are synchronised with a distance of only 80 years (I am a romantic, I confess). Have a look at the map prior for the location of the harbour.

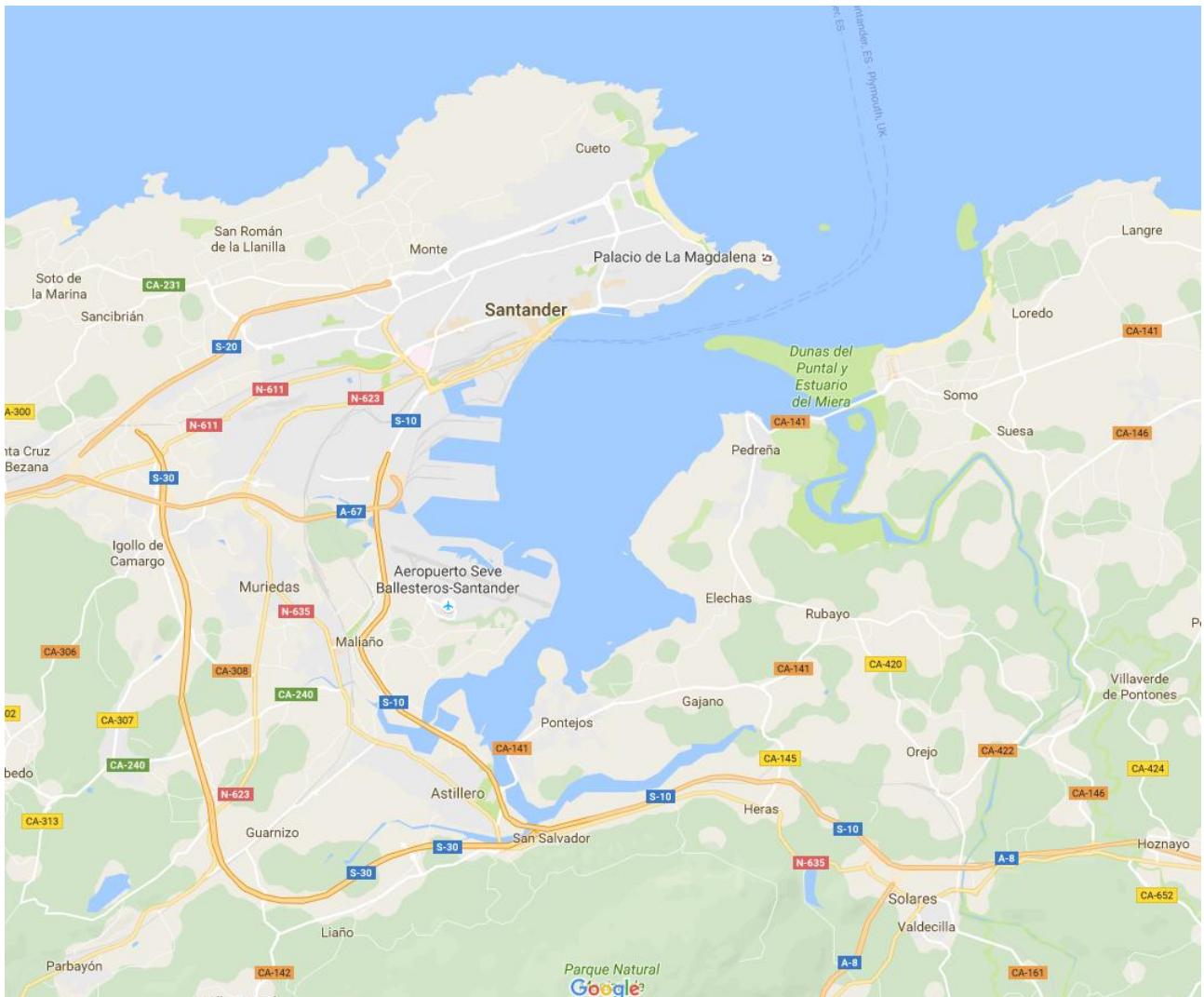


## 16-09-16, friday

Today we have bad weather. Not as cold as yesterday but it is raining all the time.

There is this expression here in Cantabria: it is always a great summer here, always a great day. The weather is about the same as back in Holland and of the classic weather in Spain - sunny and nicely warm - not much can be found here.

From Holland I already managed to get in touch with a divingcentre at Pedreña, a small village at the other side of the bay of Santander.



They already told me they know the whereabouts of the wreckage of the Andra and I was more then welcome to come over and talk about it. And so I take the ferry to the other side of the bay, a trip of about 10 minutes.

On the ferry I hear three people, obviously a couple not from Spain and a lady who seems to be Spanish, talking in English. Still a unusual event in Spain and so it gets my attention. I check out their bagpacks and see a sticker from Denmark, that's were the couple must come from.

We start a covenversation and it turns out they are from Denmark and the other lady is Spanish indeed. They are undertaking El Camino, a walking trip to Santiago de Compostella. Not out of religious conviction but because they think it is a nice way to meet people.

The woman from Denmark tells me she lives in Helsingør, the same place in Denmark where the Andra had to enter port for repairs. This place is also on my list to visit sometime. I tell them the story of my grandfather and spontaneously she invites me to stay with her when that moment comes.

In Spain, on a ferry to an ordinary village, meeting someone who can and is willing ot help me out, what are the odds.

Because of our conversation I forget to get off the ferry at my stop in Pedreña and I have to walk back from the next stop. Rain pooring down but a car stops and I get a lift offered to the divingcentre. Unfortunatly it is closed, probably because of the bad weather. A little help from some other guy does not work, the owner doesn't answer his phone. I do however get pointed at a house that turns out to be the home of worldfamous golfplayer Severiano Ballesteros - the trip was not completly in vain after all.

And so I decide to head back to Santander by the ferry. But before I do, I enter the local café for a cup of coffey. To my surprise I see a photograph of Franco hanging on the wall. Next to that picture there is a picture of the leader of the Falangist party, the facist party, José Heredia. I might better watch my tongue here but still ask the guy behind the counter if it would be ok for me to take a picture - I am allowed.



