

Guernica attack vivid for Midvale couple



AL HARTMANN | *The Salt Lake Tribune*

Jaime and Magdalena Sangroniz are survivors of the 1937 bombing of the Basque city of Guernica, Spain, by German and Italian forces.

As Magdalena Sangroniz tells it, her father somehow knew that something would happen that Monday afternoon in Guernica, Spain. “Send the children to the valley,” he told his wife.

It wasn't long before a single plane flew over dropping bombs, one of them close to Magdalena's home. Their mother rushed to join them, and they found shelter under a bridge, where soldiers also had taken refuge.

More planes came, strafing the bridge with machine gunfire. The little group dodged from side to side, and no one was hurt.

So began the destruction

**PEG
MCENTEE**



of the Basque town of Guernica on April 26, 1937. Historians tell us that Gen. Francisco Franco, who led the Nationalists against Spain's Republican government, had allowed German and Italian pilots to bomb the city as a trial run in what would become the Axis' blitzkrieg through Europe a few years later.

Please see **MCENTEE, B6**

It was a market day, so the town was busy with shoppers when the church bells rang the alarm. Bombers and fighter planes pounded Guernica for more than three hours. Most accounts put the number of dead at more than 1,600.

Magdalena was 12, while Jaime Sangroniz, the boy who would become her husband, was 15. Today, they live in Midvale, members of a culturally rich Basque community.

Both remember that day vividly. “It was an awful day, so ‘triste’ ... a sad day,” Magdalena said as we sat in her living room.

Both recount how the bombs, many of them incendiary, pounded Guernica. From the faraway valley, Magdalena said, her family could see the fire, “the red glow of the burning city on the far side of the mountain.”

Magdalena’s family took refuge in a farmhouse with two other families. “My family lost everything,” she says. Ultimately, they were sent to Bilbao, and then to France as refugees. They stayed for seven months — “the people there were wonderful” — then went home.

The bombs destroyed Jaime’s family home, and they were only able to salvage one blanket each. They also took shelter in a farmhouse, on a floor above the cattle.

“I remember two things in that time,” he said. “There was a [Republican] soldier with a big rifle, and he was crying and crying.”

Then, fearing for his parishioners’ lives, “a priest showed up, giving us the last rites, just in case something happened.”

“You can’t forget those things.”

MAGDALENA SANGRONIZ

Who sometimes has dreams about what happened in Guernica.

“How could they do that?”

JAIME SANGRONIZ

Adding to his wife’s assessment.

Franco’s troops moved in, and the survivors were told they could get food in town. Jaime borrowed a bicycle to retrieve the single daily meal.

“One day I was riding the bicycle to pick up the stuff,” he said. “From here to there” — gesturing to a house across the street — “an artillery bomb hit the road.”

He went back, and his mother asked why. He explained, and his mother replied, “I don’t know how we’re going to eat today!”

“I was thinking, thinking, what are we going to eat today?” Jaime said. So he bicycled into town and brought the daily ration home, only to have his mother exclaim, “You went back?”

Jaime laughed, then told me about the Italian cook who worked in a battalion kitchen. “I would go there and talk to the people,” he said. “The cook, he says to me, ‘You know how to play dominoes?’”

“Sure I know how to play dominoes,” Jaime said.

“OK, let’s play,” the cook said.

When it was time to go to work, the cook would give Jaime food to take home. After three days, the battalion moved out, and the cook gave Jaime the game. He still has it, a little wooden box filled with ivory dominoes, a 73-year-old memento of an enemy’s kindness.

Magdalena stayed near Guernica with her family. In 1947, Jaime got a job herding sheep in Idaho, and later went to work in the Kennecott copper mines.

Five years later, he returned for a visit to Guernica, found and married Magdalena and brought her to the States.

“I think I was waiting for him,” she said.

The Sangronizes raised

four children, careful to teach them Basque along with English. Neither of them talk much about what happened in Guernica, but Magdalena told me she dreams about it all the time.

“You can’t forget those things,” she said. Added Jaime: “How could they do that?”

Pablo Picasso’s famous painting hangs in a museum in Madrid. I was there

in the late 1990s and wanted so much to see it. I got to the museum the day before we flew home, but it was closed.

Now I have an equally vivid picture. Thanks to Magdalena and Jaime, for painting in words for me what happened on that terrible day in Guernica.

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