The location of Robert Capa’s Falling Soldier

Abstract
Discussions concerning the authenticity of Capa’s Falling Soldier have generated diverse opinions and theories but remarkably little research. A version of the events authorized by the International Center of Photography was refuted when this author located the photograph at Espejo and not at Cerro Muriano, where previously it was thought to have been taken. Locating the site of the photograph more exactly required important work method adaptations to features of a new landscape, given that the objective evidence results from reproducing Capa’s framing, including the perspective and the orographic accidents seen in the original photo. The application of new technologies has played an essential role in obtaining the evidence that reveals that this image was taken at Cerro del Cuco using a technique applied by Robert Capa. With this new location Falling Soldier must be seen in a completely different light. Capa’s own version of how this photograph was taken is demonstrably false. These facts also disprove all the stories arising from his version, including the notion that credit this photograph to his partner, Gerda Taro.

Keywords
Robert Capa, Photography, Gerda Taro, Cerro del Cuco.

1. Introduction
Falling Soldier has been controversial ever since it was published by Life magazine on July 12, 1937, but Robert Capa’s stature is an obstacle difficult to overcome by those who might question or doubt the authenticity of the photo. See for example the following comment by Richard Whelan, Robert Capa’s biographer: “To insist upon knowing whether the photograph actually shows a man at the moment he has been hit by a bullet is both morbid and trivializing” (Whelan, 1985: 100).

When, back in 2009 I situated Falling Soldier in Espejo, the results of Whelan’s research were invalidated as he had situated the photograph at the Cerro Muriano battle, in which a soldier from Alcoy by the name of Federico García Borrell was killed. This location error also has consequences in terms of his research because Enrique Borrell (1937), a friend of Federico’s, wrote an article in his memory, wherein Borrell describes him dying while taking refuge behind a tree. There are no trees in the photo by Capa. The alleged identity of the soldier was
one of the major contributions by Whelan, but as it turned out, the soldier in the photo was not in Cerro Muriano but in Espejo.

If the sole objective of this study were to find out whether the photograph was authentic or staged, it would suffice to closely observe its first edition, in which two dead soldiers appear on two different photographs with the same framing. The relationship between these two photos is so absurd that it immediately reveals that they are staged. However, this research also took other paths that have led to identifying the distinctive style of Capa in some of his photographs, including Falling Soldier, which, in turn, has led to crediting of other photos. The final stage of this study was a search of the area where Capa took the photograph. Its location has unveiled elements essential for the correct interpretation of Falling Soldier.

2. The controversy and its evolution

Robert Capa arrived in Barcelona with Gerda Taro in early August, 1936. At the time he was working as a photojournalist, and was to cover the Spanish Civil War for the French magazine Vu. He made nine trips to Spain, his first one being the most discouraging as he had to go from Barcelona to Córdoba, passing through the Aragón and Madrid fronts in order finally to find an active front at Cerro Muriano. Before that, he stayed in Espejo, Córdoba, where he photographed a group of soldiers in a field. One of those soldiers is the one who appears in the famous image. He then went to Paris, where Vu magazine published the Espejo and Cerro Muriano photographs in its September 23 issue (Figure 1). It was a two-page report and Falling Soldier was printed for the first time on its first page, together with Second Falling Man.

An analysis of these photos clearly reveals that the framing and the position of the subjects is the same in both cases. The only difference is in the tilting to the right of the second photograph and a change in the position of the clouds, which marks a time difference of a few minutes between these two takes.

The second known publication of Falling Soldier occurs in Life magazine, which published it on July 12, 1937. This photograph opened an extensive report covering the first year of the Spanish Civil War. In this case, only Falling Soldier was published.

The difference between these two prints of Falling Soldier is in the format. In Life the photograph is more squared than in the one published in Vu and furthermore, this format matches that of the only existing copy at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. There are other copies, but their right side has been cropped; one of these prints is in the Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica de Salamanca (Reference code: ES.37274.CDMH/12.66.11//FOTOGRAFÍAS–CAPA.FOT065). The version published by Life is the most relevant here given that it has become the main reference point in the debate. The Vu print has been virtually forgotten, which is a major error, as some researchers have overlooked Second Falling Soldier, which in fact constitutes an essential document in this research.

