The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 295
“The Bottle Uncorked”
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“Spain is a bottle and I am the cork, and when the cork is no longer there, the champagne gushes over.”

Spanish King Ferdinand VII.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

[music: Opening Theme]

Episode 295. The Bottle Uncorked.

We last talked about the situation in Spain in episode 253. We discussed the Rif War, which was when the Spanish military struggled to subdue the people of the Rif, or Spanish Morocco, as they called it in the West, even when Spanish control over it was mostly theoretical.

The war went poorly and opposition grew until a military coup established a dictatorship under an aristocrat and general named Miguel Primo de Rivera y Orbaneja. The Spanish King Alfonso XIII supported the coup and ratified it by appointing Primo de Rivera prime minister.

Primo de Rivera’s greatest accomplishment was defeating the Rif rebels and ending the war—with a great deal of help from the French, it must be said. Afterward, he governed a fractious Spain for the following six years.

The challenges were vast. The right-wing traditionalist forces in Spain included monarchists, aristocrats, large land owners, military officers, and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and you should note that a Venn diagram of these forces would reveal considerable overlap. Aristocratic families were usually large landowners and often included among their family members high-ranking military officers and high-ranking Catholic clergy.

Large landowners held estates that measured in square miles, or even more in square kilometers, which they seldom visited in person. They treated the landless laborers who worked the lands for them with cruelty and contempt, and, I hardly need add, paid little or nothing in taxes. The

Catholic Church held an estimated one-third of the nation’s wealth, while preaching to the Spanish masses the virtue of poverty. Church schools were reluctant to teach their students to read, lest they read something liberal, or even worse, socialist. Better to have students memorize the catechism and let it go at that. Hence Spain’s appalling rate of illiteracy. Wealthy families, of course, had the option of placing their own children in pricier church schools that had no such reluctance. Church influence over Spanish society was so strong that Spanish doctors were required by law to prescribe confession along with their secular treatment, and the reading of liberal newspapers was declared a mortal sin. Catholic priests condemned American motion pictures as sinful, although they had no qualms about bullfighting. The eating of meat during Lent was banned, though the Church happily sold dispensations to those who could afford them.

The Church’s great wealth and its steadfast support for the ruling class made it deeply unpopular among ordinary Spaniards. Less than 20% of the population attended went to Mass even on Easter Sunday. Despite the Church’s vast wealth and power, Spain ranked as perhaps the least religious nation in Europe, and whenever there was political unrest, church buildings and Catholic clergy were invariably among the first targets of violence, along with the hated Guardia Civil, the national police force that was an arm of the military.

The Spanish military was a disguised subsidy to the aristocracy. It had one general for every hundred soldiers, and its officer corps was known for selling food and supplies meant for their soldiers on the black market. Corruption in government, the military, the Church, and the upper classes was commonplace.

Agriculture was still a large part of the Spanish economy. The large estates in the south and west of the country, in places like Extremadura and Andalucía, employed millions of unlanded laborers, most of whom were but one meal away from starvation. Things were a little better in the more industrialized northern and eastern parts of the country. Catalonia, along the eastern Mediterranean coast, was where most of Spain’s industry could be found, along with most of Spain’s industrial workers, and hence most of Spain’s socialists. Spain was one of the few places where anarchists gave Marxists a run for their money in organizing workers. Spain’s heavy-handed ruling class probably explains the appeal of anarchism. Spanish industrialists tended to be liberals. They resented the central government’s distrust of them, not to mention how they paid the taxes that kept the state going and which allowed the landed aristocrats a free ride.

In the northeast of Spain lay the Basque regions, also home to industry that was much in demand during the war. Basque farmers worked in communal fields and got along just fine without landlords.

It was Primo de Rivera’s job to manage this fragmented and unhappy nation. He attempted to rule in an evenhanded way. When there was labor unrest in Catalonia, he sided with the workers. He was sympathetic to agricultural laborers, though not willing to tackle the power of the large

landowners in any serious way. Still, he ruled with a light touch and had the support of many in Spain's upper and middle classes.

