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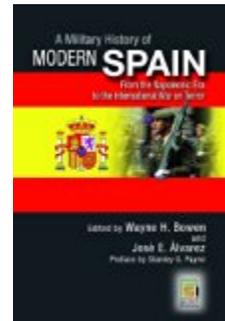
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Wayne H. Bowen, José E. Alvarez. *A Military History of Modern Spain: From the Napoleonic Era to the International War on Terror*. Westport: Praeger, 2007. viii + 222 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-99357-3.

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The Military in Spanish History

Without a doubt, the subjects of this volume would have been astounded to know that in the first decade of the twenty-first century Spain's Minister of Defence would be a Catalan woman, thirty-seven years old, and the grand daughter of an anarchist. In April 2008, Carme Chacón's appointment to the Socialist cabinet captured the headlines, as did her energetic commitment to the job when, a few days after her appointment and while seven months pregnant, she headed off to review Spain's combat units that were part of the United Nations coalition in Afghanistan.

The army has long played a central role in Spanish history. Indeed, as these essays show, the persistent military presence in Spain has lent a particular skew to Spanish affairs. In a society where the central state has been weak, the military elite too frequently has acted as the arbiter of politics. Large sections of the Spanish officer corps have long seen themselves as providing the backbone to a decentered nation where regionalism has been the counter weight to centralization. Against the pull of regional cultures, the military has unfailingly backed the national, that is Castilian, culture. While all of this is well known in broad terms, the historians in this volume lay out the detail of the army's involvement, and the ways in which military power has been exercised from Napoleonic times to the end of the twentieth century. With several notable exceptions, the essays focus more on military and martial matters than on society and culture. The detail of the analyses, and the depth of research

on which individual studies draw, however, make this a collection that will be welcomed by scholars and students who are interested in Spanish cultural and social history, as well as those who follow military affairs.

The editors are distinguished scholars of Spanish history and the military. José Alvarez has traced the origins of the Spanish Foreign legion in *The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Rif Rebellion* (2001); Wayne Bowen wrote on the social and political effects of Spain's involvement with Nazi Germany in *Spaniards and Nazi Germany* (2000), and on Spanish politics during World War II in *Spain during World War Two* (2006). As well, Bowen knows military life from the inside, having been called up to serve in Iraq as part of the U.S. Army Reserve.[1]

Stanley Payne, a doyen of Spanish studies, provides a crisp overview of the army's role from the Middle Ages to the present. He identifies the conundrum at the heart of the army's place, whereby the institution exerted a major influence on Spanish domestic politics but in military combat could never muster a creditable performance, and until very recently functioned in isolation from international affairs.

In a very substantial first chapter that evaluates military methods and strategy across the nineteenth century, from the Napoleonic wars to the defeat in Cuba in 1898, Geoffrey Jensen sees a series of military setbacks. Despite the activism of the military elite, the Spanish Army

was never able to forge an effective fighting force. The officers' involvement in politics (between 1814 and 1899 Spain had 129 ministers of war) took them away from the main game of running the army. At the same time, the rigidity of military training imbued the corps with an inflexible mindset that meant that even in the field they clung to the antiquated ideas of previous military generations. As a consequence, when confronted with popular insurgency and guerrilla warfare the Spanish army was flummoxed.

Spain remained neutral in World War I. Javier Ponce finds that in comparison with the Prussian Army, Spain was saddled with conscripts of poor quality, under-industrialized manufacturers, and a bloated officer corps that "bled the state's coffers" (p. 54). José Alvarez continues the gloomy story up to 1931, in which the "bloated ranks" of the officers (p. 37), and the antiquated equipment at their disposal, precluded the Spanish army from achieving a military mission.

Particularly welcome is Michael Alpert's evaluation (in chapter 5) of the "popular army" in the Spanish civil war. Alpert's large and scholarly study of the Republican forces is available in Spanish *El Ejército republicano en la Guerra civil* (1989), but not in English. The clarity and conciseness of Alpert's analysis comes from his deep familiarity with Spanish history and literature. The study, here, is framed around a series of questions that are important in evaluating the course and outcome of the civil war, and have been greatly contested among historians of that event. At the time of the conflict these questions produced a heated polemic between pro-Republicans and *franquistas*. The central issue is the strength of the Republican army itself and how effective, or ineffective, it was. As well, he examines the republican militias that formed up spontaneously in the early weeks of the war, and he assesses the military contribution of the International brigades.