2.1. Robert Capa’s version


[Capa and his subject, the soldier] were on the Córdoba front, stranded there, the two of them, Capa with his precious camera and the soldier with his rifle. The soldier was impatient. He wanted to get back to the Loyalist lines. Time and again he climbed up and peered over the sandbags. Each time he would drop back at the warning rattle of machine-gun fire. Finally, the soldier muttered something to the effect that he was going to take the long chance. He clambered out of the trench with Capa behind him. The machine-guns rattled, and Capa automatically
Snapped his camera, falling back beside the body of his companion. Two hours later, when it was dark and the guns were still, the photographer crept across the broken ground to safety. Later he discovered that he had taken one of the finest shots of the Spanish war.

**Figure 1.** Robert Capa. *Vu* magazine. September 23, 1936

**Figure 2.** Robert Capa. *Life* magazine. July 12, 1937
There is no mention whatsoever of the second soldier in these statements by Robert Capa nor did he mention him ten years later at the time of an interview he gave to WNBC in New York, also cited in Kershaw (2004: 42):

The men fired towards the machine gun for five minutes. Then they stood up and said ‘Vamos’ (‘Let’s go!’), and crawled out of the trench and advanced towards the machine gun. ‘Sure enough,’ Capa continued, ‘the machine gun opened up and, dim dom! So what was left of them came back and again take pot shots in the direction of the machine gun [that] certainly was clever enough not to answer. And after five minutes again they say “Vamos” and they got mowed down again. This thing repeated itself for about three or four times so the fourth time I just kind of put my camera above my head and even didn’t look and clicked a picture when they moved over the trench.

The final paragraph of the second statement includes a description of how the photograph was taken that is not believable. How could Capa possibly have put the camera over his head and click, that is to say, how could he have taken two photographs with the same framing without looking through the viewfinder and in the heat of battle, as illustrated by the first edition of the dead soldiers? Another question is how was it possible for this photograph to have had so many advocates after reading Capa’s statements?

2.2. Chronology of the controversy

It was a journalist, Phillip Knightley (1977: 210–212), who first questioned the authenticity of this photo; despite its renown, nobody had ever made any observations, no one had ever analyzed the soldier’s face, or his body position, or the circumstances under which Capa took this snapshot. Knightley made an interesting move when he changed the photo caption in Life magazine, which read “Robert Capa’s camera catches a Spanish soldier the instant he is dropped by a bullet through the head in front of Cordoba” to “A militiaman slips and falls while training for action.” He thus proved that the meaning of the photo changed according to how it was captioned, and reflected: “... There is something wrong with the values of a journalistic world that accepts as an important image a photograph that so clearly depends on the caption for its authentication.”

This controversy also gathered momentum in Italy in 1972, when Piero Berengo Gardin published an article claiming that Falling Soldier was fake, a claim replicated by Leydi in another article two years later1, “The fact that Robert Capa fabricated a fake photo does not affect the ideal, moral, political, civil and human value of the event the picture refers to; even if it is the case that the photo is fake, it still is very good as a symbol of a moment in history and of our conscience.” This part of Leydi’s text is rather incoherent as he states among other things that counterfeiting does not affect moral values. If there is one thing affecting a journalist’s moral standards, it is precisely those actions which are out of line with professional practices, and in this specific case Robert Capa fabricated news. The Spanish historian Ricardo de la Cierva2 made similar statements, “Everything has been said about this photograph: that it was probably taken at the Andalusia front, that it might not be authentic. One thing is certain, its symbol and its message are authentic.”

Richard Whelan’s arguments (1987: 97) when it comes to defending Capa’s photograph also strain credulity. The fact that both the first and the second soldier were photographed on the same spot demanded an explanation as to why the bodies did not appear one on top

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of the other in one of the photos. According to Whelan’s analysis, when the first soldier was shot, his comrades rushed forward to recover his body. Another possibility would have been for the first soldier to have slipped and fallen outside the camera frame.

Both these statements are unfounded and fail to justify the coincidence of these two dead soldiers at the same spot. Random coincidence is not an argument, and neither is the hypothesis that the first soldier slipped and fell out of frame. The latter explanation goes back to Knightley’s idea when he changed the photo caption in Life for another one describing a soldier slipping and falling while training to fight. That is to say, what was for Knightley an experiment to demonstrate the importance of a caption in the meaning of a photo is, for Whelan, a clarification of how Robert Capa’s camera could have captured that situation.