The economic story in Spain during the Jazz Age was the same as everywhere else. Spanish agriculture and industry sold to eager foreign markets during the war; afterward came the inflation of 1919-20 and the economic slowdown of 1920-22. The end of the Rif War coincided with the stronger economy of the period 1923-29. The Primo de Rivera government invested heavily in economic development projects during this time, but much of that investment was poorly conceived and the funds squandered. In the late 1920s, Primo de Rivera took steps toward drafting a new constitution, as I described before. But then the Great Depression hit. Spain's economy shrank by about 20%. This wasn't as bad as in Germany or the United States; more an Italian or British level of depression, but it was bad enough, especially since most Spaniards were poor to begin with and because the agricultural sector was hit especially hard.

Plans for a plebiscite on the new constitution were stalled when unrest against the Primo de Rivera government erupted in early 1930 with student protestors marching through Madrid. He consulted with the military leadership and learned they were not willing to keep him in power, so he resigned and left the country, moving to Paris, where he died just weeks later at the age of 60.

The King appointed another aristocrat-general, Dámaso Berenguer y Fusté, to succeed Primo de Rivera and assigned him the job of completing the transition back to constitutional monarchy. But that was likely an impossible task. There hadn't been a general election in Spain in many years. The political parties were disorganized, political unrest and protest was rampant, and by this point there was a broad consensus that the King and the monarchy had to go.

In August 1930, a number of republican conservative, liberal, and socialist political leaders met in San Sebastián and formed a revolutionary committee dedicated to overthrowing the monarchy. They reached out to sympathetic military officers. December 1930 saw a poorly organized military uprising that was quickly put down. The two leaders of the uprising were executed the very next day and many in the revolutionary committee were arrested.

But the King had overplayed his hand. Public sympathy was clearly on the republican side, and it seemed likely that any attempt to hold an election would lead to a sharp repudiation of the monarchy. Two months later, General Berenguer resigned. He was replaced by his war minister, Admiral Juan Bautista Aznar-Cabañas.

The Aznar government attempted to ease the political crisis by holding local elections first, with elections for a national constituent assembly to be held at a later, unspecified date. These local elections were held on April 12, 1931. Despite their local character, they were widely perceived as a referendum on the monarchy. When the results came in, monarchist parties carried the rural regions of the country where large landowners held sway, but in every city and town in Spain, republican candidates won handily, with the single exception of the southwestern port city of Cádiz.

Afterwards, huge crowds gathered in Spain's major cities to celebrate the victory. A number of the new local governments, including those in Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia, flush with their electoral success, declared the establishment of the Second Spanish Republic.

King Alfonso was stunned by the extent of his own unpopularity. His prime minister told him that last night, Spain had gone to bed as a monarchy, and rose this morning as a republic. When General José Sanjurjo y Sacanell, commander of the Civil Guard, the national police force, told the King he could not maintain the monarchy, the King followed the path previously trodden by Primo de Rivera, and fled the country, although he did not formally abdicate until 1941.

Yesterday, the Revolutionary Committee were prison inmates; today they were the Provisional Government of the Second Spanish Republic. A general election was held in June 1931 for a new Cortes, which drafted a new constitution, which was approved in December. By the end of the year, Spain had reconstituted itself as a constitutional republic, and it had done so with minimal bloodshed.

It makes a nice story, and oh, if only that were the whole story. This is one of those cases where, although I would love to stop right here and tell you it is the end of the story, I have to keep going. This pretty tale of the fall of the monarchy and the rise of the Second Republic papers over the sharp divisions in Spanish society. The wealthy landowners and the military and the Catholic hierarchy were still there, in disarray perhaps after the fall of the King, but still powerful and inclined to regard any attempt to reform Spanish society as the equivalent of at least treason and probably heresy as well. On the other side were millions of impoverished factory and farm workers desperate for change, and in between were the middle class, who absolutely agreed that Spain needed to change, but…well…hold on…there's no hurry…and when I said "change" I didn't mean *that* kind of change…

In particular, from the beginning of the Second Republic, it was clear that the new government was on a collision course with the Spanish Catholic Church. In May, just weeks after the Provisional Government took power, Cardinal Segura, the Archbishop of Toledo, the highest-ranking church official in the country, released a pastoral letter reminding his communicants that King Alfonso had "steadfastly kept the Catholic faith," and that while one might be a monarchist or a republican, it was essential to protect the place of the Catholic Church in Spain, since in Spain one was "either a Catholic or nothing at all." This on top of an earlier declaration, made in a sermon, "May the Republic be cursed!"

