

The Betrothed of Death

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[ The Spanish  
Foreign Legion  
During the  
Rif Rebellion,  
1920–1927 ]

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, Jose Mill n 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 Rifians 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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