2.3. New research: The location of Espejo and the photographs’ format

_Falling Soldier_ is a simple composition offering very little information in terms of location. The orographic features reveal a diagonal line descending left to right, with a mostly horizontal and quite blurred mountainous profile in the background. Between these two elements, there is a dark hill descending to the right, where a light-colored geometrical shape appears. All these elements make for only 25% of the photograph. The remaining 75% corresponds to the sky and a few clouds. There is hardly any information available regarding the soldier; he is believed to have been from Alcoy.

I started a new line of research based on _This is War! Robert Capa at Work_, the exhibition catalogue published by the International Center of Photography (Whelan, 2008) which contains a series of unpublished photos by Capa. The catalogue follows Vaccari’s archeology of perception theory (1981: 109), according to which a quick view of a photograph “gives our vision the absolutely new power to contemplate a series of events and order them according to rules that we ourselves more or less freely establish.” The graphic designer observed the events in three specific photographs (Whelan, 2008: 59–77–85) following professional criteria. However, a change of criterion in terms of photo order (2008: 59–85–77) placed the photographs consecutively starting with _Falling Soldier_, followed by a second photo of another dead soldier, and finally a photo of a group of militiamen firing to the horizon. These three photos gave logical continuation to the landscape in such a way that situating the third photo, which shows a wide and easily identifiable landscape, could lead to finding the location of _Falling Soldier_.

With this information (Figure 3), in 2008 I planned my first trip to Cerro Muriano to find the location of _Falling Soldier_. Upon arriving at this hamlet, I compared the photograph to the view before me and I once realized that Capa’s photo was not located at Cerro Muriano.

A comparison between Figure 4 and Figure 5 clearly reveals that they were taken in totally different locations. A main conclusion is the confirmation that _Falling Soldier_ was taken at a site other than Cerro Muriano. A detailed observation of Figure 4 makes one wonder why the graphic designer included two black wedges at the top and on the left of this photo.

Early in 2009, I found on the internet a site on the Civil War in Córdoba. I sent an enquiry asking about the connections between the villages where the front had been located in the summer of 1936. The following day I received an e-mail from Patricio Hidalgo with an attachment showing the connections between the villages on the Córdoba front. I then phoned the different town councils and sent the picture in Figure 4 so that they could show it to anyone who might have more information. Within a few days Juan Manuel Moreno, the librarian in Villa del Río, contacted me and asked me if he could send the photo to a historian friend of his, Juan Molleja Martínez, a teacher at the _Instituto de Educación_
Secundaria Vicente Núñez, a high school in Aguilar de la Frontera. This teacher showed the photo to his students for them to locate it and he got lucky. Antonio Aguilera, one of these students, immediately located the landscape in Llano de Batán, also known as Llano de Vanda, near Montilla.

![Image of the location of Robert Capa's Falling Soldier](image_url)

Figure 3. Robert Capa. The geometrical shape in the first photo appears on the left side of the second picture. The right side of the second photo and the left side of the third one also overlap. Early September, 1936. Magnum Photos.

This initiated a new line of research that bore no relation to Richard Whelan’s version. On the way to Montilla, when I got to the roundabout in Espejo, 53 km away from Cerro Muriano, I could see the mountains in Figure 4 in the distance. I also observed a substantial change; the fields were no longer grain fields but where now olive groves, which partially blocked the view.

The identification of Espejo as the location of Falling Soldier radically changed Richard Whelan’s version, based at the Cerro Muriano battle on September 5, 1936. Robert Capa was definitely present at that battle, but before that he was in Espejo, where he took the photo of the soldier – or more accurately – of the soldiers, on days that witnessed neither military action nor deaths, as revealed in the research of Francisco Moreno (1985: 202–215). The battle of Espejo started on September 22 and ended three days later. Falling Soldier was published on September 23, which again totally rules out the possibility of Robert Capa having taken this photograph during the battle of Espejo.
Figure 4. Robert Capa. Soldiers firing to the horizon. Early September, 1936. Magnum Photos

Figure 5. J. M. Susperregui. Panoramic view from Cerro Muriano

The publication of my book, Sombras de la fotografía (2009), reopened the controversy behind this photo by Capa. Initially, the ICP Board did not react to the change of location of Falling Soldier from Cerro Muriano to Espejo, but then Cynthia Young⁴, curator of the Robert Capa archives at ICP, stated the following in The New York Times: “The new

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evidence suggesting that “Falling Soldier” was photographed in Espejo was compelling, even persuasive.” Two days later The New York Times published a categorical editorial on the subject: “We hope that this dispute can be finally settled. Faking any journalistic photograph would be terribly wrong. The truth of “Falling Soldier” is especially important. It matters greatly to us — and to Capa’s reputation — to know whether this man fell, never to rise again, or got up and walked away.”