Back in time at Santander I decide to visit the "uppercity" of Santander. This neighbourhood is the more rich part of the town, especially the area near the coast.

I want to visit the Italian monument, a monument that was put there as a remembrance to the Italians that entered and took over Santander in 1937. That monument has a text like "to our Italian heroes". Unlike a lot of other monuments, this one is still there and you don't have to ask the question which side most inhabitants here are still on.

I have already found the monument but since I want to start a conversation I decide to pull an innocent trick: asking directions.

On a couch there is an old lady with next to what turns out to be her daughter. I ask the daughter if she speaks English and she does - I do not want any misunderstandings now because of my insufficient Spanish.

I ask her if she can tell me where this Italian monument is and she does. I ask her if she knows more about this monument and she starts telling me all sorts of things, most of it I already know but that doesn't matter, it's not the things I want to hear. The daughter takes on the role of translator and her mother starts telling those things and so I am all ear, this is what I came for.



The day before the "liberation" by the Italians the mother - as a 10 year old girl - and her family were paid a visit by communists, the opposite of Franco. Her father was not at home but if he would have been, they would have killed him instantly. The guy escaped his faith to be safe the next day the Italians took over the city. As this 10 year old she watched the Italians coming through her street.

The daughter also tells me people should forget the past and leave it alone (a lot of things going on in Spain to recover mass graves and stuff). Avoiding the real question I actually want to ask, I ask her why this monument is still there. She reacts in a bit of harsh way, it seems the wrong question, I must have pushed the wrong button. She replies these kind of things should remain. I think - but don't tell her - she wants other people to forget, not she herself.

After a couple of minutes the mother signals the conversation is over, she doesn't want to talk anymore and I decide to not put pressure on the both. Just for the show of it I walk towards the monument.

I also pay a visit to the Palacio de Magdalena. It is suited on a peninsula east of Santander. On that peninsula there is the palace where king Alfonso VIII and his wife Victoria Eugenia spend their summers up to 1931 when he was exiled.



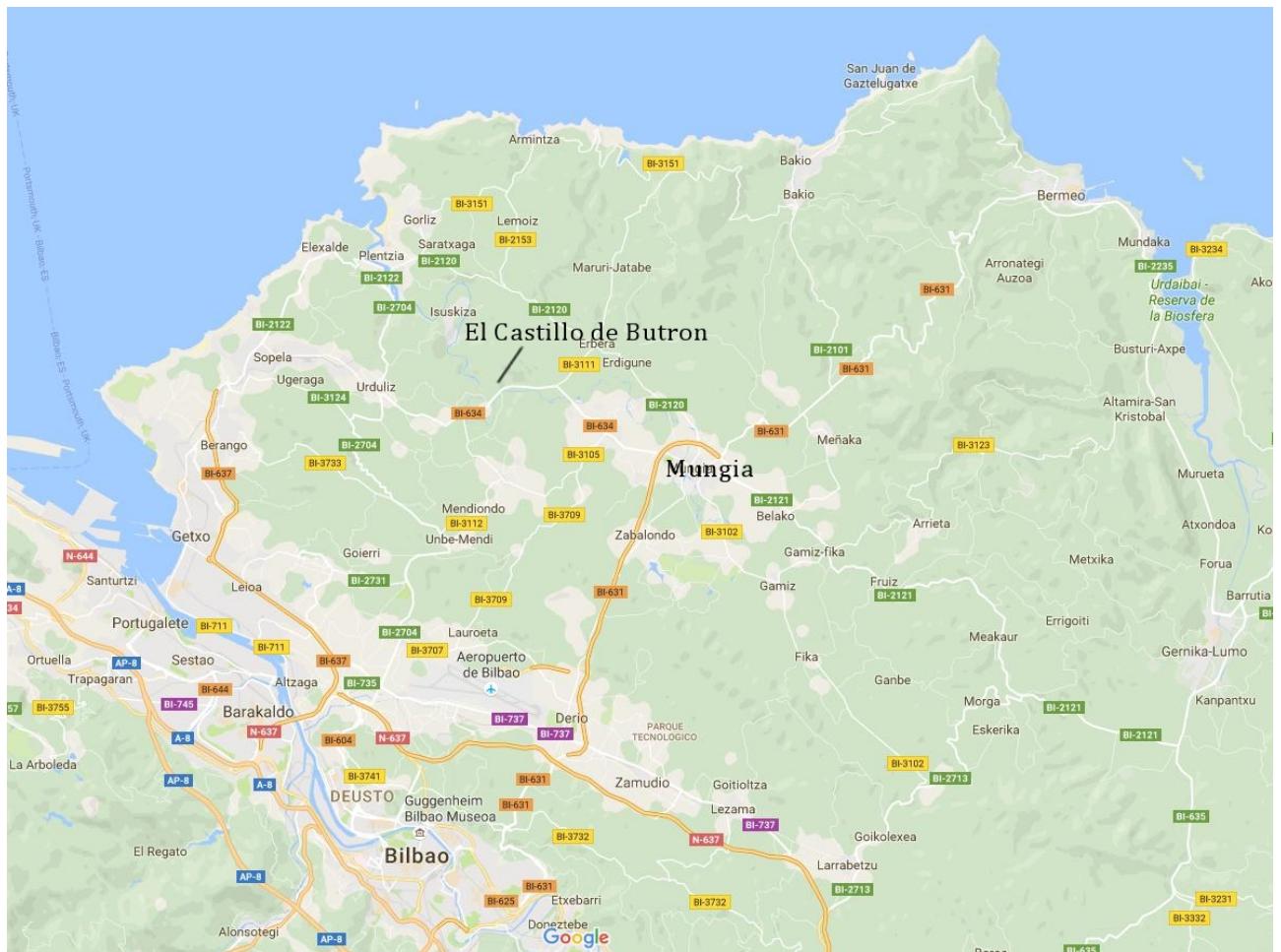
These days you can find a small zoo and a number of replica's of a raft and small ships a Vital Alsar used as an experiment to prove South America was reachable by this types of vessels.



