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The Journal of Military History, Vol. 63, No. 1. (Jan., 1999), pp. 75-98.

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Between Gallipoli and D-Day: Alhucemas, 1925*



José E. Alvarez

*Alhucemas is the heart of the anti-Spanish rebellion. It is the road to Fez. It is the quick route to the Mediterranean, and it is the key to much [Riffian] propaganda which shall end on the day that we set foot on that coast.*¹

THESE prophetic words were spoken by Major Francisco Franco Bahamonde, Spain's future dictator, in 1921 when he was in command of the 1st *Bandera* (battalion) of the newly created Spanish Foreign Legion or *Tercio de Extranjeros*. Franco's comments were also made in a period of deep malaise for the Spanish government and army. At the time, Mohamed ben Abd-el-Krim, a Berber notable in the Beni Ourriagli tribe, had led Riffian tribesmen in the eastern one-half of Spain's Moroccan Protectorate in a successful revolt against Spanish occupation of his homeland. The revolt resulted in the most crushing defeat inflicted on a European colonial army since the Italian debacle at Adowa, Ethiopia in 1896.

While Christian Spain had over one thousand years of contact with the Muslim inhabitants of North Africa, particularly those of northwest Morocco, its modern-day diplomatic and military involvement in the area can be dated from late 1859, when an incident between local tribesmen and

* I am sincerely indebted to the anonymous *JMH* referees for their comments and recommendations regarding this paper, as well as to Shannon E. Fleming for his insightful suggestions and advice. In addition, I would like to thank D. José Ignacio Gonzalez-Aller Hierro of the Spanish Naval Museum for the use of the photographs which accompany this article.

1. Luis De Galinsoga, *Centinelas de Occidente*, with the collaboration of Lieutenant General Franco Salgado (Barcelona: Editorial AHR, 1956), 110–111. The same quote can be found in English in Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 43.

soldiers from Spain's Ceuta *presidio* led to a general Spanish-Moroccan conflict, which resulted in a series of Moroccan defeats. Following this brief, six-month war, Spain was forced by Great Britain and its own tenuous international position to accept a series of treaties which, while extracting concessions from the Moroccan sultan, limited its territorial ambitions and restored to some degree the antebellum stability. This stability remained intact until the early 1890s.²

The next Spanish-Moroccan military conflict occurred in 1893, outside the boundaries of Melilla (a Spanish *presidio* since 1497), where some laborers were building a small fort at Sidi-Guariach on Spanish territory. Local Riffian tribesmen killed some of the laborers because they considered the construction to be a violation of local sovereignty. Spanish troops engaged the tribesmen, but were repelled with losses. Before reinforcements could be brought into the fight, the tribesmen attacked and inflicted further casualties on the Spanish, causing the death of their commander, General Garcia Margallo. Around fifteen thousand men under the leadership of General Arsenio Martinez de Campos were needed to finally repel the Riffians and restore order.

With the loss of her overseas empire to the United States in 1898, Spain was left with only her Moroccan *presidios*, Rio de Oro, Ifni, and Equatorial Guinea.³ France, the major power in the Maghreb, was slowly but methodically expanding from Algeria into Morocco. The French government realized that in order to proceed with this expansion, it was necessary to recognize Spain's interests in Morocco and its strategic position between North Africa and France. In 1904, with British encouragement, France decided that Spain should join her in the self-appointed assignment of protecting the Sultan of Morocco. Spain was to be permitted to expand into the area surrounding Melilla and Ceuta, and in October, a

2. For additional information regarding the 1859–1860 Spanish-Moroccan campaign, see Robert Rezzette, *The Spanish Enclaves in Morocco*, trans. Mary Ewalt (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1976), 50; Ignacio de Abenia Taure, *Memorias Sobre el Riff* (Zaragoza: Imprenta de Antonio Gallifa, 1859); Raymond Carr, *Spain: 1808–1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); J. Hardman, *The Spanish Campaign in Morocco* (Edinburgh, 1860); Shannon E. Fleming, "North Africa," in *Spain in the Nineteenth-Century World: Essays on Spanish Diplomacy, 1789–1898*, ed. James W. Cortada (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 91–102; and *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, 1958 ed., s.v. "Marruecos"; R. Gil Grimau, *Aproximación a una bibliografía española sobre el Norte de Africa (1850–1980)* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Dir. Gral. de Relaciones Culturales, 1982).

3. For more on Spain's reaction to her loss of empire, and subsequent greater focus on Africa, see Walter B. Harris, *France, Spain, and the Riff* (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927), 50; Shannon E. Fleming, *Primo de Rivera and Abd-el-Krim: The Struggle in Spanish Morocco, 1923–1927* (New York: Garland, 1991), 12; and Antonio Azpeitua, *Marruecos, la mala semilla; ensayo de analisis objetivo de como fue sembrada la guerra en Africa* (Madrid: n.p., 1921), 68–69.

French-Spanish treaty was approved by both Liberals and Conservatives in the Spanish Parliament. Thus, Spain's interests in Morocco were recognized by two of Europe's major powers, France and Great Britain. France had made it possible for Spain to play an active role in Moroccan affairs, while at the same time keeping her place in the concert of Europe.⁴

It is important to note that, at this juncture, the region west of Melilla held special interest for Spain due to its mineral wealth. By the early years of the twentieth century, Basque millionaire don Horacio Echevarrieta's company was actively involved in exploiting iron ore located in the Rif, mining the iron in the Spanish zone of the Protectorate and exporting it through the port of Melilla.⁵ Iron ore mining would prove profitable for those involved in the enterprise. In 1925, for instance, these mines yielded about 800,000 tons. Moroccan iron ore had a high ore content and was found in good deposits easily accessible by open pit mining.⁶

On 9 July 1909, a force of Riffian tribesmen attacked a military outpost protecting Spanish workers building a railway to serve the mines. Four workers and one sentry were killed. This was the chance that Spanish colonialists had been anticipating. On 13 July, six thousand Riffians attacked a force of two thousand Spaniards, and on 23 July, the tribesmen engaged Spanish forces for a third time. In reaction, the Spanish government decided to reinforce its meager colonial forces with peninsular troops. At the time, only fifteen thousand soldiers could be called upon for combat in the *presidios*, so the call went out for forty thousand reserves in Spain. This call-up of troops for a colonial conflict led to anti-war protests which took a particularly violent form in Barcelona. These were harshly suppressed by the authorities, and the period of conflict in late July and early August 1909 came to be called the "Tragic Week." This episode visibly demonstrated the government's commitment not only to remain in Morocco for political purposes, but also to expand from its *presidios* towards the interior. Moreover, it brought to light the deep divisions that existed in Spain between those who advocated overseas colonization

4. For an in-depth study of Spain's policies vis-à-vis Morocco during the early years of the twentieth century, see Shannon E. Fleming, "The Disaster of Annual: Spanish Colonial Failure in Northern Morocco, 1902-1921" (Master's thesis, University of Minnesota, 1969); Abdelmajid Benjelloun, "Pacification de la Zone d'Influence Espagnole au Maroc Septentrional (1909-27)," *Revue d'Histoire Maghrébine*, 11, 35-36 (1984): 15-38; and George Hills, *Spain* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 114. For more on the treaties between France and Spain (1902-4), see Fleming, *Primo de Rivera*, 22-28.

5. Pessah Shinar, "Abd al Qadir and Abd al Krim: Religious Influences on their thought and action," *Asian and African Studies* 1 (1975): 161. For information on German mining interests in the Rif, see James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (New York: Longman, 1984), 132.