Countering the position of The New York Times, Prof. Gubern stated,

I have seen the photos of the death camps on the pages of The Illustrated London News, photos that the Francoist censorship hid from the eyes of Spaniards. I cannot find words to describe the horror I felt when I saw those living dead staring at the camera with lifeless eyes. These were also posed photos which nevertheless told the truth of the Holocaust tragedy.

In my view comparing Holocaust survivors to Capa’s soldier is not appropriate; those “living corpses” did not have to play a part, they were the tragedy in themselves. Capa’s soldier, on the other hand, was acting, playing a supposed hero generously sacrificing his life for a cause. With regard to the concept of performance, there is an interesting reflection by Berenice Abbot cited in Tagg (1992: 153): “Photography cannot ignore the great challenge to reveal and celebrate reality [...] Is this not exactly what photography is meant to do with the sharp, realistic, image-forming lens?” Berenice Abbott was not exactly an ignorant photographer out of touch with trends in photography. She worked in Paris as an assistant to Man Ray and Eugéne Atget, a documentary photographer and her main role model. In this same line, Claude Lanzmann (2009: 216), the author of Shoah, the renowned documentary on the Holocaust, is also a fierce defender of truth: “Why would anyone publish falsehood? And this is why the press – it is the worst crime it can commit, an attempt of its very essence – can lie with impunity. Even if he knows that everything in it is false, a tyrant’s subject reads the tyrant’s press. Because it is written”

“To reveal and celebrate reality” rather than “acting out” is the responsibility that The New York Times editorial attributes to press photography, and so do most of the mass media. Neither Vu nor Life would have published Falling Soldier had they known it was a staged picture; first it would have been against ethical principles and further, they risked losing their prestige in the public sphere.

The ICP Board concession in terms of the change of location of the photo did not include accepting my evidence on the camera used to take the picture. It was thought to have been taken with a Leica, but following an analysis of the prints in Vu and Life, I concluded that it had in fact been taken with a camera in a square format. Vu, which first published this photo, printed it in a rectangular format, but months later Life published a virtually squared print of it. The bottom part of the composition is exactly the same in both editions, the difference is in the size of the sky, which is significantly bigger in the version in Life. If the latter magazine changed the format to a virtually squared print, it was not at the expense of sacrificing one of the sides of the rectangular print in Vu as if that had been the case then the bottom part of the two photographs would not match. This shows that the photograph was originally squared; the difference in these two editions is that the one in Vu sacrificed a large section of the sky whereas Life respected the original format.

ICP failed to appreciate the technological unconscious of the two versions of the photos, as according to Vaccari (1984: 16) “The fact that the product acts independently of its signification and thus, without the subject (the photographer) knowing it, results in the

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product possessing some of the characteristics of the signifier (the format) and, especially, its autonomy”. This format relationship, in this case as one of the characteristics of the signifier and its autonomy, explains the impossibility of changing a rectangular shape into a virtual square without sacrificing one of the sides of the rectangle. Therefore, this shows that the original Falling Soldier photo was taken with a camera with a squared format.

3. Robert Capa’s style of photography
On my second trip to Espejo, I reached the upper part of the area known as Alcaparral and from the olive grove to the right of the intersection of the road to the cemetery and the Casalillas road I managed to take a panoramic view through the olive trees. This was a crucial photo as it allowed me to discover Robert Capa’s camera movements.

![Panoramic view from Alcaparral](image)

Figure 6. J. M. Susperregui. Panoramic view from Alcaparral

A comparison of the skylines in the photographs in Figure 4 and Figure 6 reveals that in Figure 6 the sky height is approximately the same on both sides but Figure 4 shows that the sky height is lower on the left side. This effect is part of the style of many of the photographs Capa took on his first trip to Spain with his girlfriend Gerda Taro in the summer of 1936. This right tilting answers the question I posed here before regarding the black wedges on the top left of Soldiers firing to the horizon (Figure 4). The designer opted for this solution to balance the composition as it seems as though the soldiers are cardboard figures about to fall.