When I consider the last few days, I can not escape the thought why I have not started this whole research, let's say 30 years ago. Why, grandpa, have you not told me about your adventures back then? Ok, at the age of 14, when you passed away, I would not have done anything with it in this way, my interest in history back then is nothing compared with what it is today. But still, maybe I would have started 20 or 30 years ago with my research.

Maybe it's better this way. Probabaly I am more capable of doing this now instead of so many years ago. I do now understand history is not just about cold facts but also about understanding. And to be able to do that, you have to visit places, talk to people, people who were there when things actually happened or heard it first hand of those who were.

17-09-16, saturday - Mungia, Basque Country



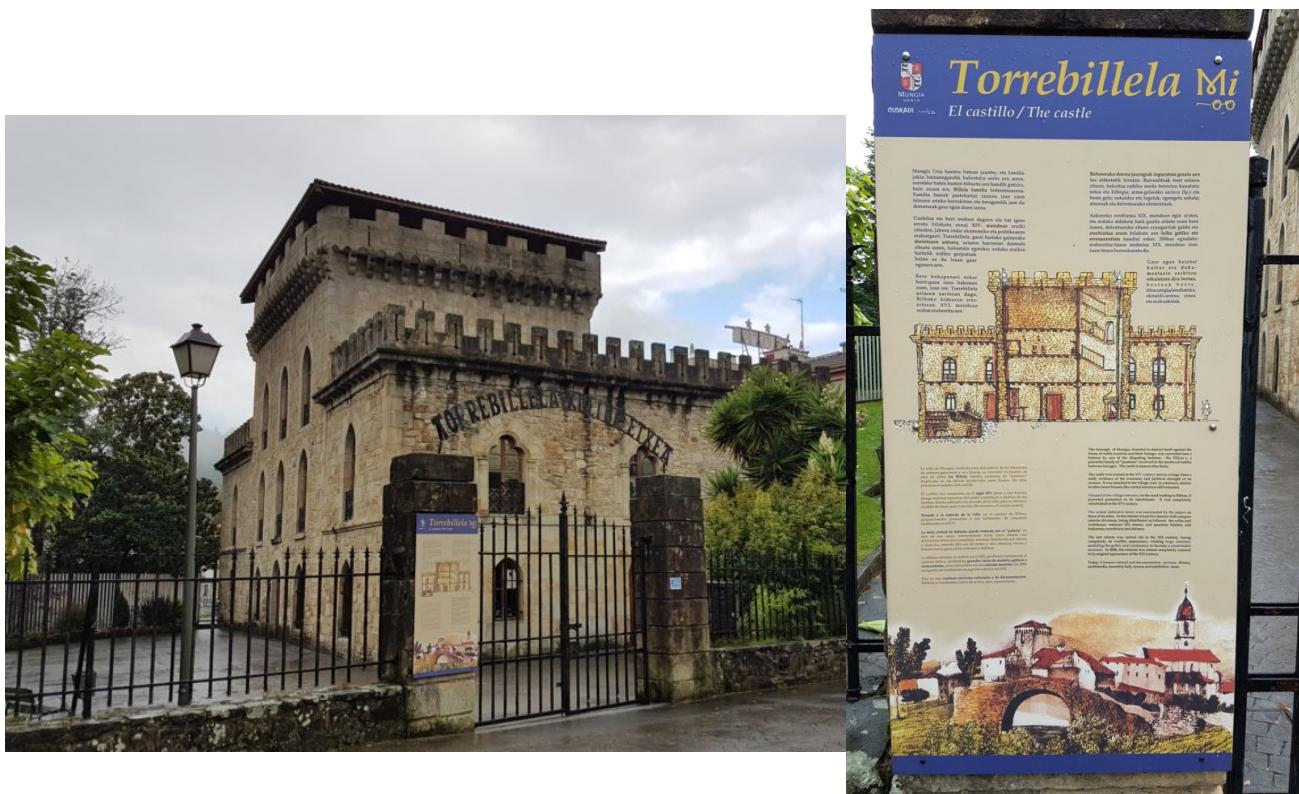
Today it's moving day. After five very pleasant days with Esther and her friends I am moving to Mungia, a small village near Bilbao. I will use this place as a base for further research. My host Iker is a genuine Basque and, as I will find out, will tell me a lot about the Basque Country, the culture and history. His address is easy to find and he might well turn out to be friend for life.

In the afternoon I do some grocery shopping and at night, sitting at a terrace we already have an interesting conversation. I am told I better not take pictures here since it turns out this is one of the places where members of the ETA (Basque seperation organisation, militant up to not so many years ago) were holding their meetings - people still don't like there faces to appear on pictures. And so I taken Iker's advice. He even tells me not to mention the name of Franco too loud - people might get suspicious. Things seem to still be going on here.

## 18-09-16, sunday

My host Iker works in ICT for a company in Barcelona and mainly works from his home. He spends a lot of time and energy on it so a night out is a rare occasion for him to relax. That then results in consuming just a little to much and when he gets out of bed this morning he feeds his two cats and heads back to bed, of course. There will not be much work done today.

And so I decide to take a stroll through the, still quiet, town of Mungia. I discover a castlelike building where there are a number of pictures and text are hanging on the fence. In these texts the history of Mungia and the building are explained - luckily also in English.



The city is, especially during the Dark Ages, the centre of constant arguements between the powers in the area. And so Mungia is attacked once more when another power has taken over - history, nothing new there.

After that I go for a cup of coffey at a local café. Behind the counter there's Mirjam, nine yaers ago she moved here from Colombia. She doesn't speak a word English so this is a nice occasion to practice my Spanish. She runs the business with her sister but they don't look alike by far.

A while later I get in touch with a guy that also doesn't speak English but it turns out he does speak German and he enjoys speaking that language again since he moved back from Switzerland where he used to live and work some years ago. English is an exception here but German is even more of an exception. I mention that he would probably be the only one here in Mungia speaking German and he confirms.