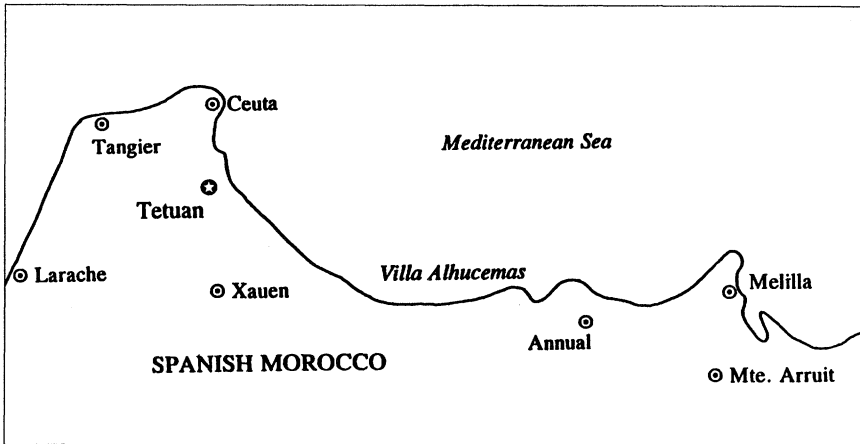
6. J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver, eds., "Morocco," *The Cambridge History of Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 7: 300.

and those who were opposed to it. The call-up of metropolitan conscripts, in this case Barcelona's working class, to fight in Morocco sparked great anger and bloodshed in Spain's most industrialized city.⁷

As a consequence of the 1909–10 campaign, Spanish forces were able to move out from Melilla and occupy an enclave that stretched from Cape Tres Forcas to the southern shore of Mar Chica, and ranged about ten kilometers into the interior. Moreover, this campaign had gained new territory for Spain, as well as providing the Spanish Army an opportunity to gain glory, respect, and promotion. However, these military initiatives in Morocco were extremely costly in lives lost and in resources.

Peace in the Rif would not last long. On 24 August 1911, Riffian tribesmen on the eastern bank of the Kert River attacked a General Staff cartographic unit about twenty miles east of Melilla. The local sheikh, El Mizzian, declared a *jihād* against the Spanish Christians. Spanish forces moved westward from Melilla and crossed the Kert River. Poor weather and enemy resistance halted the campaign and led to a Spanish retreat back to the *presidio*. Again, Melilla itself was threatened by Riffian tribesmen. The war continued until the spring of 1912, when Spanish forces pushed the Riffians back across the Kert River and the newly founded *Regulares de Melilla* killed El Mizzian in battle, leaving his men without an effective leader. The *Regulares*, native troops commanded by Spanish officers, were founded in Melilla on 30 June 1911 by Lieutenant Colonel Damaso Berenguer Fuste, the future High Commissioner of the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. The recruitment of native troops by the Spanish Army, something the French had done previously in North Africa, added a new dimension to the Moroccan campaign. The creation of the *Regulares* can be seen as a response to the protests in 1909 when Spanish reserves were called up for service in Morocco. Each native soldier would take the place of a Spanish conscript thus, in effect, attempting to "Moroccanize" the war. The most ambitious junior officers in the Spanish Army (those hoping for promotions through battlefield heroics [*"meritos de guerra"*]) as opposed to seniority) would command units of the *Regulares*, with some of them later going on to create and command the Spanish Foreign Legion. During the Rif Rebellion (1921–27), the Legion and the *Regulares*

7. Hills, *Spain*, 114. For additional information on the 1909 campaign around Melilla, see Joaquin Arraras, ed., *Historia de la Cruzada Española* (Madrid: Ediciones Españolas, 1939), 38–42; Chapter X of Tomas Garcia Figueras, *Marruecos: La Accion de España en el Norte de Africa* (Barcelona: Ediciones Fe, 1939); Alal al-Fasi, *The Independence Movements in Arab North Africa*, trans. Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh (New York: Octagon, 1970), 92; and Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1975), 402. For more on the "Tragic Week," see Joan Connelly Ullman, *The Tragic Week: A Study of Anti-clericalism in Spain, 1875–1912* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968).



The Spanish Protectorate

would bear the brunt of the fighting and dying. Following the Rif Rebellion, the Legion and the *Regulares* together would make up the “Army of Africa,” which was called upon in 1934 to crush the Asturian miners’ revolt, and in 1936 would form the vanguard of Franco’s rebel forces during the Spanish Civil War.⁸

The Moroccan Sultan, Moulay Abd al-Hafid, was forced to sign the Treaty of Fez in 1912, which established the French and Spanish Protectorates. Under the terms of the treaty, Spain was given the northern one-fifth of Morocco to administer, with Tangier being an international city. The Protectorate consisted of roughly eighteen thousand square miles inhabited by sixty-six indigenous tribes. These tribes were subdivided into various clans and sub-clans which constantly fought among themselves. Resistance to Spain’s colonialism within the Protectorate was greatest in the Yebala region in the West, under the rule of Sherif Muley Ahmed el Raisuli, and in the Rif. Hypothetically subordinate to the khalif, the Sultan’s deputy in Tetuan, capital of the Spanish Protectorate, the Protectorate’s rural tribes basically ignored the khalif and were even more opposed to domination from foreign “infidels.”⁹

8. David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd el Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1968), 44; Fleming, “Disaster of Annual,” 26–28; and Stanley G. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1967), 113–14. For information on the *Regulares*, see Fernando Cano Velasco, ed., *Historia De Las Fuerzas Armadas* (Zaragoza: Ediciones Palafox, 1984), 4: 171–98; and Jose Maria Bueno Carrera, *Los Regulares: Uniformes y Organizacion de las Tropas Regulares Indigenas de Marruecos* (Madrid: Aldaba Press, 1989).

9. Fage and Oliver, “Morocco,” 288–89; and Harris, *France, Spain and the Rif*, 59. For additional information on the establishment of the Protectorate, see Ch. 11 of

Spanish forces attempted their first pacification of the new colony in 1913 when they moved to occupy the region around the "sacred city" of Xauen in the Western Zone of the Protectorate. In bitter combat with the tribes of the Yebala, Spanish troops were forced back to Tetuan where they remained until an armistice could be hammered out with el Raisuli.¹⁰

Under the leadership of General D. Felipe Alfau Mendoza, the Protectorate's first High Commissioner, and Colonel Manuel Fernandez Silvestre, Spanish forces advanced into the Yebala and engaged in numerous small-scale battles with el Raisuli's forces. A worthy adversary, el Raisuli kept the Yebalan tribes in line through a combination of charisma and terror. Eventually, Spanish Protectorate officials reached a *modus vivendi* with el Raisuli, who became a temporary friend of Spain's.¹¹

During World War I, the Spanish Protectorate was relatively quiet. However, through influence peddling and gun running, Germany attempted to instigate indigenous opposition to French authority in the Maghreb.¹² At the same time, Spanish incursions into the interior of their Protectorate during and following the Great War were minimal. According to David S. Woolman, "By 1920 Spain had conquered and pacified less than a quarter of her new possession."¹³

The Spanish High Commissioner, General Damaso Berenguer Fuste, proceeded cautiously against the rebellious tribes of the Yebala, Beni Aros, and Gomara in the Western Zone of the Protectorate. Berenguer's efforts were rewarded with the occupation of Xauen on 15 October 1920. At the same time, General Manuel Fernandez Silvestre was operating in the Protectorate's Eastern Zone, trying to pacify the area that extended from Melilla to Alhucemas Bay. This region, dominated by the Rif Mountains and populated by the bellicose tribes of the Rif, offered a difficult challenge

Garcia Figueras, *Marruecos*; M. Aguirre De Carcer, *Origenes diplomáticos del Convenio hispano-francés de 1912 en 'África'* (Madrid: n.p., 1962); Victor Morales Lezcano, *España y el norte de África—El Protectorado En Marruecos (1912–56)* (Madrid: U.N.E.D., 1986), 226–27; and for the nine principal articles of the Treaty of Fez, in the original French, see F. H. Mellor, *Morocco Awakes* (London: Methuen Publishers, 1939), 41–43. A solid work which provides background on the subject is Douglas Porch, *The Conquest of Morocco* (New York: Knopf, 1983). For information on Ahmed el Raisuli, see Rosita Forbes, *El Raisuli, the Sultan of the Mountains: His Life as Told To Rosita Forbes* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1924).

10. Al-Fasi, *The Independence Movements in Arab North Africa*, 92; Arraras, *Historia de la Cruzada Española*, 66–67; and Morales Lezcano, *España y el norte de Africa*, 227.

11. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain*, 116–22; Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 55–67; Fleming, *Primo de Rivera*, 36–46; and Morales Lezcano, *España y el norte de Africa*, 227.

12. Mellor, *Morocco Awakes*, 64; and Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 62.

13. David Woolman, "In Spanish Morocco, two Berber brothers became a legend in their guerrilla war against two European powers," *Military History*, February 1994, 12.

for the Spanish. However, by 1921, they had crossed the Kert River, taking the strategic encampment of Annual in the interior on 15 January and Sidi Dris on the coast on 15 March.

In late July 1921, the Abd-el-Krim brothers led an *harka* (war party) of tribesmen against Annual, which had become Spain's main outpost in the region. The audacious and impetuous General Fernandez Silvestre, in command of twenty thousand men, had pushed deeper and deeper into the central Rif, hoping to reach Alhucemas Bay, an important center of tribal resistance. He began this advance, however, without undertaking the necessary preparation and intelligence work, and without totally securing his rear position. Abd-el-Krim allowed him to advance deeper and deeper into the Rif, knowing that Silvestre's lines of communication were tenuous. Surrounding the Spanish and preventing reinforcements, more than four thousand rebels stormed one position after another. What should have been an orderly, fighting retreat, quickly turned into a rout, as panic-stricken conscripts dropped their weapons (a few had the presence of mind to keep the bolts from their rifles) and ran for their lives. The Riffians slaughtered those they caught, with soldiers and civilians (camp followers, sutlers, etc.) alike being put to the knife. In the end, Spanish casualties numbered at least twelve thousand, with another five hundred or so taken prisoner and held for ransom. General Silvestre perished at Annual, although it was never fully established if he was killed by the enemy, or died by his own hand. What had taken twelve years of blood and treasure to conquer, had now been lost in a few days. Spain's ignominious rout at the hands of Riffian tribesmen was the greatest defeat suffered by a European power in an African colonial conflict in the 20th century.¹⁴

The Annual disaster had two serious consequences for the Spanish. First, the elimination of an army of twenty thousand men from the order of battle put the entire Protectorate in great peril and left the Spanish *presidio* of Melilla unprotected and at the mercy of the Riffians for nearly two months. Second, the rebels, who up to that time had been armed solely with antique rifles and daggers, now possessed all types of modern small arms, as well as artillery. Thousands of rounds of ammunition were also part of the booty.¹⁵

14. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 111, noted that, "Of the 570 Spaniards who had survived the Annual rout, only 326 walked out of the Rif [in January 1923, having been ransomed for four million *pesetas*]. These numbered 44 officers, 239 soldiers, and 43 civilians, of whom 33 were women and children."

15. The exact quantity of weapons and equipment lost varies, but Charles Petrie, *King Alfonso XIII and His Age* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1963), 160, gave the following figures: "29,504 rifles, 392 machine-guns, and 129 guns." Al-Fasi, *The Independence Movements in Arab North Africa*, 96, noted, "The booty included two hundred artillery guns, twenty thousand rifles, a considerable number of transport vehicles, stores of ammunition, and other war equipment."

The herculean task of reconquering the Melillan Command was given to the recently created Spanish Foreign Legion (inappropriately named since the number of foreigners within its ranks never exceeded 10 percent) and the *Regulares*. Rushed from the Western Zone of the Protectorate to save Melilla, these units comprised the vanguard of Spanish forces. The going was tough, with hard-fought battles taking place nearly every day. The cost in men and matériel, along with the difficulty of the terrain, and the tenacity of the rebels, led to demands from opposition parties within Spain that the government abandon its Protectorate completely. Abd-el-Krim's successes encouraged more and more tribes to flock to his standard, which spread the rebellion throughout considerable areas of the Protectorate.¹⁶

With General Miguel Primo de Rivera's bloodless 1923 coup d'état back in Spain, the military strategy in Morocco changed to what would become known as "semi-abandonment."¹⁷ It should be noted that when Primo de Rivera came to power, he had vowed to pull out of Morocco, and on one occasion had even proposed to the British the possibility of exchanging Spain's Moroccan possessions for Gibraltar. However, once in power, he needed the support of the officers commanding the military units stationed there (especially those of the Legion and the *Regulares*) who saw the Moroccan War as their opportunity for decorations, glory, and most important of all, rapid promotions. In addition, if Spain were to cut and run, it would lose face before the international community, something these officers, who had been junior officers in 1898, would not allow to happen. They wanted to uphold the honor of Spanish arms in Morocco no matter what the cost. Therefore, Primo de Rivera, fearing the possibility of a military revolt by his elite troops, altered his former "abandonista" policy for one which would allow the military to continue to pursue its objectives on a reduced scale. This meant that the Army

16. For an excellent in-depth study of Abd-el-Krim and his "Riffian Republic," see G. Richard Pennell, *A Country with a Government and a Flag: the Rif War in Morocco, 1921–1926* (Wisbech, Cambridgeshire: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1986); and "Ideology and Practical Politics: A Case Study of the Rif War in Morocco, 1921–1926," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14, 1 (1982): 19–33. An additional source on the Rif conflict with an extensive bibliography is: Germain Ayache, *Les Origines de la Guerre du Rif* (Rabat, Maroc: SEMER, 1981). An interesting and informative first-person account of Abd-el-Krim and the Rif is provided by American journalist Vincent Sheean, *Personal History* (Garden City: Country Life Press, 1934–1935), 83–161.

17. For additional information regarding Primo de Rivera's coup, as well as Spain's political situation at the time, see Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Fascism from Above: The Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in Spain, 1923–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and James H. Dial, *Revolution from Above: The Primo de Rivera Dictatorship in Spain, 1923–1930* (Fairfax, Va.: George Mason University Press, 1986).

would hold the limited territory it had reoccupied in the Eastern Zone, while withdrawing from vulnerable outposts in the interior to more tenable positions in the Western one. The so-called “Primo de Rivera Line” ran just south of the Protectorate’s capital of Tetuan, which at times left it at the mercy of rebel artillery situated on the other side of the line. With his rear relatively secure from Abd-el-Krim’s forces following the costly retreat from the Yebalan interior in late 1924, the dictator finally agreed to strike at Alhucemas Bay, the very heart of the rebellion. Not only was Alhucemas Bay close to Abd-el-Krim’s capital of Ajdir, but it was also the entry point for contraband weapons and munitions which had been supplying his forces.¹⁸ When the “Primo de Rivera Line” was established in 1924, it deprived the rebels of weapons and matériel which previously had been captured from Spanish outposts that had been overrun. However, weapons continued to reach the Riffians from Tangier, the French Zone in Morocco, and from Algeria. Nevertheless, Alhucemas Bay became much more important to the survival of Abd-el-Krim’s recently proclaimed “Rif Republic.”

The concept of a landing at Alhucemas Bay was hardly new, having circulated within the General Staff for at least fifteen years. It had first been proposed by the War Minister, General Arsenio Linares y Pombo, during the 1909 campaign against the Riffians. As Stanley Payne has pointed out, the general “proposed a special amphibious landing at the Bay of Alhucemas, well to the west of Melilla at the coastal base of the Riff. It was hoped that such an operation might take the hostile tribesmen by surprise from the rear and permit the Spanish to cut through the heart of the difficult Riff terrain.”¹⁹ His plan was never implemented, as the government rejected it on the grounds that the forces required for such an operation were unavailable, and the terrain had not been reconnoitered.

18. José Llacuna and José Maria Polls, *Novios de la Muerte: Historia de la Legión* (n.p.: 1987), 47. The authors noted that: “The Bay of Alhucemas had for a long time been the lung[s] of the insurrection.”

19. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain*, 112; Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 187, noted that, “The idea of landing a large body of troops on the Rif coast [i.e., Alhucemas Bay] and then proceeding to invade the mountains of Beni Urriaguel [Abd-el-Krim’s tribal land] was an old one, and had long been considered an absolute necessity for successful control of the Rif.” Santiago Domínguez Llosa, “Ocurrió hace setenta años: El Desembarco de Alhucemas,” *Defensa: revista internacional de ejércitos, armamento y tecnología*, XVIII, 209, (September 1995), 61, noted that plans for a landing at Alhucemas Bay were also contemplated in 1911, again in 1913 (reconnaissance gathered at this time proved invaluable to the operation of 1925), and then again in 1920, when General Silvestre ordered that plans be drawn up for a landing at Alhucemas that would support his land-based conquest of the Rif. After the Annual disaster, in late 1921, the General Staff once again tackled the task of preparing for a landing at Alhucemas Bay that included two full-strength divisions, as well as support from the Navy and Air Force.

The situation, however, was vastly different in 1924 when the idea resurfaced, advanced this time by the *africanistas*, officers who had spent most of their military careers in the Protectorate and had gained rank rapidly through “*meritos de guerra*” (merit promotions), not seniority. Naturally, they favored remaining in the Protectorate where a young officer, willing to risk his life in battle, could quickly ascend.²⁰ Once Primo de Rivera became convinced to retain the Protectorate and decided that the quickest way to put an end to the war was to strike at the heart of the rebellion via Alhucemas Bay, the General Staff went to work on the necessary plans. A second event that influenced the conduct of the war occurred in April 1925, when Abd-el-Krim’s forces attacked French outposts to the south and brought that country into the war on the side of Spain. At first, French forces suffered one stinging defeat after another, which led the French government to replace the venerable Marshal Louis-Hubert Lyautey with the more dynamic Marshal Philippe Pétain, the hero of Verdun.²¹ Abd-el-Krim was now faced with war on three fronts (France to the south, and Spain to the east and west). A landing at Alhucemas Bay would create a fourth, and perhaps an even more vulnerable, front.

Landings on hostile shores have been a part of military history since ancient times. From the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., through Pevensey/Hastings in 1066 A.D., to Quebec in 1759, armies have carried out amphibious assaults on enemy-held territory. They have often proven successful for the invader since he has had the advantage of being able to select the time and place for the landing (i.e., an undefended beach). However, the situation was reversed during World War I at Gallipoli, where the defenders had the advantages of excellent beach fortifications, difficult terrain, artillery, machine guns, and well-led troops. For an amphibious assault to be successful against a well-defended site, the attackers needed solid preparation, good intelligence gathering, and a pre-invasion naval bombardment, which would surrender the essential elements of surprise and location.

The disastrous Anglo-French landings on Gallipoli/Dardanelles in 1915–16 became the yardstick for post–World War I amphibious oper-

20. Merit promotions were sacrosanct for the *africanistas*. As George Esenwein and Adrian Shubert noted in *Spain at War: The Spanish Civil War in Context 1931–1939* (New York: Longman, 1995), 67–68: “Franco, who [at 33] became the youngest general in Europe since Napoleon, jumped 2,438 places.” For an excellent account of the *africanistas*, as well as the Spanish military during this era, see Carolyn P. Boyd, *Praetorian Politics in Liberal Spain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

21. For more on Marshal Lyautey, as well as France’s role in defeating Abd-el-Krim, see William A. Hoisington, Jr., *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

ations. The landing at Gallipoli failed because of the absence of support for the operation from the War Office (i.e., Lord Kitchener); the failure of army and navy commanders to work together; the improvised organization; the inadequate naval gunfire support for the troops storming ashore; the distances between the assault beaches, which precluded mutual support; the lack of suitable landing craft; and the lack of vigor and initiative displayed by field commanders in pushing their men forward, while General Sir Ian Hamilton himself remained aboard ship, instead of going ashore to make the crucial decisions. Additionally, one must not overlook the tenacity and obstinacy of the defending Turks, who were ably led by Liman von Sanders and Mustafa Kemal, in a fluid, active defense.²² The lessons learned during that campaign would prove to be invaluable not only for Spain's landing at Alhucemas, but also for those to come during World War II, Korea (Inchon, 1950), and beyond.²³

The formidable task of preparing the plans for the landing was assigned to the brightest General Staff officers in the Spanish Army. Under the command of General Ignacio Despujols, these included: Colonels Manuel Goded Llopis and Joaquin Fanjul Goni, Commander Carlos Boado Suances, and Lieutenant Colonels Antonio Aranda Mata (the officer responsible for the final draft) and Antonio Barroso y Sanchez-Guerra. Colonel Francisco Franco Bahamonde, commander-in-chief of the Legion, also took part in the planning, as the men of the Legion (IInd, IIIrd, VIth, and VIIth *Banderas*, or battalions) would be in the landing vanguard and constitute 18 percent of the invasion force.²⁴

22. R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History from 3500 B.C. to the Present* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 953–55.

23. For an in-depth look at the history of amphibious warfare, see Simon Foster, *Hit the Beach! Amphibious Warfare from the Plains of Abraham to San Carlos Water* (London: Arms and Armour, 1995). On the front, inside jacket cover of his book, it is noted that there “. . . are four distinct phases of the combined operation: Preparation, Assault, Consolidation and Break-Out.” Also see, Merrill L. Bartlett, ed., *Assault from the Sea: Essays on the History of Amphibious Warfare* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1983); Arch Whitehouse, *Amphibious Operations* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963); Norman Polmar and Peter B. Mersky, *Amphibious Warfare: An Illustrated History* (London: Blandford Press, 1988); and Barry Gregory, *Amphibious Operations* (London: Blandford Press, 1988).

24. Franco told his biographer, Ricardo De La Cierva, that while preparing the operation, he read as much as he could on amphibious landings, especially the ones which were “tragically frustrated at the Dardanelles,” and that the “specter of Gallipoli presided” during the planning phase. See Ricardo De La Cierva, *Franco: Un Siglo De España* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1973), 250; and Francisco Gomez-Jordana Souza, *La Tramoya de Nuestra Actuacion en Marruecos* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1976), 99–121. Lieutenant Colonel Rafael Valenzuela Urzaiz of the *Regulares* had replaced Colonel José Millan Astray, the founder and commander-in-chief of the Legion, on 13 November 1922. Valenzuela was killed in action while leading the Legion in breaking the Riffian siege of Tizi Azza on 5 June 1923. On 8 June 1923, Franco was promoted

While these preparations were underway, however, Spanish forces continued to face the spread of Abd-el-Krim's rebellion. Following the withdrawal of the Spanish from the interior of the Yebala to the relative security of the "Primo de Rivera Line," these forces were confronted with rebellion by the Anjera tribe in their rear. In order to eliminate this threat, Primo de Rivera ordered Colonel Franco to prepare an amphibious landing on the Anjera coast (at Alcazarseguer) with the hope of quickly putting an end to this pocket of resistance. On 7 January 1925, Franco reconnoitered the coastline from onboard the gunboat *Bonifaz*; and again, a few days later, from a sister ship, the *Canalejas*.

Finally, plans were set for the landing to take place on 14 January 1925. At dawn that morning, a small convoy composed of a gunboat, a coast guard vessel, and three tugs, set off from Ceuta toward Punta Alcazar escorting six "K-type" landing barges. Each barge was self-propelled, lightly armored, and said to be capable of transporting three hundred men with all their equipment, as well as a vehicle. Also known as "beetles," these "K-type" landing barges were purchased from the British in Gibraltar in 1922. According to sources consulted for this article, the British had used these landing craft at Gallipoli. The self-propelled landing craft carried troops from the Legion, a unit from the *Regulares*, a mountain battery, and support services. Unable to proceed due to rough seas, the convoy was forced to return to Ceuta.²⁵

This amphibious landing was attempted again on 29–30 March 1925. The invasion column, under the overall command of General Federico de Sousa Regoyos, included the IVth and VIth *Banderas* of the Legion, led by Colonel Franco, and a *tabor* (battalion) of the *Regulares de Ceuta*, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Alvarez Arenas. The operation began

to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and with the King's approval, was given command of the Legion.