Now, if we compare Soldiers firing to the horizon (Figure 4) and Falling Soldier (Figure 2), there are some coincidences in terms of composition. Soldiers firing to the horizon is tilted to the right as revealed by the comparison of Figure 4 and Figure 6. The composition in Figure 4 is asymmetrical and covers mainly the left side of the frame. Furthermore, the soldier to the left is just on the border of the frame while the photographer had plenty of space available to move the camera away and adjust the frame with better balance.
In *Falling Soldier* the composition is also asymmetrical with the soldier to the left and at the edge of the frame, to the extent that part of the butt of the gun is cropped even though Robert Capa also here had enough space to move the camera away and open the space to improve the composition. In this specific case we can give Capa the benefit of the doubt; if this were a natural snapshot the asymmetry and the cropping of part of the butt of the gun could be the consequence of a sudden event. However, doubt vanishes once the photographs in the Mexican Suitcase are analyzed as quite a few of the photos taken during the Spanish Civil War share these characteristics.

Following the analysis of Robert Capa’s style, *Falling Soldier* also comes out as tilted to the right. The two orographic references appearing in *Falling Soldier* concur in another panoramic view from Alcaparral (Figure 7), the mountainous background and the diagonal line.

In this panoramic view the mountainous background is tilted to the left, as opposed to *Falling Soldier* (Figure 2), in which this background is slightly raised on the left side. This comparison gives objective evidence to the fact that *Falling Soldier* is also tilted to the right, an effect that Robert Capa obtained by tilting the camera to the left before clicking.

Robert Capa’s style in some of the photos he took on his first trip to Civil War Spain can be defined based on the following features:
- asymmetric composition covering mainly the left side of the frame
- right-tilted composition
- cropping of subjects and objects also on the left side

*Figure 7. J. M. Susperregui. Panoramic view with diagonal line and mountainous background*

These three features are enough in terms of criteria to identify Robert Capa’s photographs during that summer of 1936 trip, both in the case of the rectangular Leica photos and the square pictures, though these three features are found mainly in square negatives. As for subsequent photographs, only two of these features apply given that he abandons right-tilted compositions. Schaber and Whelan, Taro and Capa’s biographers,
obtained different results when they applied the format criterion to negatives in order to credit the photographs (Schaber, 2007: 44): “It now seems apparent that on their first trip, Capa used the Leica exclusively (rectangular), and Taro used Rolleiflex exclusively (square).” However, format is but a minor criterion when compared to style when it comes to crediting photographic work, which created a problem for Irme Schaber (2013: 117) when she claimed that Falling Soldier had been taken by Robert Capa.

4. Work methodology adapted to the photograph in question and to the landscape circumstances

This research has been carried out applying a work methodology adapted to the specific features of Falling Soldier and to the physical conditions of the place where Robert Capa took this snapshot, with the aim of finding out how it was taken. An important reference point for this methodology is the concept of “studium” in Roland Barthes (1980: 50–51):

“To recognize the studium is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture (from which the studium derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumer. The studium is a kind of education (knowledge and civility, 'politeness') which allows me to discover the Operator, to experience the intentions which establish and animate his practices, but to experience them ‘in reverse,’ according to my will as Spectator”.

“To encounter the photographer's intentions...in reverse,” implies replacing the Operator, to reproduce the context of his photograph, correctly interpret it and obtain specific results. If we analyze the elements of Falling Soldier, the soldier and the space his figure occupies is in the foreground. The rest of the picture shows orographic accidents and the sky, the latter taking up 75% of the total picture. Of all these elements, only the mountainous background has been located and remains unaltered. The descending diagonal line crossing the photo from side to side is another interesting reference point, though due to Capa's camera movement technique, this line might be exaggerated in the photograph. The dark masses between the diagonal and the background also might have changed over time, which could also be the case for the light-colored geometrical shape.

The first stage was to divide the photograph (Figure 8) in an upper part and lower part. The lower part includes the soldier and the field he occupies and the upper part shows the remaining orographic elements, which are minor and weakly defined as these elements are quite blurred in the photo. References in the upper part are the only ones to offer the possibility of replicating this landscape so as to definitively situate the location Falling Soldier.

From the technical point of view, the first difficulty arose from the olive trees which block the view from the ground. The solution was to elevate the camera 4–5 meters to look at the background landscape, which required a tripod with vertical and lateral mobility to ensure that the framing was as accurate as possible.

A digital camera was required so that the photograph could be shown on a computer screen. Previous trials carried out with analog cameras such as Rolleiflex Standard and Reflex Korelle did not work, given that the viewfinder shows the image with inverted sides, that is, the mountainous background appears from the left side of the frame. A further problem is the small size of the viewfinder image, which prevents detailed observation of the orographic accidents and other relevant references for the location of the framing.