He tells me a lot about the Basque Country and also the Spanish Civil War. I tell him I will visit to Tolosa tomorrow and he is very helpful explaining - in German - to me how to get there.

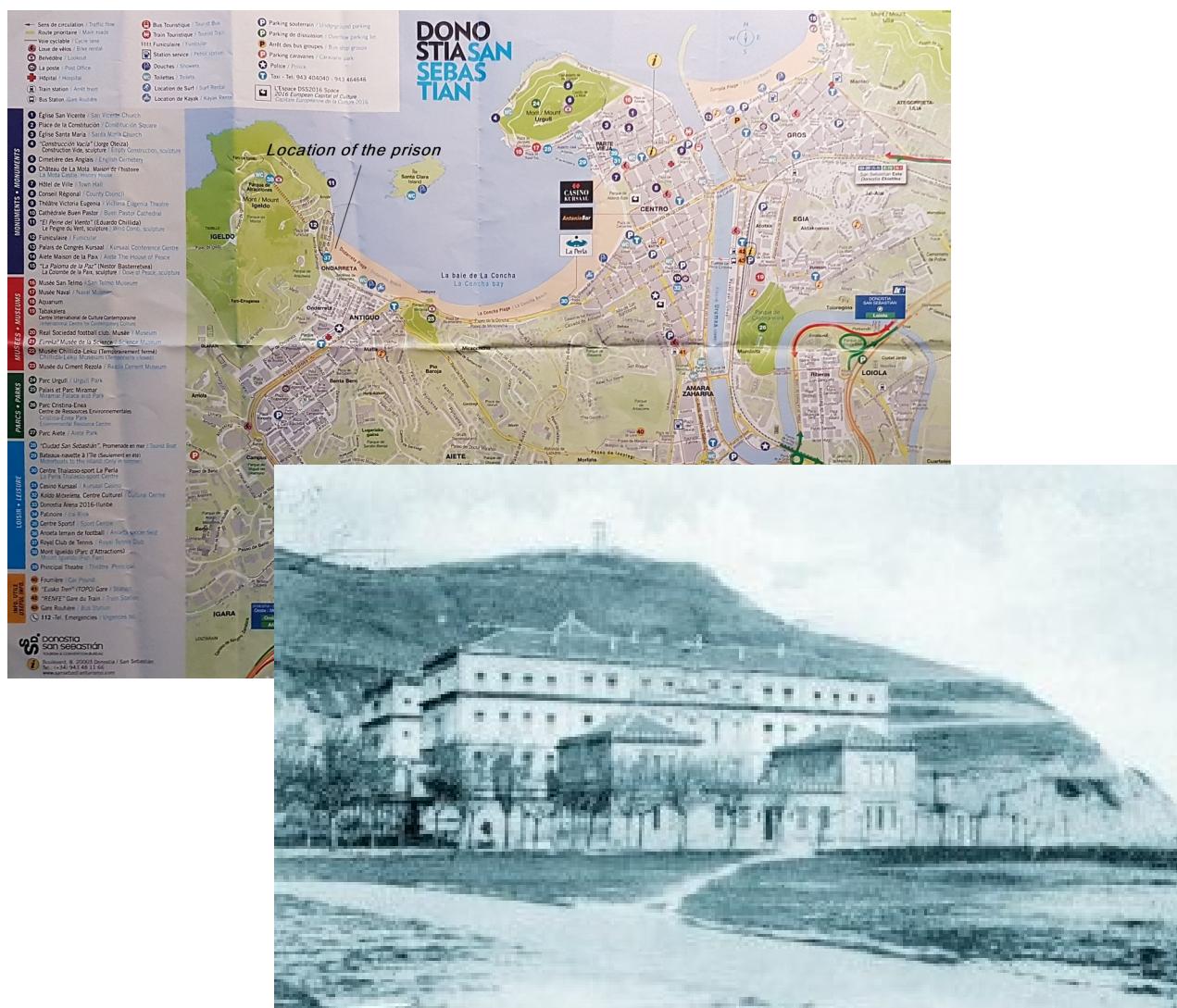
## 19-09-16, monday - San Sebastián/Donostia, Tolosa

The bus to Bilbao is ready to leave as I find out at the stop (later it turns out it goes every 15 minutes so that is not really a surprise). A lot of people get in the bus, probably commuters that have a job in Bilbao. It will take about half an hour to get there.

In Bilbao I buy a ticket to take the bus to San Sebastián/Donostia and go and sit down at no particulair seat. A guy stops near me and starts talking to me in Spanish, he wants something from me. I quickly understand what he is saying: I am in his seat. This way I find out that seats in busses between cities are reserved and I check my ticket to find out there is indeed a mentioning of a seatnumber, "plaza" and a number. And so I look for my number and sit down. Nobody complains and so this must be my seat.

The lady at the tourist information at San Sebastián/Donostia speaks very good English. Very nice since I still have to find out how to get to Tolosa from there. Luckily the map of this city is more accurate then the one in Santander and finding my busstop is no problem.

Before we leave for Tolosa we pass the beach at Ondareta, the place where one of the prisons used to be my grandfather had to spend a month in.



That prison was demolished in 1949 but when the tide is extreem low you can still see parts of the foundation. At the tourist information I have been told that this event will take place again next week, when I would be back in Holland. Something I wish I had known but to take in concideration for my next trip. I have a very good look at the place, a real visit will be for the next time I will be here.

And so I arrive at Tolosa, the place where my grandfather had to spend another month in prison.



From Holland I had already made contact with the director of the museum that now occupies the building. It is a puppetmuseum with puppets from all over the world, used in performances like marionettes and Wajang-puppets from Indonesia. The building has had all sorts of utilizations but the interior has been completely rebuilt in 2006. So I already know there is nothing left. In spite of this I will visit the building anyway.

I did make an appointment with the director Idoya but when I arrive she is not there, she would be back at around 4 pm. And so I will go the cityarchives, maybe someone there can tell me more.

