



The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion During the Rif Rebellion, 1920-1927 (Contributions in Comparative Colonial Studies)

By José E. Alvarez

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Following her defeat in the Spanish-American War of 1898, Spain shifted her colonial focus to her Protectorate in northern Morocco. When Spanish conscripts began to fight and to die by the thousands, political fallout forced the government to create a new unit of professional soldiers. This unit would serve the dual function of providing fighting men for Moroccan service, while sparing the lives of conscripted men. Under its founder, José Millán Astray, and his deputy, Francisco Franco, the Spanish Foreign Legion would quickly become the spearhead for Spain's army in Africa. This is the story of the creation, organization, and combat role of the Legion in its formative years from 1919 to 1927.

Based upon archival sources in Madrid, Segovia, and Ceuta, this is the first and most complete history in English or Spanish of the early years of the Spanish Foreign Legion. The unit was instrumental in crushing Abd-el-Krim's rebellion against Spanish colonial authority. When the Riffians annihilated the army of General Silvestre at Annual in 1921 and were poised to attack the Spanish enclave of Melilla, it was the arrival of the Legion that pacified its panic-stricken citizens. The force would be in the vanguard of all major offensives undertaken in recapturing the territory lost in 1921, and its amphibious landing at Alhucemas Bay in 1925 marked the beginning of the end for the Rif Rebellion.

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Editorial Review

Review

"A very well done, very readable treatment of the early history of one of the most formidable fighting forces of the twentieth century. The Betrothed of Death is very detailed, refreshingly even-handed, and well documented. Descriptions of battles are quite clear, and there are a number of excellent word portraits of some of the most interesting soldiers of the century, including not only Francisco Franco, but also such remarkable characters as Jose Millan Astray, Albert Castro Girona, and many others not well known outside of Spain. Worthwhile reading for anyone interested in colonial warfare, the Spanish Civil War, in which many of the legionaries would rise to high rank, and elite forces."-The NYMAS Newsletter

"This chronological narrative fills a gap in the history of the Spanish Foreign Legion."-Choice

"Alvarez takes the reader to new ground with his excellent look at the Spanish Foreign Legion's first campaigns in Africa."-Star-Banner

"Jose Alvarez should be commended for tackling such a difficult subject....more entertainingly written than any of the many plodding semi-official histories in Spanish."-The International History Review

"Jose Alvarez's book provides the most detailed history in English concerning the establishment of the Spanish Foreign Legion and its role in Spain's "pacification" effects in its Moroccan protectorate during the 1920s."-The Journal of Military History

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"Alvarez has written one of the best books available on a twentieth century European military unit. He tells the fascinating story of the Spanish Foreign Legion in its wars in North Africa. It is an incredible tale of military values, courage, and warfare."-James W. Cortada Editor, Historical Dictionary of the Spanish Civil

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"Jose Alvarez's *The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Rif Rebellion 1920-1927* will be welcomed by scholars of the Iberian Peninsula. Those interested in 20th century Spanish history will profit from the detailed analysis of the origins of the Spanish Foreign Legion and the role played by this remarkable institution in Spain's fraught relations with the protectorate in Morocco and in the development of Spanish domestic politics."-Judith Keene Department of History The University of Sydney

"Although often neglected by military historians, Spanish Morocco merits an important place in the history of modern colonial conflict and counter-insurgency. As Jose Alvarez demonstrates, during the 1920s the Spanish Foreign Legion played a crucial role in the fighting in North Africa. His book covers the fascinating early history of this very colorful fighting force, providing readers with valuable insight into its composition, organization, and military methods and feats."-Geoffrey Jensen Visiting Senior Lecturer Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Assistant Professor of History University of Southern Mississippi

About the Author

JOSÉ E. ÁLVAREZ is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Houston-Downtown. Born in Marianao, Cuba, he came to the United States in 1961. He is a member of the Society for Military History and the Society for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies.

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