25. De La Cierva, *Franco*, 242–43; Simon Foster, *Hit the Beach!*, 49, described the "beetles" used during the Gallipoli campaign as

specially designed motor lighters for landing troops—the precursors of today's landing craft. These had originally been designed for use in [Admiral of the Fleet Lord John] Fisher's abortive operation in the Baltic: the only useful by-product of this slightly ludicrous scheme, they were potentially of great value. Each was capable of carrying 500 men, drew only seven feet of water, had armoured sides and was fitted with a bow ramp to permit quick disembarkation on the beach. As such, the craft offered a solution to many of the landing problems experienced on 25 April [1915].

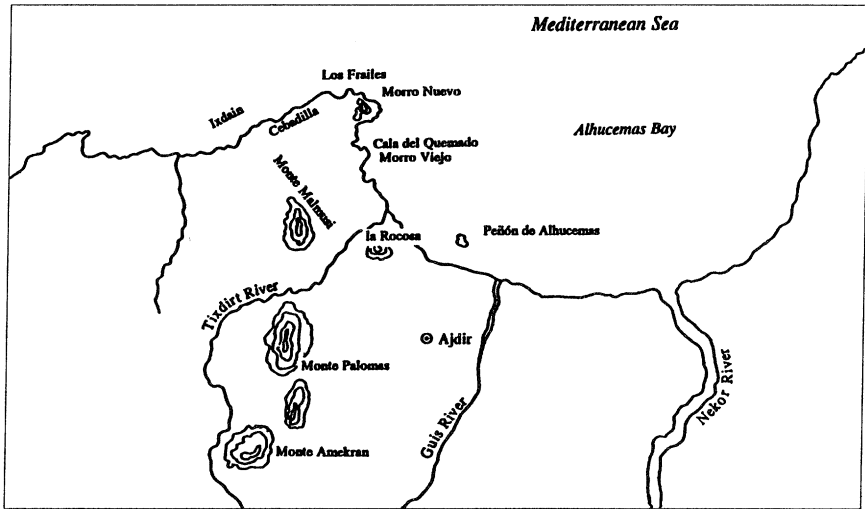
Also see, Eduardo Quintana Martinez and Juan Llabres Bernal, *La Marina De Guerra En África* (Madrid: Compañía Ibero-Americana De Publicaciones, 1928), 238. All ships mentioned in this article are described in the 1925 edition of *Jane's Fighting Ships*.

late on 29 March when the Spanish Navy and Air Force combined to bomb and strafe the coastal villages in preparation for the assault. The land forces were transported to Alcazarseguer from Ceuta aboard the steamer, *Vicente la Roda*, and from it, the three battalions transferred to the six "Ks," with Franco aboard *K-1*. Naval protection was provided by the armed trawler, *Arcila*. At 0100 hours on 30 March, the two Legion *Banderas*, forming the vanguard of the invasion force, landed on the northeastern shore of the little beach and swiftly secured the port. The rebels were completely overwhelmed by the firepower and speed of the invaders. For the Spanish military, the Alcazarseguer operation was a total success with minimal casualties. It had not only crushed the Anjera rebels, but also had served as useful practice for the much larger and more important landing that was now scheduled to take place at Alhucemas Bay in early September.

Preparations for Alhucemas continued. Originally, the plan called for an all-Spanish operation, but then the French agreed to participate, realizing that Abd-el-Krim's rebellion against the Spanish, and his subsequent attack on them, threatened their position not only in Morocco, but in French North Africa as well. Moreover, the religious essence of Abd-el-Krim's "Rif Republic" posed a very plausible threat to French control of Muslim Syria. The Spanish General Staff was forced to postpone the landing, first scheduled for late June, to some time in late August or early September, in order to accommodate the basically symbolic French naval contingent.

The plan's first draft placed the landing between the mouth of the Nekor River and the Morro Nuevo peninsula (see map of Alhucemas Bay), and specified that the beachhead landing point would be no greater than ten kilometers or less than six. First, it would divide the enemy's forces, and second, it would allow two bases for future operations. Furthermore, the beachhead should be able eventually to accommodate twenty thousand men. Beginning in July, the forces designated for the operation intensively trained by practicing amphibious landings on the beaches near Ceuta and Melilla. Within each battalion-sized assault detachment, heavy machine gun, light machine gun, grenadier, light mortar, and demolition units were established. In addition, the men were issued brand-new rifles, and were put through a rigorous course of physical training which not only improved their strength and endurance, but also raised their morale and will to win.²⁶

26. Fleming, *Primo de Rivera*, 264. The author called the planning and organization for Alhucemas "one of the most ambitious Spanish military undertakings since the Great Armada of 1588." Dominguez Llosa, "Ocurrio hace setenta años," 62. For more, see "Documentos: El Proyecto de Desembarco en Alhucemas del General Anido," *Revista de Historia Militar*, 24, 49 (1980): 139-69.



The Alhucemas Bay Landing Site

As the chosen date for the invasion approached, the three branches of the Spanish military started making detailed preparations. The land forces were composed of two brigades (nine thousand men each). The plans called for one to be moved from Ceuta under the command of Major General Leopoldo de Saro y Marin, and the other to be transported from Melilla under the command of Major General Emilio Fernandez Perez. The Navy's ships, under the command of Vice Admiral Francisco Yolí y Morgado, were ready and waiting in Cartagena, while the entire Spanish Air Force was distributed between the airfields of Ceuta and Melilla. Opposing this invasion force on the beaches and cliffs surrounding Alhucemas Bay was Abd-el-Krim's army. Its nucleus was a force of regulars, but the great majority of his warriors were guerrillas who fought when they were called upon. Abd-el-Krim's army was trained and commanded by very capable officers, including some Moroccans who had served in the Spanish Native Police, Harkas, and the *Regulares*. In addition, both heavy weapons and technical equipment were manned and/or serviced by European mercenaries, as well as deserters from the French and Spanish armies.²⁷ In the area in and around Alhucemas Bay, Abd-el-Krim could count on some

27. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 151, noted that Krim's Army included, among others, a German telephone specialist, a Serbian artillery captain, a Norwegian doctor, and another German, Joseph Klemms, a French Foreign Legion deserter. For more on the famous Sergeant Joseph Klemms ("*el Hadj Alemán*"), see Sheean, *Personal History*, 107–8.

eight thousand men and no fewer than ten artillery batteries, of which four were 105-mm. The great majority of Riffians were spread out within the perimeter of the bay, with strong fortifications present at the mouths of the Nekor and Guis Rivers. In the area of Morro Nuevo and Morro Viejo, near the place where the disembarkation would take place, the Riffians had three batteries set up, supported by several machine gun posts, and garrisoned by roughly one thousand men.²⁸

General José Sanjurjo Sacanell (“the lion of the Rif”) was Spain’s most experienced general in Africa, and it was he who was entrusted with the overall command for the actual landings. On 20 August 1925 he reconnoitered by air the western part of Alhucemas Bay, looking at Riffian fortifications in that sector. By the first day of September, all the ships, men, and supplies had been loaded, and final instructions were given to the operational commanders. The operation was set to commence.²⁹ However, following the old maxim that the best defense is a good offense, Abd-el-Krim’s response to the impending invasion of his homeland was to launch a diversionary attack against Spanish lines near Tetuan. He hoped that this assault on the Protectorate’s capital would delay the Alhucemas Bay landing long enough for autumn’s inclement weather to set in, in particular the *levante*, a powerful gale-force wind which blows through the Mediterranean during the month of September.³⁰

On 5–6 September 1925, the two invasion fleets set sail from Ceuta and Melilla towards Alhucemas Bay. The combined invasion fleet consisted of two battleships, four cruisers, two destroyers, eight torpedo boats, six gunboats, eleven armed trawlers, one seaplane tender, twenty-six landing barges, two tugs, plus ten transports (six of them being requisitioned from the Spanish Compañía Transmediterranea), three hospital ships, and one water tender, with another in reserve. These were joined by a French fleet from Oran under the command of Rear Admiral Hallier. It included one battleship, two cruisers, two destroyers, two monitors, and one tug with a barrage balloon. The huge armada assembled by the Allies would not only provide the invasion with overwhelming firepower against Riffian gun emplacements within Alhucemas Bay, but it would also allow both navies to participate in the campaign. Except for its feeble attempts to halt arms smuggling for Abd-el-Krim’s forces, the Spanish Navy had not

28. De La Cierva, *Franco*, 251; and Domínguez Llosa, “Ocurrió hace setenta años,” 62–63.

29. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 188.