The cardinal's political meddling was too much even for the Vatican, which had given up on any restoration of the Spanish monarchy and was now angling to create a Catholic political party in Spain on the model of Germany's Centre Party. In Madrid, republicans reacted to the Cardinal's letter by setting fire to churches and schools. When the Vatican refused the Provisional Government's request to recall Cardinal Segura, he was gathered up into a motorcar and deported to France, on the grounds that he was a threat to public safety.

Spain's new constitution included among its provisions controversial articles related to the Church and its privileges. The constitution codified women's suffrage, introduced civil marriage and permitted divorce. It guaranteed freedom of worship to religious minorities, principally Jews and Protestants. It guaranteed a free, public, secular education and barred members of Catholic religious communities from teaching, and banned outright the Jesuits, the Society of Jesus, on the grounds that its members took an oath of allegiance to the Pope. Church and state were separated. The government stipend of fifty million pesetas per year to the Church was rescinded and Church properties seized by the state.

There was a strong argument to be made that the Church's privileged position in Spanish law and society were no longer justified in light of how modest its actual support ran among the Spanish people. On the other hand, tradition-minded Spaniards thought the new constitution went way too far, and this included the Provisional Government's own prime minister, Niceto Alcalá-Zamora y Torres, who resigned his office in protest. His absence from government will be brief, however; after the constitution was ratified, he was made President of the Republic. Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical, *Dilectissima Nobis*, condemning the new Republic's treatment of the church as an "offense not only to Religion and the Church, but also to those declared principles of civil liberty on which the new Spanish regime declares it bases itself."

The Provisional Government also began discussions on autonomy for the province of Catalonia, which became formalized in 1932. Some on the left saw this as a first step to decentralizing Spain's traditionally highly centralized government into a more federal system, similar to that of Germany or the United States, but this kind of talk was anathema to the right, especially Spain's largely Castillian military leadership, who saw Catalonian autonomy as the first step toward the disintegration of the Spanish state.

But the new Republican government's most urgent problem was land reform. The new constitution included a broad guarantee that every working person in Spain receive sufficient income to support a "dignified existence." You could hardly say that Spain's landless peasant laborers, or *braceros,* were living a dignified existence, especially not in the regions of Andalucía or Extremadura, where many dwelt in adobe huts so primitive there were stories of *braceros* sleeping in their employers' pigsties because those accommodations were more comfortable. A healthy young man could expect to be paid about three pesetas for a day's labor (about thirty cents in US currency of the time); women got paid one peseta. That's if they got work at all, which often they didn't. Some were willing to trade a day's labor for no more than a bowl of soup and a hunk of bread. On days when there was no work to be had, peasant laborers were known to eat grass.

This was in spite of the fact that many large landowners kept tracts of their land uncultivated for various reasons, including use as their personal hunting preserves. Desperate *braceros* sometimes squatted on these lands until the owner found out and summoned the Guardia Civil, hence its unpopularity. The military authorities were careful to assign new recruits to the Guardia

Civil to regions of the country distant from the recruits' own homes, so they would feel no attachment to the community they policed, and were also discouraged from socializing with the locals, who in turn saw the Guardia Civil as something akin to a foreign occupation force.

Attempts by socialists and labor leaders to organize the *braceros* foundered. Imagine trying to tell these people to go on strike. No matter how many agree, there will always be people desperate enough to show up for work regardless. So the left looked to the government of the Republic and relied upon its stated constitutional duty to guarantee a "dignified existence." The constitution also granted the government the power to appropriate private property at public need, though it obligated the government to pay just compensation.

This was during the Great Depression, and if all this economic hardship wasn't bad enough, add in the dictatorship's profligate spending on economic projects that did little for the economy and the capital that fled the country soon after the King did. Government revenues were shrunken. In its first two years, the Second Republic purchased enough estate lands to provide small farms for about 12,000 families. This represented less than half a percent of the rural poor, meaning at this rate the Republic's land reform program would be a resounding success by sometime in the mid-23rd century. The government's own labor minister, trade union leader Francisco Largo Caballero, compared it to a doctor attempting to treat appendicitis by prescribing aspirin.

The Spanish civil service was populated by right-wing leftovers from the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, who were also suspicious of the new government. Left-leaning ministers complained that their reform efforts were being sabotaged by the very civil servants whose duty it was to carry them out.

