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José E. Álvarez. *The Spanish Foreign Legion in the Spanish Civil War, 1936*. Columbia: University Of Missouri Press, 2016. 307 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8262-2083-7.

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José E. Álvarez's second book on the Spanish Foreign Legion is a detailed narrative of the legion's involvement in the first six months of the Spanish Civil War, in 1936. Through use of extensive military records, Álvarez provides readers with an excellent sense of the constant battles that were fought from the outbreak of the Civil War; the movement and success of the forces of the Nationalists, led by General Francisco Franco; and the role of the legion in this first, and most violent, stage of the conflict.

The Spanish Foreign Legion, like its French counterpart, was conceived as a tool in colonial warfare when it was first founded, in 1920, and came to play an important role in Spain's effort to hold its empire in North Africa, as Álvarez demonstrated in his first book, *The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Rif Rebellion, 1920-1927* (2001). Unlike the French Foreign Legion, however, the Spanish Legion mostly enrolled Spanish volunteers, and it became an elite force among the African-based troops of the Spanish Army. In particular, its notoriety for "brutality and savagery"—not just in Africa but also in Asturias, in the suppression of the October 1934 uprising—became useful to Nationalist efforts to propagandize their approach to total war once the civil conflict erupted in July 1936 (p. 2). Along with other *Africanista* units so important to early Nationalist success in securing Spanish Morocco and moving into southern Spain, the legion was, from the start, completely on the side of the military rebellion led by Franco.

The legion had been subject to decreases in size, as part of other downsizing affecting the military, during the Second Republic of 1931-36. It began the Civil War with only 3,758 soldiers. The legion battalions, or *ban-*

deras, served alongside other military forces but were separate units. Álvarez focuses most of his narrative on the main groups that fought from Sevilla north toward Madrid, although chapters also consider *banderas* in Asturias and Aragon. Usually legion forces had better weapons and training than those that served alongside them.

Álvarez provides a very descriptive account of individual battles placed within the context of larger campaigns. He clearly and methodically separates out the contributions of legion forces in describing the campaign toward Madrid. For the most part, they were seen as shock troops, used in situations where their mobility and high level of training would give the Nationalists an advantage. Due to his reliance on official military records, the author is limited in describing the role of the legion in atrocities against civilians that marked this early phase of the Civil War. The use of local newspapers and some soldier diaries allows him to do what he can. He is able to describe well an atmosphere of reprisals by both sides, such as the murder of priests and the burning of churches in towns held by leftists, later taken by the legion and Nationalist forces that set up subsequent "cleanse" and "punish" operations following battle (p. 53). One such operation, presented in detail, involved a group of legionnaires led by Major Antonio Castejón Espinosa, who took the town of Zafra; imposed a "war tax" on its citizens; and exited town with fifty leftists, whose names were given to him by local rightists and who were executed by the legion the next day (p. 57). Álvarez also provides great detail on the looting and pillaging of villages by the legion, an action that was common in the African and Asturian campaigns and brought over and incorporated into the

Civil War in Spain.

Álvarez makes an important contribution to the military history of the Spanish Civil War by demonstrating that the Spanish Foreign Legion must be seen as a small yet vital component of the Nationalist Army, especially in considering the impact that the colonial wars and the African atmosphere had on shaping Nationalist tactics and actions in the conflict. This work adds to the importance of the *Africanistas* and Spanish military culture in shaping the Nationalist side, with a decided focus on what this meant in terms of military tactics. It reinforces and further develops ideas made by Sebastian Balfour in *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the*

Spanish Civil War (2002) and Geoffrey Jensen in *Irrational Triumph: Cultural Despair, Military Nationalism, and the Ideological Origins of Franco's Spain* (2001). Álvarez limits his study just to 1936, for although the legion expanded greatly in the subsequent years of the conflict, after that time it was more integrated into the Nationalist Army's units, thus losing some of its distinctiveness. Militarily, the Spanish Foreign Legion succeeded as shock troops in the small towns and villages of southern Spain but faltered in the urban warfare that came with the assault on Madrid in autumn 1936, another legacy of their colonial training. The year 1936, then, represents "the apogee" of the legion's unique contributions to Nationalist warfare (p. 218). Álvarez does well to convey this in his book.

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