The entrance of the cityhall is small, two desks there, both occupied. I am the only one there and I start talking. But no, I have to draw a number first before I get my turn and so I do. The display shows my number right away, no surprise of course - civil servants, nothing new in Spain.

I manage to explain why I am there and they make a phonecall. A while later someone comes up and takes me to another building that is in use as the cityarchive.

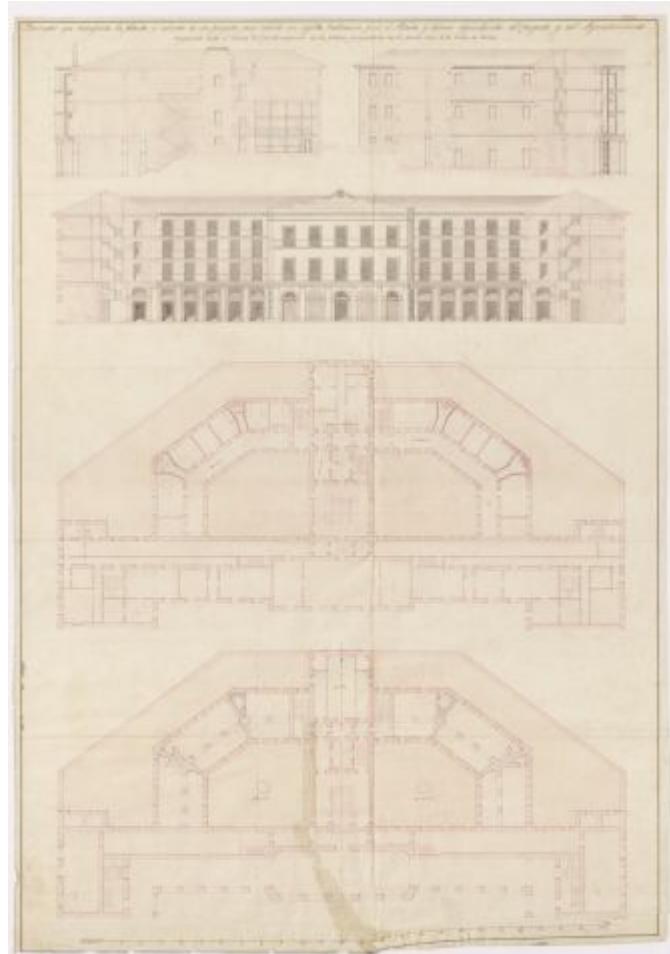
There I am welcomed by a lady that introduces herself as Guadalupe, I have no idea yet. I start telling her what my visit is about but she interrupts me and to my surprise finishes my story. It turns out I already had contact with Guadalupe from Holland I had totally forgot about her, nice.

It made a huge difference I didn't have to tell the whole story and she kept me busy for a couple of hours with all sorts of information. There were even original old drawings from 1851 that she showed me, the time when the cellblocks were built.

I tried to get a hold on those drawings to take them with me, a non serious attempt of course - as if she would have let me.

She also provides me with titles and ISBN-numbers of books that might be interested, the same sort of books as the one Fernando gave me in Santander: how Tolosa lived through the war.

After she agreed letting me draw her portrait - I do that as a hobby and she would send me a picture - we say goodbye and I am on my way again to the museum.



Director Idoya is present and she has time for me. She tells me all sorts of things about the museum and though it is closed at this moment I get to take a tour. All of the shows are working - with English commentary - and I get a very nice impression of what it has to offer.

Idoya takes me to the location where the cellblocks were back then and it is a theatre now. Still I am there where my grandfather was in 1937.



After the tour, Idoya shows me a 20 centimeter long nail. It is definitely an old thing and very obviously made by hand, the ancient way. Idoya was there in 2006 when the interior was rebuilt and she kept the nail as a souvenir. I could hold it she said and so I did.

She looked at me for a while and then told me to keep it. I asked if she was sure about that and after a short while - did I see doubt in her eyes? - she confirmed. Now I do not know what the usual way of things is in Spain but I almost took her in my arms and wanted to kiss her - but I decided to play it safe and didn't. For a while I thought about mentioning to her this might give trouble if I would try to take it with me at the airport, security would never have it. But I thought I better not talk about that, she might change her mind and maybe would think it would be better to keep the nail in her own possession. It will be a great attribute to show during my lectures and guestlessons at schools, a genuine nail from the prison my grandfather was in. (later I send it to myself by physical mail and when I got home it was there in my mailbox)

The way back to Mungia starts with taking the train - instead of the bus - from Tolosa to San Sebastián - or Donostia as it is called in the Basque language. The Basque language deserves to have a little more attention because there is something strange about it, something very strange.

To start with, there is no other language you can compare it with. Sure, they use the same letters as we do but that is where it ends. You stand as much chance - or actually as little chance - to read Chinese without any knowledge.

Ok, there are some words they have "borrowed" from Spanish. The Spanish word for information is **información** and the Basque word is **informatik**. But you won't find much of these "borrowed" words.

Also you will find the letter **x** is used very often, a letter not used in Spanish. In Basque you pronounce it as **ts** instead of **ks** as most other languages do.

Even after several conversations I have not been able to figure out where the roots of the Basque language are, nobody seems to know, not even the Basques themselves. Some say the Greek language might be but there is no real similarity with that language. I believe the birthplace of the Basque language will probably be the Basque Country itself. Knowing what I know now, the Basques are that fanatic - even more fanatic than the Frisians in my country, Holland - about their own culture, the language must have survived the influence of other languages greatly.

In normal life you can find certain things about the Basque language. Whenever they can afford it, they will restrict themselves to just Basque language. For instance, the display in the train from Tolosa will only show Donostia, not San Sebastián. If you are not familiar with this, you will miss your stop in San Sebastián, thinking you're not there yet and end up at the terminal in Irun, the last stop just before the border with France.

## 20-09-16, tuesday

Today is a resting day. So just taking a stroll and sit on a terrace with a cup of cafe solo.