[music: de Falla, "Spanish Dance" from *La vida breve*]

At the end of December 1931, just a couple weeks after the first election under the new constitution and the first elected government, socialists demonstrated against the wealthy landowners in the province of Badajoz, in the region of Extremadura. After one such demonstration, permission to hold a second one, in the small village of Castilblanco, population about 900, was denied by the local authorities. The socialists went ahead and held their demonstration anyway, in defiance of the authorities, who called in the Guardia Civil. Although Castilblanco was just a sleepy little town with no history of unrest, when the troops fired shots in an effort to disperse the demonstration, the townspeople set upon them with knives and hacked four of them to death.

The killings in Castilblanco and similar events disturbed many high-ranking military officers, as did the general leftward tilt of the government, now led by Prime Minister Manuel Azaña Díaz. Azaña was a well-to-do lawyer, certainly no socialist, but his hard line on reining in the power and influence of the Catholic Church bothered the military leadership, who were even more bothered that Azaña, who was also war minister, wanted to reform the military by shrinking its bloated officer corps and bringing the military more firmly under civilian control.

By 1932, military officers were discussing more or less openly whether and how to move against the government, but they themselves were divided. Among them there were committed monarchists who wanted to bring King Alfonso back to Madrid, but there were also republicans who were okay with the new constitution but wanted to see a more moderate government and in between, those who accepted the principle of a republic, but only if the right people were running it and democracy was clearly no way to decide who the right people were.

In April, the coup plotters opened talks with figures in the Italian government and military. Some sources claim the Italians provided them with money, though there is no hard evidence of this.

Azaña and his government were aware of the coup plot, but were sufficiently confident to adopt a strategy of "give them enough rope and they'll hang themselves." And indeed, when the coup attempt came, in August 1932, it was rushed, haphazard, and easily put down. In Madrid, a disorganized attempt to seize the Ministry of War building was brushed aside with minimal casualties; most Army garrisons across the country remained quiet.

The one city where the coup had some success was Seville, where the rebelling Army was commanded by none other than General José Sanjurjo, the same commander who last year had told King Alfonso he was unable to protect the monarchy, precipitating Alfonso's flight from the country. Sanjurjo and the rebel soldiers were able to take control of Seville for a day, but by nightfall, after it became clear that the coup had failed everywhere else and with loyal soldiers from Madrid and other garrisons taking up positions outside the city, the rebels surrendered. No one was killed either in the takeover of Seville or in its surrender.

General Sanjurjo attempted to flee the country but was captured. Because he was the most prominent coup leader, this coup is often known as the Sanjurjada. A number of coup leaders were prosecuted and sent to prison, including Sanjurjo, who was initially sentenced to death, though this was commuted to life in prison.

The spectacular failure of the Sanjurjada produced a sense of complacency among the political leadership of the Republic, especially on the left, who saw it as the last gasp of the old order. In fact and in hindsight, the Sanjurjada is better understood as an early indicator of what is to come.

Meanwhile, the Spanish left were still dissatisfied with the slow pace of land reform. The left was split between socialists, pro-Moscow Communists, Trotskyites, and anarchists. Of these, the anarchists were the most restless. They had supported the Republic over the monarchy as a matter of convenience, but being anarchists what they really wanted was no state at all. Once the glacial pace of the government's land reforms became evident, the anarchists moved on to "do-it-yourself" land reform, which involved sending in their supporters to take control of a town, burning all the property records, and then declaring that all lands in that region were now communal property. The government would send in the Guardia Civil to stop them and violence would ensue. The anarchists accused the moderate socialists—the ones participating in the

government—of being accessories to repression. The moderate socialists would accuse the anarchists of playing into the hands of the Republic's right-wing enemies.

In the autumn of 1933, socialist parties in the Azaña government withdrew their support, an expression of their dissatisfaction with the pace of land reform. This forced a general election.

The November 1933 general election was the first to be held under a new electoral system involving multi-member constituencies. Under this system, the party or list that carried a plurality in the constituency would get two-thirds of the seats in that constituency. This method had been crafted by leftist political leaders in the hope that it would strengthen the divided left by forcing a pooling of left-leaning votes into a single list.