After the generals' *pronunciamento* in July 1936, the Army of Africa and the majority of the officer corps in the Peninsula Army went over to General Franco. The Republican government was left with the task of recreating a fighting force from the remnants of the troops on the mainland that had remained loyal. In Alpert's view, the Republicans and the reconstituted military did a reasonable job, given the circumstances, but the civilian leadership made a serious tactical error in impugning the loyalty of the officers who stayed with the Republic. The consequence of this mistake was the loss of much-needed military expertise in the government camp at a

time in which it was in short supply. On the militias, Alpert is neither a pro-Poumist nor dismissive of the militias that often military historians treat as rabble. Alpert sees them as effective in many places and indeed "not totally disorganized" (p. 97). The International Brigades, he finds, were not filled with experienced veterans from World War I, though many of their commanders had been through that conflict. He suggests that the Internationals probably were not better led than were the Spanish units, though the former were used as shock troops and therefore bore heavy losses throughout the conflict. By 1938, in any event, Spaniards made up two-thirds of most International Brigades. And none of the Republican units, in Alpert's assessment, was a match for the Spanish Army of Africa, braced by the Foreign Legion and the Moroccan mercenaries whose discipline and training had been honed in brutal colonial warfare in North Africa.

The parallel essay that analyses the Nationalist Army (chapter 4) is less satisfactory. George Esenwein provides a useful chronological narrative of Franco's army between 1936 and 1939, following the military engagements in the inexorable expansion of Franco's military control over Spain. The author, however, eschews the contentious questions that readers might expect to find aired in this analysis. An important issue, though not here canvassed, is whether Franco was the great military leader hailed by his followers and the *franquista* press until his death in 1975. In *Franco* (1994), Paul Preston argues firmly that Franco's reputation as a tactical genius was part of the overblown polemic around the carefully constructed cult of the *caudillo*. Geoffrey Jensen (though his work on Franco is not cited in this volume) has provided a more positive, if nuanced, assessment of Franco's abilities as a military strategist in field combat.[2]

It is not surprising that Spain, with its economy crippled and national infrastructure in ruins after the civil war, stayed out of World War II. Wayne Bowen traces the initiatives, such as the Blue Division, that Franco, and particularly the *Falange*, undertook to show solidarity with Hitler. However, the parlous state of the budget, the continuing drain of the oversized officer corps, and the domestic struggles within the Nationalist camp kept Spain and its core military institution in a state of internecine conflict and economic stagnation. T. Shannon Fleming traces Spain's new imperialist enterprise in North West Africa between 1940 and 1976, as Spanish military administrators managed Iberian interests in Spanish Morocco in the face of France's determination to offer Moroccan independence. And in the post Franco era, it is clear that military reform has paled back the

numbers of army officers, and applied the funds released to purchase up-to-date equipment. Kenneth W. Estes and José M. Serrano examine Spain's transformation from a "pariah state" to equal partner in European affairs (p. 136). The authors demonstrate that the hardware of the military was greatly improved through NATO membership and the support of the United States.

José Olmeda, in a fascinating essay (chapter 9), traces Spain's experience with terrorism from 1939 to 2006, pointing out the true but dispiriting fact that democracies are more likely to be the targets of terrorism than are dictatorships. He traces the shift in ETA and the recent expansion of Islamic terrorism, but suggests that overall (and despite the horror of the Madrid bombing in 2004), there has been a decline in terrorist episodes since the year 2000.

One can only speculate that, in any future analysis of the Spanish military, the next challenge that confronts the historian will be to assess the effect on Spain's history of the newest group to enter the military milieu. Women have been able to enlist as soldiers only in the last two decades, and given democratic Spain's remarkable progress in opening up to able females places in the political and administrative elite, I will put my money on women in the Ministry of Defense bringing about a new epoch in Spanish military history.

Notes

[1]. See Wayne Bowen, *Undoing Saddam: From Occupation to Sovereignty in Northern Iraq* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2007).

[2]. Geoffrey Jensen, *Franco: Soldier, Commander, Dictator* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2005).

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