## 21-09-16, wednesday

Today I visited Gernika. Most people pronounce it as **Gwernika** because in Spain the name is Guernica. But in Basque Country it is appreciated if you pronounce it without that **u**.

First I visit the unavoidable tourist information point for a map of the city and more information. The lady overthere speaks very good English so no misunderstandings to expect. She was very charmed with the reasons for my visit, a Dutch guy coming here doing research on the Spanish Civil War - she treated me accordingly and beside the normal story told to tourists, she also started talking about other things as well. In fact, it took to me some trouble

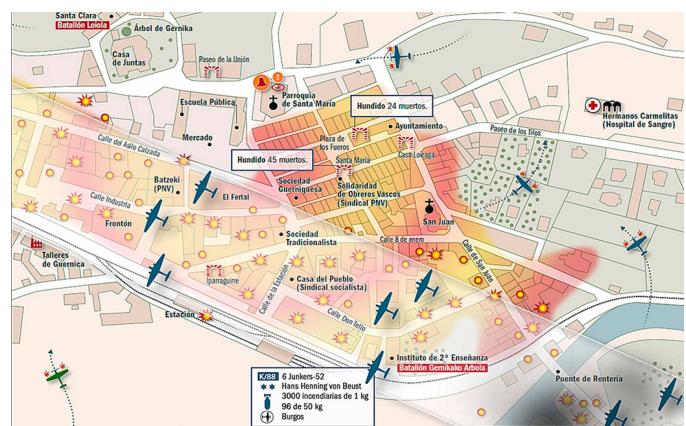
to be on my way as she just kept talking, almost as if she had been waiting for this chance and now took advantage of the situation.



The Museum of Peace (Museo de la Paz) happened to be just across the street. Since today was the day of peace, entrance was free - it would have made no difference to me anyway.

In the museum there are pictures and stories of the dramatic bombardement on april 26th 1937 by the German Condor Legion, the help Franco got from Hitler during the war.

Gernika did not have any strategic value but it was demolished to undermine the Basque state of mind for Gernika is and was the soul of the Basque spirit.



*The map of the bombardement*

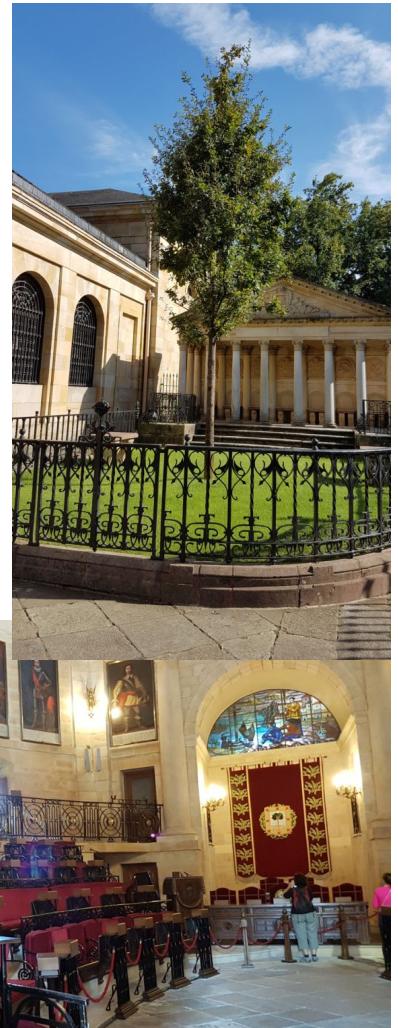
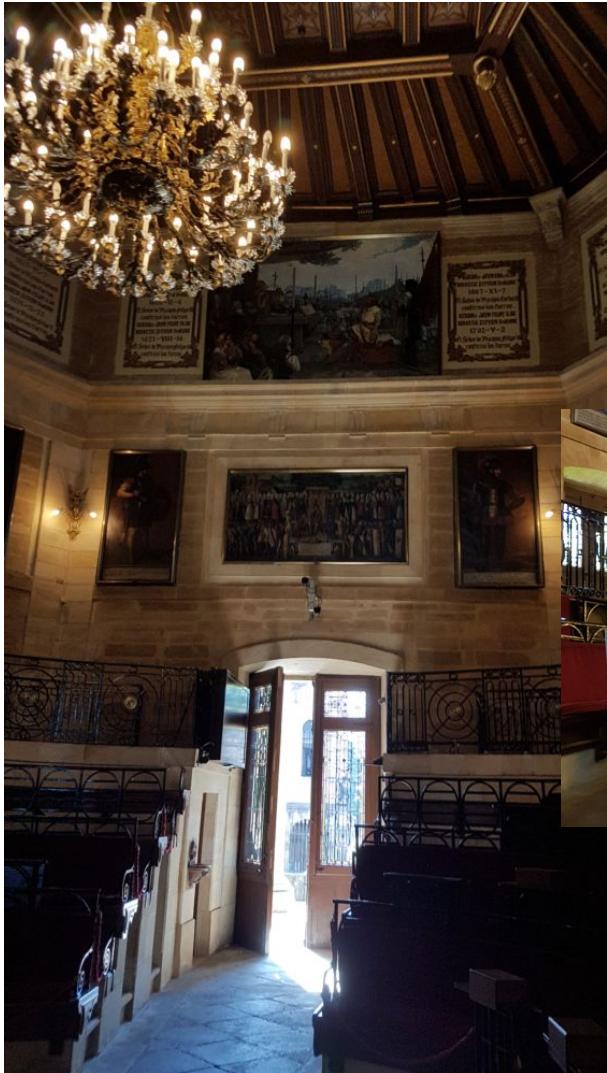
Two targets would have been the goal, the bridge on the eastside and the weaponfactory in the west. They could have been easily destroyed but in stead the innercity was completely demolished. Discussions about it all are still going on but there is no doubt the bombardement was a practice by the German Condor Legion.

I also had a very nice conversation with one of the guards. She was born and raised in Gernika and told me a lot of things she was told about the history of the town. She also showed me some books that could be purchased. Those books are about witnessreports about the bombing and have been collected during the reign of Franco. Very dangerous since Franco

always denied he had anything to do with that rampage. Talking about it could easily turn into being arrested.