30. De La Cierva, *Franco*, 251–52, noted that Abd-el-Krim had said on more than one occasion that, “If they disembark at Alhucemas, I will take Tetuan.” For more on the impact of the *levante* on the operation, see Rupert Furneaux, *Abdel Krim—Emir of the Rif* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967), 203; and Arraras, *Historia de la Cruzada Española*, 191, who wrote that Primo de Rivera told those who doubted or objected to the invasion that, “The wind of the Levante will not blow.”

contributed very much towards the war effort. This was the opportunity naval commanders had hoped for, the chance to bring out their capital ships and justify their existence to the nation. The naval component was crucial to the success or failure of the entire operation as all reinforcements and supplies for the invasion force, once on the beaches, would come from the ships offshore.

Colonel Franco's Legionnaires (the VIth *Bandera* aboard the *Jaime II* and the VIIth *Bandera* on board the *Capitan Segarra*) served as the vanguard for General Saro's Column, while the IIrd and IIIrd *Banderas* (aboard the steamer *Antonio Lazaro*), under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Amado Balmes, formed part of General Fernandez Perez's Column.³¹ On 6 September, in an attempt to obfuscate the landing site, two *Banderas* made desultory landing attempts at Uad Lau, Kaaseras, and Targa with prior beach bombardment provided by the warships of the Spanish fleet. The entire operation began at 0815 hours and was completed by 1600 hours.³²

The invasion fleet had reached its destination by dawn on 7 September, but the operation had to be put off for a day due to fog and strong,

31. Dominguez Llosa, *Ocurrio hace setenta años*, 62–63, recorded that preparations began on 28 August in Ceuta and on 2 September in Melilla, since the latter was closer to Alhucemas Bay, and the men were brought on board the ships between 3 and 5 September. Gerardo Mariñas del Rio, "Los ejercicios combinados: Una catedra para mandos y tropas," *Defensa: revista internacional de ejercitos, armamento, y tecnologia*, Extra no. 41 (June 1995), 31. Subinspección de La Legion, ed., *La Legion Española (Cincuenta años de historia) 1920–1936* (Madrid: Leganes, 1975), 255, noted that while Colonel Francisco Franco Bahamonde would command the vanguard of the Ceuta Column (Saro), Colonel Manuel Goded Llopis would command the vanguard of the Melilla Column (Fernandez Perez). For additional references on the Spanish Navy's role during the Moroccan War, as well as the Alhucemas Bay operation, see Mariano Dominguez Adrubau, "La Marina de Guerra en las Campañas de Marruecos," *Revista General de Marina* 204 (August-September 1983): 339–51; Manuel Espinosa, "Memorias de un Alférez de Navio: El Desembarco en Alhucemas," *Revista General de Marina* 204 (March 1983): 441–55; Juan Cervera y Cervera, "Recuerdos del Año 1921: Las Fuerzas Navales en el Norte de Africa," *Revista General de Marina* 204 (August-September 1983), 273–82; and Ricardo Alvarez- Maldonado, "Contribución de la Armada a la Difícil Pacificación de Nuestro Protectorado Marroquí," *Revista de Historia Naval*, 10, 37 (1992), 83–113.

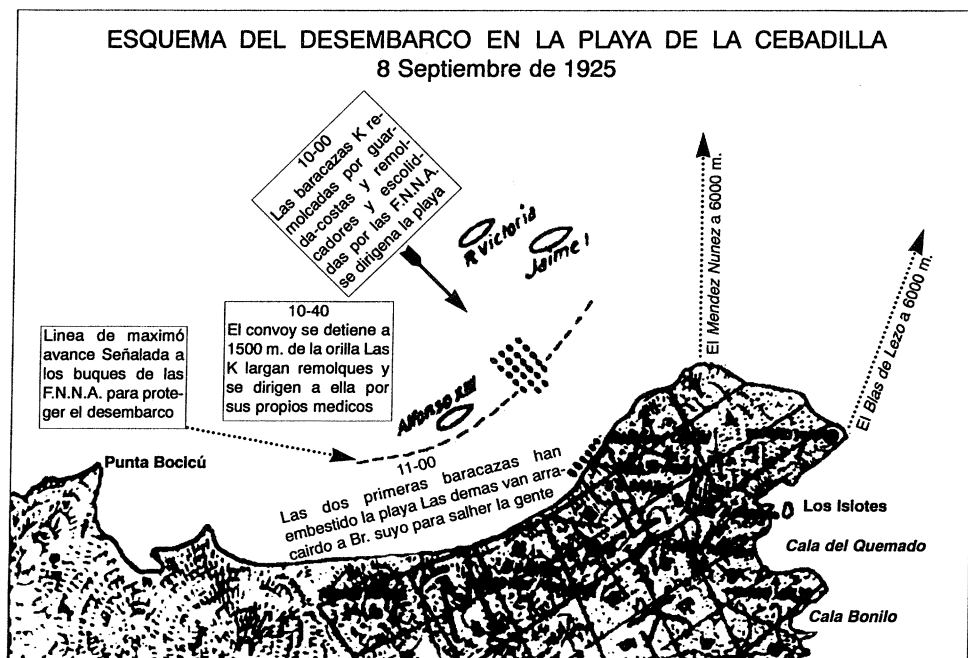
32. Fernando Cano Velasco, ed., *La Legion*, vol. 4, *Historia De Las Fuerzas Armadas* (Zaragoza: Ediciones Palafox, 1984), 158, noted that from the Ceuta Column, various companies from the two *Banderas* boarded their landing craft and headed towards the beaches of Uad Lau, only to return to their mother ships. This exercise was also repeated at Targa, M'Ter, and Tiguisas. Estado Mayor Central del Ejercito, *Historia de las Campañas de Marruecos* (Madrid: Servicio Historico Militar, Imprenta Ideal, 1981), 4: 57–58. Dominguez Llosa, *Ocurrio hace setenta años*, 63, wrote that the Melilla Column (which was to serve in a subservient role to the Ceuta Column) carried out a similar desultory landing at Sidi Dris, which was preceded by intense naval shore bombardment by the French fleet.

unfavorable currents, which had dispersed the convoy. General Primo de Rivera, frustrated by the postponement of the landing, was quoted as saying: "I promised Marshal Pétain I would disembark, and I will disembark, whatever it costs."³³

"H-hour" was at 0600 hours on the foggy morning of 8 September. The invasion began with a naval bombardment from the ships of the fleet, as well as aerial bombing and strafing of the invasion beaches (La Cebadilla and Ixdain) two hours later by seventy-six Spanish aircraft. At 0900, the order was given to board the "Ks," which would then be towed by tugboats to the beach. The tugs would cut their lines to the "Ks" at about one thousand meters from shore, and the craft would then proceed under their own propulsion. The supreme commander of the operation, Primo de Rivera, reviewed the flotilla of landing craft from the deck of torpedo boat No. 22. At 1140, while naval gunfire raked the enemy coastline, the VIth *Bandera* headed in towards the beach aboard *K.21* and *K.23*, towed by the *Ferrolano* and the *Gaditano*. Preceding the landing craft in a motor boat, Navy Commander Carlos Boado Suances diverted them away from the primary target of La Cebadilla beach, which contained fifty unexploded aerial bombs and now served the enemy as a mine field, and towards the adjoining Ixdain beach. In the lead boat, Commander Boado Suances realized that the landing craft would not be able to reach the shoreline due to the rocks and shoals and thus could not unload the ten Renault FT-17 light tanks which had been brought along to precede and support the landing on the right flank. When he radioed the situation back to the fleet, the High Command ordered the mission to be aborted. Franco took it upon himself to countermand the order to withdraw, noting that this would destroy the morale of his men, while at the same time elevate that of the Riffian defenders. He was later able to justify his decision to disobey a direct order from his superiors by claiming an officer's right to use his initiative under enemy fire. The landing barges did indeed run aground on the rocks and shoals fifty meters out. Nonetheless, Franco, undaunted by the unexpected turn of events, ordered the bugler to sound the call for attack. This energized the Legionnaires (along with the pro-Spanish natives of the *Harkas de Tetuan y Larache*) who jumped out of

33. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 190; Manuel Goded Llopis, *Marruecos: Las Etapas de la Pacificación* (Madrid: Compañía Iber-Americana de Publicaciones, 1932), 182–186 and 193–196, details the final orders and preparations for the disembarkation which was scheduled for the following morning. De La Cierva, *Franco*, 259, recorded Primo de Rivera as having said in a muffled voice: "I have promised Marshal Pétain that I would disembark today and I will do so."

their landing craft into neck-deep water. With their weapons held high above their heads, they waded ashore onto Ixdain beach.³⁴



Artillery grids for Ixdain/La Cebadilla beaches and Morro Nuevo Peninsula. Spanish capital ships are offshore. “Ks,” in sailing order, prepare to hit the beach at 1040 hours.

The plan called for the *Harkas* to attack head-on on the right flank, while the Legion attacked on the left flank. Colonel Franco commanded all forces on the beach, while Lieutenant Colonel Juan José Perez de Liniers y Muñero (a future commander-in-chief of the Legion), led the VIth (Major Rada) and VIIth (Major Verdu) *Banderas* ashore. The 24th Company of the VIth was disputably the first to reach the beach, with the 22nd to its right, and the 23rd to its left. The Machine Gun Company provided effective fire support for the invasion. The troops of the VIIth *Bandera* supported the attacks of the more experienced VIth, and they too achieved their assigned missions. Overwhelmed by this aggressive

34. Quintana Martínez and Llabres Bernal, *La Marina De Guerra En Africa*, 254, noted that the area targeted for the invasion was divided into twenty-four sectors and given a corresponding letter of the alphabet (i.e., A-Z). In turn, each one of these sectors was itself divided into eight squares. This was done in order to identify areas occupied by either friend or foe, as well as for providing naval gunfire support. Preston, *Franco*, 48.

attack, the Riffian defenders barely resisted, and fled, leaving behind a cannon, several machine guns, and their dead. Pushing up the nearby low cliffs, the Legionnaires were able to accomplish their objectives.³⁵

By sundown on that first day, the Legion had secured Morro Nuevo, and the Vith *Bandera's* standard fluttered from its crest. The beachhead stretched from Ixdain/Cebadilla beaches to Punta de los Frailes (Friars' Point). With over 8,000 men and three batteries ashore, it was obvious that the surprise landing to the west of Alhucemas Bay had been a complete success. Spanish casualties for the first assault wave, although substantial, were less than feared: 7 officers and 117 men were either killed or wounded.³⁶

One of the reasons for the attackers' low casualties was the solid support received from the Spanish Air Force, which had provided reconnaissance, artillery spotting, bombardment, and strafing runs for the landings. It racked up 1,462 hours of flying time, while dropping almost 150,000 kg (330,000 lbs) of bombs. The Breguet XIX, one of the most advanced planes in the Spanish Air Force, flew over the beaches of Alhucemas.³⁷

The honor of relaying the joyous news of the successful landing to the Spanish press was given to Major General Felipe Navarro, who at 1300 hours declared: "We have landed!" ("*Ya estamos en tierra!*")³⁸ Also, at 1300 hours, the second wave composed of the *Regulares* and the artillery hit the beach. Defensive fortifications were quickly begun ashore. Before the third wave could be brought in, it was necessary to unload the "Ks" of all the matériel they contained, an operation which lasted the rest of

35. For a day-by-day account of the Alhucemas Bay landing as seen through the eyes of Colonel Franco, the Commander-in-Chief of the Spanish Foreign Legion, see Francisco Franco Bahamonde, *Papeles De La Guerra De Marruecos (Diario De Alhucemas)* (Madrid: Fundación Nacional Francisco Franco, 1986), 171–90.

36. De La Cierva, *Franco*, 89; Subinspección de La Legion, *La Legion Española*, 256–57; Federico Ramas Izquierdo, *La Legion: Historial de Guerra (1 Septiembre 1920 al 12 Octubre 1927)* (Ceuta: Imprenta Africa, 1933), 254–60; John Scurr, *The Spanish Foreign Legion*, Osprey Men-At-Arms Series, no. 161 (London: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 1985), 16; and Domínguez Llosa, *Ocurrió hace setenta años*, 64.

37. *Cronica de la aviacion* (Esplugues de Llobregat: Plaza & Janes, 1992), 219. For more on the role of the Spanish Air Force during the Rif Rebellion, see Beatriz Pecker and Carlos Perez Grange, *Cronica De La Aviacion Española* (Madrid: Silex, 1983), 63–71.

38. General Felipe Navarro had been left in command of Spanish forces after the death of General Fernandez Silvestre. He, and what remained of Silvestre's forces, were besieged by the Riffians at Monte Arruit, located on the road between Annual and Melilla. With no hope for rescue, Navarro received permission to surrender from the High Commissioner, General Berenguer, and was forced to capitulate on 9 August 1921. Navarro, along with those who were not slaughtered outright, went into captivity. The prisoners were ransomed in January 1923.

the day. By 2200 hours, there were ten thousand men on shore.³⁹ The Renault FT-17 light tanks were dropped off at Los Frailes beach early the following day.

While Abd-el-Krim was certain that an invasion on a massive scale was coming, he did not know exactly where along the coast it would take place. Therefore, he pressed his attack against Spanish fortifications near Tetuan. The position of Kudia Tahar in particular resisted the repeated Riffian attacks with great tenacity and valor. As the number of casualties mounted, Primo de Rivera decided to send additional forces to Kudia Tahar. The Legionnaires of the IInd and IIIrd *Banderas*, who were to serve as the vanguard for the Melilla Column, were not allowed to disembark at Alhucemas, but were ordered to continue sailing for Ceuta where they were put on trains and sent to Tetuan. From there, the Legionnaires (plus a regular Army regiment) marched to Kudia Tahar where they engaged the Riffians in ferocious combat, breaking the siege of this post on 13 September 1925.⁴⁰

Abd-el-Krim had gambled and lost. Not only had his plan for taking the capital failed, but he had diverted some of his finest units away from Alhucemas Bay in order to capture Tetuan. Furthermore, the defeat of his forces at Kudia Tahar had the effect of lowering the morale of his other soldiers at Alhucemas. Abd-el-Krim's forces also received an additional setback when they were attacked by the French Army in the south in conjunction with the Spanish landing at Alhucemas. Abd-el-Krim had erroneously expected that the Spanish would disembark inside the bay, taking advantage of their heavy artillery emplacements on the small island in Alhucemas Bay (el Peñon de Alhucemas) to provide fire support. It was inside the bay that Abd-el-Krim had built up his defenses and had placed his major fortifications. In addition, he had these positions manned by members of his own tribe, the bellicose Beni Urriaguel, not the less capable and trustworthy Bucoya tribe who occupied the region where the Spanish actually did land.⁴¹

It took the Riffians some time to recover from the impact of the initial assault, but eventually the defenders regrouped, and opposition began to stiffen. At 2230 hours on 11 September, following a potent Riffian artillery barrage which lasted more than two hours, the Riffians launched a strong counterattack led by a vanguard of Beni Urriaguel tribesmen.

39. José E. Alvarez, "The Betrothed of Death: The Spanish Foreign Legion during the Rif Rebellion, 1920–1927" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1995), 309–11; and Domínguez Llosa, *Ocurrio hace setenta años*, 60.

40. Ramas Izquierdo, *La Legion*, 260–68; and Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 189–90.

41. Domínguez Llosa, *Ocurrio hace setenta años*, 63–64. Furneaux, *Abdel Krim*, 205, wrote: "Like von Rundstedt and Rommel in 1944, Abdel Krim failed to perceive which landing was the real thing and which was the diversion planned to deceive him."