With Falling Soldier as the main reference point, the analog copy had to be gridded (Photo 9) in order to compare the position of the visual references with the position of these same reference points on the computer screen.
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**Figure 8.** Robert Capa

**Figure 9.** Robert Capa. Gridded copy of the original photo
The digital camera and a computer connected to the Canon EOS Utility allowed in the first place to overlay a grid on the screen, the same grid which is on the copy of the photograph of reference. Next, a close-up of the lower section of Capa's photo was overlaid on the computer screen (Figure 10). This procedure is essential as it allows for comparing the photo to the landscape image displayed by the digital camera as a background screen. These three elements should produce a set of layers fully matching the original photo.

An important factor to bear in mind is the difference in format between the original photograph and digital camera photos. In order to overlay the lower part of the original photo on the digital image, these two formats need to have the same proportions so that the overlay is proportional. Given that the digital image has a 3x2 aspect ratio and the original photograph is 3x2.3, the upper part of the sky can be cropped to match the proportion of the digital image, as it contains no reference of interest (Figure 10). Once the two images are equally proportioned, they can be overlaid to make comparisons in relation to the original gridded copy.

This method guarantees even comparisons between the original copy of *Falling Soldier* and the overlaid image on the computer screen. But there is still one more important reference to consider for accurate framing with the digital camera. The computer screen shows the lower part of the original photo, specifically a profile of the soldier’s left knee, as seen in Figure 10, so this is a very important reference point to horizontally adjust the knee’s level to the part of the digital image displaying a dark orographic accident on the computer screen. For vertical adjustment it is important to take into account mainly the elements on the lower right grid (Figure 9). The position of the white vertical line on this grid is key to correctly positioning the camera. These two horizontal and vertical reference points suffice to guarantee the framing of *Falling Soldier*. The only adjustment missing was...
the visual angle in both cameras. Our starting point was a Reflex Korelle camera with a 75 mm Schneider lens like the one used by Robert Capa and a digital camera with a zoom lens. These two cameras were placed on tripods facing an open landscape and the shot was framed with the Reflex Korelle in such a way as to get specific reference points both to the left and to the right. The next step was to obtain the same framing with the digital camera changing the focal distance of the zoom lens. Once the framing was achieved, the focal distance read on the lens would be the zoom position at the moment of making the trials to locate *Falling Soldier*. It is important to make black and white digital photos in order to adjust the values of the digital photos to those of the original photograph. It is also advisable to use a filter on the digital camera lens as in the original photo the clouds are highlighted against a dark sky. This effect is achieved with a red filter, which darkens mainly the blue color and also the green shades of the olive trees. In the original photo, these shades compose the dark mass between the stubble field occupied by the soldier and the mountainous background.

![Figure 11. J. M. Susperregui. Device set up](image)

This set of observation devices (Figure 11) is the basis of this work method adapted to the requirements of this research. The direct view of the gridded original photograph followed by the view of the gridded digital photo on the computer screen displaying the lower part of the overlaid original photo allows comparative observation to verify that both compositions match. From there it was only a matter of positioning the device at the right spot to check for effectiveness. Prior to this, I made detailed observations of the orographic accidents of various placements in order to find a spot similar to that of the original photo, and ruled out locations that did not match.

According to evidence in the original, the photograph was located on a height facing a mountainous background. The length and height of the mountains is another important criterion when comparing the gridded original photo to the grid on the computer screen. Potential locations were reduced to three spots: la Haza del Reloj, Cerro de Casalillas, and Cerro del Cuco.
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figure 12. j. m. susperregui. view of cerro de casalillas and cerro del cuco from la haza del reloj

4.1. assessment of the haza del reloj location

in principle, la haza del reloj matches the characteristics of a high spot facing a mountainous background. in 2013 the town of espejo hosted a tribute to robert capa’s on the occasion of his centennial and the mayor ⁶ announced a project to mark the spot where the soldier was killed.

the marking at la haza del reloj consists of a sign (figure 13) displaying figure 4 at the bottom and the same spot as it looks today at the top. the sign includes the following text: “photomontage showing that falling soldier, an icon of the spanish civil war and the photograph which marks the birth of contemporary photojournalism was taken in this site known as la haza del reloj (espejo).” this sign is erroneous, for instead of showing the site appearing on falling soldier, it shows the landscape seen in a different photograph. this signage does not actually prove anything in terms of the location of the site where falling soldier was taken, as will be revealed below.

a close observation of the orographic accidents from la haza del reloj reveals some elements in the background which do not appear in robert capa’s original photo.