Temptation was there to buy a couple of books in Spanish but I decided to purchase the English versions.

In the north of Gernika there is an oaktree. It is the fifth generation of a tree where under even kings of Spain would pledge to respect the Baque rule and law. This had been done already from the middle ages



Next to the tree there is an old builing that used to be the assembly where the powers had their meetings. That role has been taken over by Bilbao but the original assembly is still there as a tourist attraction.

Gernika is visited by a lot of tourists, almost all of them Spanish.

The thing that did surprise me was that in the centre of the town there are these two pilars with a stair in between. One of those pilars still has marks of bullets from the bombardement in 1937, they did not just dropped bombs but shot as well at the civilians. I had a look there and did find it as described by the lady at the tourist information.

Now I expected to find a number of tourists also having a peek but to my surprise they just passed without noticing - did they not know?



I drop out of my role as researcher, get into my role as tourist and sit on a terrace for a cup of coffey. Next to me there is a company of five people, two guys and three women, and I hear English - for obvious reasons my attention is drawn. As soon as there is a lull in the conversation I bend over and ask if they are from the USA. To my surprise there is only one person from the USA but he is originally from French-Canada. The rest is from Venezuela, Colombia and France.

They tell me they are tourists here and of course I tell them my reasons to be here and they are very interested. When I tell them about the pilar with the bulletholes I am told they did not know about it. Afterwards I see them walking in the directions of the pilar and so I assume they are going to have a look at it.

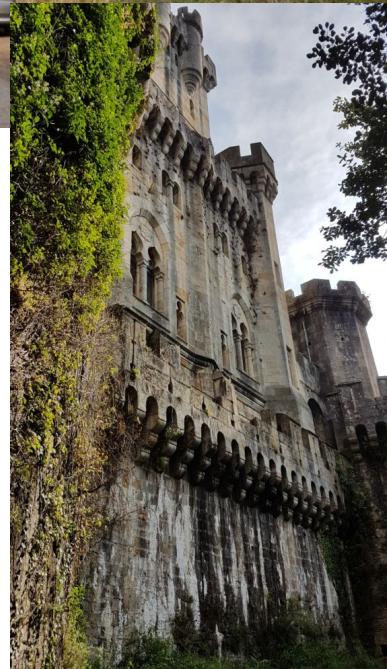
The French-Canadian guy has the looks of a priest and he turns out to be aware of it - he is not by the way. I tell them I wish I would live another 50 years or so to continue my research. The "priest" stands up and gives me a blessing saying I will: "you will live another 30 years, my

son". I play along: "thank you, father" and everyone burst into laughing. I do tell him however that if I will not live another 50 years I will come and haunt him, whether he still lives or not - laughs again. I just love meetings like this.

More than happy I return to Mungia that night.

## 22-09-16, thursday

This morning I visited El Castillo de Butrón, a castle near the town of Gatika, about seven kilometers from Mungia. My host, Iker, had already told me it is a castle from a fairytale and so I am curious. It turns out he is absolutely right: f\*ck Disneyland, this is the real thing!



Unfortunately public is not allowed inside - boy, would I have liked to have a look inside.

Back in Holland I watch a documentary about those insides and it would have been worth it. But the outside was impressive any way.

Build in the 16th century, a good period for building castles.

People in Spain have a high temperament but they are very helpful. When I need something, like directions or so, at first I try to do that in my best of Spanish. Apparently I am doing great because it results in a salvo of Spanish in return. Better tell them I am from Holanda and I speak only a poco Español. That results in a face that shows understanding but after a moment the salvo of Spanish is released on me again.

## 23-09-16, friday - back to Santander

Today I am moving back from Mungia to Santander. Nice, because my flight back home is from the airport at Santander and this way I do not have to hurry on the day I leave.

This week I also manage to get an appointment at the diving centre in Pedreña, this will be tomorrow. It did take me some trouble to get this appointment since Alberto hardly speaks any English. He insists I send him an email but I do not want to. That email might be read next week and then I will be back in Holland. He wants me to explain the reasons for my visit now on the telephone but I do not want to do that either since he might turn me away. And so I do manage to get an appointment for tomorrow and I am able to convince him I will tell him all about it.

In Santander I go to a hotel with two stars. It looks very nice, clean and friendly staff that also speaks very good English. When I will stay in Santander again some day, I will surely stay at that hotel again.

Next to the hotel there is a cafetaria that serves nice meals for a reasonable price. It turns out to be part of the hotel. I ask for the *carta de comer* (comer = to eat) but I want to improve my Spanish and ask what the Spanish word for the menu is, the paper thingy. The lady behind the counter - who does not speak English so I have to try to manage in Spanish - thinks I am asking for the English translation of the items on the menu and starts explaining. It takes a couple of minutes full of misunderstanding but an African-looking guy assists, he understands my question and so I am told the right Spanish word for the menu is just *carta* - another day lived, another day learned.

## 24-09-16, saturday - Laredo

I take the ferry - again - to Pedreña and this time I do not forget to get off the boat - nobody this time I can have a conversation with like the last time.

Alberto is at the divingcentre and I tell him what my visit is about. He tells me the guy I should talk to is Joseba, the owner (Joseba is a Basque name and instead of the Spanish way to pronounce the *j* as a *g*, it is pronounced as we do back in Holland).

Joseba is at another location of the divingcentre, in Laredo, a town about 40 kilometer from Santander. And so someone else makes a call to Laredo and I am told I can come over to talk to Joseba.

Pretty much excited I get on the bus to Laredo. A couple of months ago I already got in touch with the divingcentre and they told they know more about the Andra including the whereabouts. Will I really see pictures of the wreckage, maybe even hold something in my hands from the Andra?

In Laredo there is a fair going on. Some king Carlos V landed on the beach a couple of centuries ago and they have festivities every year. This means a lot of people dress like back then and there is a market with jewelery, food and whatever going on. Also there are bands walking around that play ancient music on ancient instruments such as bagpipes, drums and flutes.



