

C2. Spanish in Morocco, Rif War, 1920s

Historically, Spain and Morocco have always been closely connected, separated by only nine miles of the Mediterranean Sea at its narrowest point. By the early 20th century, Spain had some control over northern Morocco, an arrangement that was formalized in 1912 when France and Spain agreed to the boundaries of the Spanish 'Protectorate' in Morocco.

From 1921-1926, a major rebellion, under an Amazigh (Berber) leader named Abd el-Krim, broke out in the Rif region. This became known as the Rif War. The Spanish lost tens of thousands of soldiers and required the help of France to put down the revolt. Spanish troops used weapons outlawed since World War I (chemical weapons) and other weapons/tactics that would eventually be used in World War II (tanks and aircraft used in amphibious landings).

To this day, both sides consider this war a significant part of their history. In the Spanish enclave of Melilla (one of two cities in northern Morocco that are still part of Spain), there is a memorial to the thousands of Spanish soldiers killed in the Rif War. Also the war led to instability in the Spanish government; a few years later, General Francisco Franco, a Spanish officer who became a general during his service in the Rif War, led the right-wing faction in the Spanish Civil War.

Moroccan Amazighs of the Rif region also consider this war important. On the one hand, they celebrate their struggle for independence against European colonialism. On the other, they believe that the extremely high childhood cancer rates in the Rif region today is caused by the continuing presence of chemical agents used against them during the war. (Possibly, unexploded canisters of gas that landed in the sea are breaking down after nearly a century and leaching carcinogenic chemicals into the sea near the beaches of El Hoceima.)

Both sides look to the Spanish enclave of Melilla as important to their national interests.

Assignment: Imagine you are living in the Rif region of North Africa in the 1920s. Write 2 diary entries, each at least one double-spaced page long. Choose names for your characters that are authentic. Also, include at least 5 facts or factual details drawn from the history/ geography of the area. (Be sure to look up additional information in addition to the information found in this reading.) Underline the pieces of information you include in each of your diary entries.

-- In one diary entry, you are a Spanish soldier. Describe your experiences during the Rif War. (Look up the Battle of Annual.) Why are you fighting? Who are the forces fighting against you? Why do you think control of that strip of North Africa is important to Spanish national interests?

--In another diary entry, you are an Amazigh fighting against the Spanish. Describe why you are fighting and who your leader is. Why do you want to drive them from the Rif area? How do you feel about Spain's military tactics against you? (Remember that you wouldn't know in the 1920s about the *long-term* effects of poison gas, but you would know about the immediate effects.)