In fact, it produced the opposite outcome. The right-leaning political forces in Spain united under the banner of the conservative Catholic party, the Spanish Confederation of Autonomous Rights, known by its Spanish acronym, C-E-D-A or CEDA. CEDA campaigned on slowing or reversing the government's reforms and it was backed by a campaign well funded by Spain's wealthy elites, while the left was more divided than ever. Most notably, the anarchists called on their followers to boycott the election, on the grounds that all politicians were shameless, self-serving vultures, regardless of party affiliation. This strategy worked about as well in Spain as it ever does anywhere. The right-wing parties won twice as many seats in the Cortes as the left, even though the left won slightly more votes overall.

CEDA was a disturbingly authoritarian movement, with a leader dubbed *El Jefe,* the Spanish equivalent of *Il Duce,* and a campaign that promised to save Spain from Marxists and Jews. This was 1933, and the recent experience of the Nazis coming to power in Germany by parliamentary means and then creating a one-party dictatorship was not lost on the Spanish. President Alcalá-Zamora was loathe to ask *El Jefe* to lead the new government, so he turned to the number-two Radical Party, which despite its name was a center-right party, and its leader, Alejandro Lerroux García. The Radicals had been part of the previous, left-leaning government; now Lerroux would be prime minister in a right-leaning government supported by CEDA, although CEDA was not invited into the government.

This new right-wing government set to work dismantling the reforms of the previous government, which further radicalized the left, which began stockpiling weapons, convinced that a right-wing coup was coming. In October 1934, a cabinet reshuffle brought CEDA ministers into the government for the first time. For the Spanish left, this was Germany in January 1933 all over again. Convinced that a fascist takeover was imminent, socialists and Catalonian nationalists rose up in revolt. In Madrid, the uprising was easily suppressed. The Catalonian government declared independence, but that lasted less than a day. Strikes were called in many places, but none lasted for long.

The only place where the uprising took hold was in the region of Asturias, on the northern coast of Spain, where striking anarchist miners took control of several towns, including Oviedo, a

provincial capital. Some 30,000 took up arms and declared revolution. A number of priests and businessmen were executed by the miners, numbering perhaps fifty in all.

The right wing denounced this uprising as a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy, orchestrated in Moscow, and demanded a strong government response. The government was leery of sending in the Army against the revolutionaries. Officially, the reason given was that the miners were well-organized and experts in the use of dynamite, while the Peninsular Army was inexperienced. There was likely also fear that government troops might be persuaded to join the uprising.

So instead the government resorted to colonial troops from Spanish Morocco, undoubtedly Spain's best soldiers, also its most ruthless. These were under the command of General Francisco Franco Bahamonde. After two weeks of vicious fighting, the uprising was put down at a cost of about 200 government soldiers and 1,500 rebels. Government forces were accused of rape, torture, and summary execution of the rebels and their families. Thousands were arrested, including prominent left-wing politicians such as former prime minister Manuel Azaña Díaz and former labor minister Francisco Largo Caballero.

In 1935, the Lerroux government fell after a scandal involving government officials accepting bribes to permit rigged roulette wheels in Spanish casinos. It looked like a full CEDA government was finally at hand, but President Alcalá-Zamora still refused to ask CEDA to form a government, which led to dissolution of the Cortes and a call for a new general election, to be held in February 1936.

By 1936, the leaders of the leftist political parties had learned the bitter lesson of the 1933 election and worked together more closely. Comintern had also learned the lesson of 1933. By 1936, Comintern was encouraging Communist parties in democratic nations to eschew the old strategy of refusing to work cooperatively with other political parties, and instead to enter into coalitions with other leftist parties to form a common front against fascism. These coalitions were known as Popular Fronts. Greater unity strengthened the political left, although for some, the presence of Communists in the leftist coalition was a deal breaker, meaning this had the effect of exacerbating political polarization in Spain. The center shrank as everyone picked sides, either left or right.

This 1936 Spanish election would closely resemble 1933, but produce the opposite result. Again, the right had much greater resources and spent heavily, but the closer cooperation on the left paid off. As in 1933, the popular vote gave the left a slight edge over the right, but this time instead of producing a 2-1 right-wing advantage in the Cortes, it produced a 2-1 left-wing advantage. In other words, this time the electoral system worked the way the leftists had always intended.

The new Cortes, now controlled by left-wing parties, acted quickly to undo the undoing of the first left-leaning government by the second, right-wing government, and there was an element of vindictiveness. In tandem, labor unrest grew.

President Alcalá-Zamora, though he had maneuvered carefully for the past three years to prevent a CEDA takeover of the government, was deemed too conservative by the new leftist majority and ousted anyway. They were assisted in this effort by the right-wing parties, eager to deal out payback for his earlier machinations. Former prime minister Azaña was elected to replace him.