At night they will do a reenactment of the landing of king Carlos V on the beach. To bad, it will be at a time I will miss my bus to Santander, I would have loved to see that pageant.

At the diving centre Mundo Submarino owner Joseba is busy doing a divingsession, he would be back in about two hours. And so back to the fair at the centre for a mediaeval lunch: real chorizo sausages and bread according to the ancient recipe - for tourist prices as I will find out later.

Back at the diving centre Joseba has not returned yet and so I sit down at the pier, enjoying the sunny weather. In the clear water I see a kind of carps pass by, some half a meter or longer.

After a while men approach wearing unmistakably divingsuits - it must be the ones I have been waiting for. I walk up to them and ask for Joseba. They point out to a guy in a bright orange t-shirt, according to his looks he must defenitly be a typical local.

Joseba turns out to speak no English at all but someone else from the group is willing to act as a translator and his English is pretty good. I am told Joseba has to deal with the group first back at the centre, it might take an hour or so. And so I am invited to go for drinks with the others.

With a drink in my hand I tell my story and get to hear they do know the exact restingplace of the Andra. Even more, they undertake regular divingsessions to it, in that case it is handy to know the whereabouts of course. I am also told they have footage of those sessions, video as well as photographs. As can be understood, I am getting more and more excited and I can't wait to see that footage.

Back at the divingcentre Joseba is sitting behind his desk and a picture of the Andra is already on his computerscreen. It is the same picture I have but this one has a higher resolution and so more details are visible. That is also the case with other pictures I already have in my possesion. I am offered a chair and my translator also takes a seat at the other side of the desk.

We talk for over an hour and now I do see that footage, great! They also tell me the Andra was called a ghostship at first but in my excitement I forgot to ask why that is - I will ask that later when I have returned to Holland.

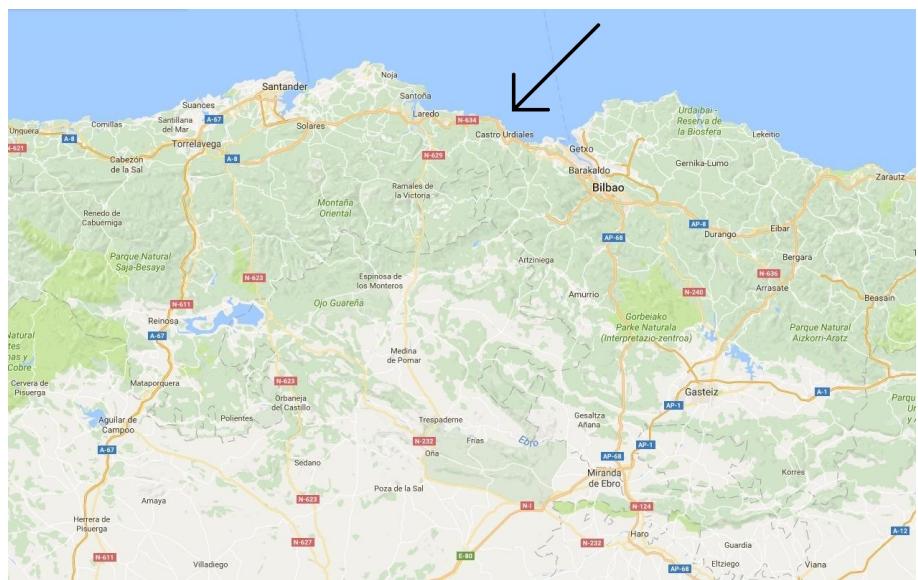
The Andra is a unique wreckage in the sense she is straightup, not really common when it comes to wrecks. Like this she is very accessible. She lies at a depth of about 85 meters, a depth that requires more than just diving for sports and is called "technical diving".

There are also differences between us about the story of the Andra. Joseba tells me the Andra was sailing in a convoy when she was intercepted but my grandfather does not mention anything like that in his diary. I am sure he would have if that would have been the case and so I stick to his version.

Another difference is the story the Andra would have made an attempt to escape. But in the diary grandpa writes the captain immediately had the engines stopped and raised the flag saying they had stopped. We are not starting a discussion who would be right since neither of us was present at the time. I promise I will translate the pages in the diary that apply to this part of the adventure to English and I will send them by email.

There is still one riddle: every ship has a bell with the name of the ship on it. The bell of the Andra however has a name on it which looks like "Josep Escicluna". The original name of the ship used to be Indra and that name could have been expected but not a totally different one like this. I will try to figure out what this is all about.

GPS-coordinates like those of the Andra are usually information you have to pay for, I get those coordinates as a present from Joseba. And so I can point out the exact location on the map. Something nice to show at lectures and guestlessons.



## 25-09-16, sunday

Today is my last full day in Spain, tomorrow morning I will go back to Holland. And so I go out, spend the rest of my day on terraces drinking pretty much cafe solo's.

That evening I take Esther, my hostess from last week, for a dinner out. It seemed the appropriate thing to do to thank her for her hospitality.

We had a very nice time, eating and chatting about all sorts of things. The fish baked in egg, a local speciality, tasted great. By the end of the week Esther will be moving to a new home closer to her job as an English teacher. I wish her success and we'll stay in touch.

## 26-09-16 Hoogeveen, Holland, home

The journey back home goes very well and also a bit faster since I travel by the Thalys from Brussels to Amsterdam, a part that takes only 1,5 hours instead of 2,5 hours.

I put my key in my door and enter my home after two great weeks. A notebook filled with a lot of information, a suitcase filled with books (some in Spanish, work to do) and a mobile phone topped up with pictures. Of course also a lot of very nice and useful contacts in Spain that are a promise for the future.

It has been two exhausting but impressive weeks. All I wanted to achieve has been realised and I know so much more about Spain than I used to. I visited the area where my grandfather lived his adventure and, just as important, I learned and understand so much more now about the Spanish Civil War. The latter will definitely play a role within my lectures and guestlessons.

Happy? More then...