Figure 13. J. M. Susperregui. Sign at la Haza del Reloj

Figure 14. J. M. Susperregui. View from la Haza del Reloj
A series of differences appear when the terrain in la Haza del Reloj (Figure 15) is compared to Figure 16: Figure 15 reveals some peaks which are not seen in Figure 16. These differences are especially notable when comparing the distances between arrows A and arrows B in Figures 15 and 16. However, when we compare Figures 16 and 17, no orographic differences appear, nor between the distances between arrows A and arrows B.

These orographic changes are the result of the difference in altitude between Figure 15 and Figure 16 i.e. 35 meters, the equivalent of a 12-storey building—which is to say that this difference in perspective between Figure 15 and Figure 16 is the difference between placing the camera on the roof of a 12-storey building or at ground level.
The orographic mismatch from la Haza del Reloj perspective in relation to the perspectives in Figure 16 and Figure 17 rules out this location as the setting of *Falling Soldier*.

A sketch of the defenses in Espejo drawn by a farmhand (Figure 18) shows two forts at the level of La Haza del Reloj, as well as a large fortification. Due to its height and location, La Haza del Reloj was a strategic point at the Espejo front, so it seems improbable that military leaders would have authorized a group of soldiers to pose for a photographer there.

### 4.2. Assessment of the Cerro de Casalillas location

The Cerro de Casalillas is located to the southeast, where the picture in Figure 18 shows in red the fortification farthest from Espejo. This hill directly faces the mountains in the background and the area corresponding to the light-colored geometrical shape, which has led some researchers to locate *Falling Soldier* at Cerro Casalillas.

A comparison of Figure 19 and Figure 20 shows considerable differences even though it also reveals an important similarity, the dark mass at the level of the soldier’s knee. The differences however, are more significant. Figure 20, for instance, shows a light line in the lower center and right squares, which refers to the light colored geometric shape in the original photograph, a shape which is well focused in the lower right square in Robert Capa’s photo.

This shifting of the light geometrical shape is sufficient evidence to establish that *Falling Soldier* is located in Cerro de Casalillas.
Figure 19. *Falling Soldier* original. Magnum Photos

Figure 20. View from Cerro de Casalillas, 325 meters above sea level
Finally, the shape of the mountains in the background an opposite effect from that of La Haza del Reloj. From the latter, the mountains in the background became thicker with altitude, but the opposite is true from Casalillas. This notable change in the thickness of the mountain range gives us an interesting clue to locate the photo. In view of the results the altitude should be between that of la Haza del Reloj, 390 m, and the altitude of the position for photographing the landscape from Cerro de Casalillas, 325 m.

4.3. Assessment of the Cerro del Cuco location

In view of the two previous failures and bearing in mind that in our second trip to Espejo there appeared a diagonal line to the mountain ridge, the new equipment (Figure 21) offered more chances to overcome the olive grove barrier. Cerro del Cuco was the only remaining option.

![Figure 21. Estibaliz Iriondo. Setting up of equipment at Cerro del Cuco site](image)

Given that one of the peculiarities of Robert Capa’s style is right–tilted images, as revealed in Figure 4, and as we have also observed the difference in the mountainous background tilt (Figure 7) in relation to Falling Soldier, now we had the chance to establish and assess the tilt in the photograph by positioning the camera at ground level, that is, at 0º.
The most notable difference between these two photographs is in the mountains in the background, which in Figure 22 are horizontal but slightly tilted to the right while in Figure 23, photographed at 0º, the mountains show a marked tilt to the left. This difference is objective evidence showing that Robert Capa tilted the camera to the left so that the photograph looked tilted to the right, a tilt that in Falling Soldier (Figure 22) is concealed because the mountain ridge looks virtually horizontal.
Figure 24. Robert Capa. Falling Soldier. Magnum Photos.

Figure 25. Photomontage with the background view from Cerro del Cuco shot with a camera tilted 10º to the left.