This attack lasted until 0430 hours of the next day and revealed that the training the Spanish forces had received prior to the invasion was paying off. Fire discipline of the various units on the beach, as well as effective coordination between the infantry, artillery, and engineers, enabled the Spanish to repel the Riffians. They were so thoroughly defeated in this engagement that, aside from occasional sniping and artillery fire, the Riffians did not attack the three-square-kilometer beachhead again.⁴²

Once the beachhead was secured and around twelve thousand men had disembarked, offensive operations were halted for roughly two weeks in order to land the rest of the men and matériel. While this consolidating operation was taking place, the Riffians continued to snipe and shell the beaches from their positions on the nearby hills and cliffs. This was probably the most critical period in regards to the final outcome of the operation, and in fact at this point the greatest threat to it came not from the Riffians, but from the inclement weather. In order to supply adequately the large numbers of men and mules, massive amounts of water, food, feed, and munitions had to be brought ashore from the support ships anchored offshore. These supplies had to be ferried to the beach by way of the landing barges, and rough seas greatly hindered this undertaking. According to Woolman, “there were special floating docks built specifically for use during the Alhucemas operations.”⁴³ It could be said that these floating docks, primitive as they may have been, were the precursors, or the genesis for, the more advanced “Mulberries” used by the Allies during the D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy in 1944. Another significant problem for the Spanish was the lack of potable water. With no sources to be found nearby, water for men and beasts had to be brought from Melilla and then taken ashore in barrels and casks. A crude hose was rigged to pipe water directly from the water tenders to shore, but this proved unreliable with continual seepage of salt water through faulty connections. For the men, this tenuous period meant having to live on canned sardines and sea-soaked hardtack. And while they had no choice but to drink brackish water, the mules refused to do so.⁴⁴

Early on the morning of 20 September, Primo de Rivera disembarked at Cebadilla beach, where he deliberated with Generals Sanjurjo, Saro, Fernandez Perez, and their staffs about the next step to be taken in the offensive—breaking out of the beachhead. Hesitation, leading to months

42. Dominguez Llosa, *Ocurrio hace setenta años*, 64; and Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 191–93.

43. *Ibid.*, 190.

44. Goded, *Marruecos*, 206–11; and Dominguez Llosa, *Ocurrio hace setenta años*, 64. In the Gallipoli section of Foster, *Hit the Beach!*, an interesting photograph shows soldiers “filtering water at Cape Helles.” Foster goes on to note that, “The supply of fresh water was a constant problem on all three beaches.”



Unloading mules and supplies during the Alhucemas landing.

of stalemate, had been the curse of the Gallipoli campaign. The Spanish High Command was not about to commit the same mistake of having the men dig in, thus losing the initiative or allowing the Riffians to recover and/or bring up reinforcements. Primo de Rivera concluded that the hills overlooking the landing beaches, which were dotted with Riffian artillery, were the primary target. Morro Viejo, Malmusi Bajo, and the Cuernos (Horns) of Xauen/Malmusi Alto were selected as the goals for the forthcoming attacks, scheduled to start on 23 September.

After thorough preparation by way of an artillery barrage, and a reconnaissance mission by scouts that fixed the position of the enemy, the attack began at 0730 hours on 23 September. Colonel Goded's column, which included the IInd and IIIrd *Banderas* of the Legion, encountered less resistance in securing Cala del Quemado, Malmusi Bajo, and Morro Viejo, than did Franco's column, the VIth and VIIth *Banderas*, in trying to take Malmusi Alto. The Riffians knew that losing Malmusi Alto would leave them wide open for a Spanish thrust towards their capital via the Ajdir plain. Therefore, the battle for Monte Malmusi (a 500-meter high hill) became the most sanguinary engagement of the campaign, with no quarter asked, and none given. As Woolman pointed out, "the struggle for this salient point was so bitter that when the heights were finally taken [following two assaults at 1055 hours], only a single Rifian defender re-

mained alive, and he kept firing until stabbed to death by troopers of the Tercio [Legion].”⁴⁵ Spanish casualties for just that one day numbered roughly 700 (166 of them from the Legion).⁴⁶

Stormy weather followed, causing difficulties in resupplying the troops on shore, and offensive operations were halted from 26–30 September. Fortifications were constructed, but Riffian machine gun fire and shelling still caused casualties. In order to consolidate the gains made during the previous offensive, an operation was launched on 30 September whose goal was to occupy a line stretching from Monte Palomas to Adrar Seddim. In three days of fierce fighting, these objectives were not only accomplished, but surpassed.⁴⁷ On 2 October, the Spanish forces captured and torched the capital of Ajdir.

Spanish forces had been able to land at Alhucemas Bay, establish a beachhead under enemy fire, dig in and resupply, and then push out towards the interior. For Abd-el-Krim and his “Rif Republic,” the loss of his capital signalled the beginning of the end. Many of his best troops had fallen in battle, while others had either deserted and returned to their own tribes, or surrendered to Spanish authorities. The Rif Rebellion would not be definitively crushed for another two years, but there is no doubt that the Alhucemas Bay landing, which struck at the very heart of the rebellion, brought the war to a speedier conclusion. Woolman observed that, “The cost notwithstanding, Alhucemas was a great victory for Spain—the only definitive one they were to achieve during the whole of the Rif Rebellion.”⁴⁸ Although little known to most military historians today, the Alhucemas Bay operation, according to Major Mariñas del Rio of the Spanish Foreign Legion’s General Staff, “was exhaustively studied by General Eisenhower and his North American and British experts prior to the Normandy landings.”⁴⁹

45. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 192.

46. Fleming, *Primo de Rivera*, 305, noted that the battle fought on 23 September accomplished the following objectives: It pushed the Alhucemas Bay front lines ten kilometers deeper towards the interior of the Rif, it consolidated the 8 September amphibious landing, “it secured a number of strategic positions which were essential for further advances,” and the Riffians lost two hundred killed, one field piece, four machine guns, plus three hundred rifles and grenades. *Resumen Historico de La Legion, Diario de Operaciones de la Legion* (Serrallo de la Legion, Plana Mayor del Tercio, Archivo General, Ceuta), *Negociado de Campaña*, 21 September 1925, 41. Although listed as 21 September in the *DOL* (the Legion’s operational diary), the battle for Monte Malmusi took place on 23 September.

47. Domínguez Llosa, *Ocurrió hace setenta años*, 66; and Fleming, *Primo de Rivera*, 306–7.

48. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, 192.

49. Mariñas del Rio, “Los ejercicios combinados,” 32. This quote can also be found in De La Cierva, *Franco*, 264. De La Cierva quoted S. F. A. Coles, the author of *Franco of Spain* (Westminster, Md.: n.p., 1956).

Abd-el-Krim's revolt against Spanish authority since 1921 and his attack on the French Protectorate in 1925 had brought together two tenuous allies having the same goal in mind: imposing colonial authority in Morocco. While the Spanish military had planned on carrying out the landing at Alhucemas Bay alone, the cooperation of the French fleet, as well as their armies attacking from the south, were too much for Abd-el-Krim's forces to contend with. Spanish arms had been vindicated after the ignominious defeat at Annual. Alhucemas Bay proved that the Spanish military could successfully carry out a difficult amphibious operation if the following factors were taken into account: meticulous planning, organization and coordination (land, sea, and air), overwhelming firepower, suitable landing craft, and ably led, highly trained, and motivated soldiers (i.e., Legionnaires and *Regulares*). For over four years, the Legion and the *Regulares* had engaged the Riffians in a hard-fought campaign to regain the territory lost following the Annual disaster. They had become battle-hardened veterans who knew that to defeat their foe, they had to continuously advance and attack in order to break the enemy's will to fight on. For the Spanish, the "specter of Gallipoli" had been surmounted through their successful operation against Abd-el-Krim's rebellion in the landing at Alhucemas Bay in 1925.