After the 1936 general election, the right wing largely gave up on resisting the left at the ballot box. In By spring of that year, high-ranking Army officers had begun discussing the prospects of another coup. Again, the government got wind of this and took steps to reduce the power of the generals, especially the ones perceived as the most dangerous.

On such general was Manuel Goded Llopis, once Army Chief of Staff. He was posted to the Balearic Islands to get him out of the way. Likewise General Emilio Mola y Vidal was made military governor of Pamplona, seen as a remote, out-of-the-way posting. General Francisco Franco was relieved of his command in Africa and sent to be military governor of the Canary Islands.

In truth, it was Mola, the general named military governor of Pamplona, who led the planning for the coup. He was code-named "the Director" by the plotters. His posting to Pamplona got him out of Madrid, but put him smack in the middle of Spain's most conservative, most Catholic, most monarchist region, where there were still organized Carlists. Remember the Carlists?

And then there was General Sanjurjo. You remember him? He had already led one attempt to overthrow the government of the Republic, failed, was sentenced to death, then had that sentence commuted to life in prison. After the right-wing electoral victory of 1933, Sanjurjo had been granted amnesty by the Lerroux government and was now living in exile in Portugal.

Sanjurjo was not closely involved in the coup plot, but the plotters felt he would be a useful figurehead, a famous name known for his patriotism. As for Francisco Franco, the coup plotters found him hard to read. He seemed sympathetic to the coup, but was reluctant to commit to it, so much so that the coup planners jokingly referred to him as "Miss Canary Islands of 1936," because of his reluctance to go all the way.

And then there was General Gonzalo Queipo de Llano y Sierra, an officer trusted by the Republican government. In 1930, he'd attempted to overthrow King Alfonso and fled the country for Portugal after that effort failed. He'd returned in 1931 when the Republic was established, and his daughter was married to a son of President Alcala-Zamora, so his Republican credentials seemed solid. No one was more surprised than the coup plotters themselves when he joined them.

The coup was launched on July 18, 1936. Now, when military leaders attempt a coup, usually one of two things happens: it succeeds, and the coup plotters become the government, or it fails, and the coup plotters go to prison or are shot. But in this case, neither of these things happened;

the outcome fell somewhere in between. What this means, unfortunately for Spain, is a drawn-out, bloody, bitter civil war.

But that is a story for next week's episode. We'll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Antonio and Viktor for their kind donations, and thank you to Nick for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Antonio and Viktor and Nick help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone. They also keep Mrs. History of the Twentieth Century happy, and when she's happy, I'm happy, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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I have a new partial to fill in the gap in my teeth, so I don't sound like Sylvester the Cat anymore…exactly…I still sound like…something…not quite myself, but I guess the partial is an improvement. What do you think?

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century,* when I pick up where I left off today and tell you about the Spanish Coup of 1936, a coup that was not quite a success, but not quite a failure. Request Instructions as to Bodies, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

Oh, and one more thing. The leaders of the coming coup in Spain are, notably, soldiers who made their names in the War of the Rif. General Sanjurjo, for example, was commander of the invasion force that landed at Alhucemas in 1925 and finally broke the Rif rebellion.

And then there was Francisco Franco. He came from a family of naval officers, a family also rumored to include Jewish ancestors. His father was an admiral, but he had the misfortune to come of age in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War when the Spanish Navy was much smaller and had no need of new officers. He became a soldier instead, much to his father's chagrin.

Young Francisco entered a military academy at 14, when he was not only younger than most of the other cadets, but smaller and more slender, with a high-pitched voice. He was bullied mercilessly, and that may explain a few things.

In 1920, the Spanish Army formed the Spanish Foreign Legion, modeled on the French Foreign Legion. The initial members of the Spanish Foreign Legion included soldiers from as far away as China and Japan and one African American, although most of them were actually Spanish nationals, despite the unit's name. Francisco Franco was made deputy commander, and later commander, of the Spanish Foreign Legion. The story goes that at his first appearance before the unit, one of the legionnaires mocked his squeaky voice. Franco calmly drew his pistol and shot the man dead.

After the brutal campaign against the uprising in Asturias, his reputation for ruthlessness was known across Spain.

[music: Closing Theme]

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