Reproducing the original appearance of *Falling Soldier* necessarily involves moving the camera in the same way Robert Capa did, tilting it to the left so that the effect of the camera movement is seen in the opposite direction in the photo. After a series of trials the correct tilt was achieved tilting the camera 10º to the left.
A comparison of Figure 24 and Figure 25 shows that the soldier’s knee reference in Figure 25 matches the original photo. The position of the right vertical line of the grid in both photos is the same in relation to the background mountains as well as the dark spot between the foreground and the mountain ridge. The light geometrical shape seen in the original photo is represented in Figure 25 by a light line horizontal with respect to the mountainous background. For this reference point, all that remains is that orographic trace, which is also positioned in the correct place. All this goes to show that Robert Capa took *Falling Soldier* at Cerro del Cuco.

Once it was found out that Robert Capa’s technique consisted in tilting the camera 10º to the left we were able to reconstruct the scene and the position of the soldier appearing in the photograph.

![Figure 26. Result of the 10º left tilt on the original photograph. Parts of the photo were reconstructed with the Clone Stamp tool to cover the white backgrounds which appeared with photograph was tilted.](image)

The reconstruction of *Falling Soldier* (Figure 26) reveals that the ground under the soldiers’ feet is not a slope, but a flat field. Thus the soldier looks much more natural than in Robert Capa’s photo, which has an oblique foreshortened effect.

We applied the same technique to *Second Falling Soldier* or *Forgotten Soldier* and obtained the same results except that in this case there is a 12.5º tilt.
Figure 27. Forgotten Soldier. Magnum Photos

Figure 28. Photomontage of Forgotten Soldier with background view from Cerro del Cuco with camera tilted 12.5º to the left.
Figure 29. Result of the 12°5 left tilt on the original Forgotten Soldier photograph. Some parts of the photo were reconstructed with the Clone Stamp tool.

The results are exactly the same as those obtained with Falling Soldier; the field is flat and not sloping as seen in the original photo. The horizontality of the field is also evident in the position of the equipment (Figure 21), which was set up on flat land to take photographs from Cerro del Cuco.

5. Results and conclusions
The most important result of this study is the location of Falling Soldier at Cerro del Cuco. Its orientation and the mountains in the background as reference points demonstrate that the soldier was facing Espejo from inside the Republican military defense lines, since the sketch drawn by the farmhand (Figure 18) locates a fortification on this hill, on the other side of the hillock. This information disproves public accounts of Robert Capa himself. If the depiction were authentic, the bullet would have to have been shot from Republican lines.

Knowledge of the technique used by Robert Capa to take this photograph is also a key piece of information: an artificial diagonal line simulating a slope. That line does not exist at Cerro del Cuco but Capa constructs and highlights this space with his camera movement; the diagonal line is relative to the mountain ridge line on the horizon and creates a fictitious situation between the soldier and the environment. This apparent situation lends credibility to Capa’s version, which in turn generated further interpretations by authors such as Richard Whelan (1987: 97), Lorna Arroyo (2010: 388), Brian Wallis (2011: 13), Irme Schaber (2013: 117) and Kotaro Sawaki (2013: 155–166), all of them erroneous because they are based on a fictitious version by Capa. In the photo, the slope it appears to show does not exist in the site were the picture was taken.
Kotaro Sawaki credits *Falling Soldier* to Gerda Taro, but this claim lacks credibility in view of the fact that this photograph has the features of Capa’s style and Kotaro Sawaki offers no arguments that would justify crediting this photo to Gerda Taro. His theory that the soldier slipped, and that Capa took the photo at that moment would seem to be based on Knightley (1975: 210), who used this hypothesis to show that the meaning of an image depends on the photo caption. Sawaki takes that general photojournalism theory and makes it his main argument to explain *Falling Soldier*. Now that we know that the soldier was standing on a horizontal plane the theory of the slip becomes unlikely.

Irène Schaber’s finding with regard to the squared Reflex Korelle, confirmed by Eijiro Yoshioka (2014: 166–173) with his analysis of the technological unconscious of the square negatives, generates a conflict over the authorship of the photograph. If Schaber (2013: 117) attributes the squared negatives to Gerda Taro and further, if *Falling Soldier* was proved to have been taken with a squared camera, then Schaber should logically credit it to Gerda Taro, but she does not. She keeps supporting the ICP version, which credits *Falling Soldier* to Robert Capa, thus contradicting her theory of Gerda Taro’s squared negatives.

Finally, the results of this study call for a revision of historical research on Robert Capa that is based on *Falling Soldier*. His archives, including 70,000 negatives mostly related to the five wars he covered, deserve to be treated with as much rigor as possible in order to deepen and improve knowledge of his work.

References


