



# The Roots of the July 1936 Coup: The Rebirth of Military Interventionism in the Spanish Infantry Academy, 1893–1927<sup>1</sup>

Foster Chamberlin

To cite this article: Foster Chamberlin (2021) The Roots of the July 1936 Coup: The Rebirth of Military Interventionism in the Spanish Infantry Academy, 1893–1927<sup>1</sup>, War & Society, 40:4, 279–295, DOI: [10.1080/07292473.2021.1969165](https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2021.1969165)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07292473.2021.1969165>



Published online: 27 Aug 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 48



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# The Roots of the July 1936 Coup: The Rebirth of Military Interventionism in the Spanish Infantry Academy, 1893–1927<sup>1</sup>

FOSTER CHAMBERLIN 

*Program in Cultures, Civilisations, and Ideas, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey*

The coup attempt of July 1936 that began the Spanish Civil War differed from its predecessors in that the rebel officers sought to remake both the Spanish state and society. The roots of this new brand of military interventionism have been traced to Spain's colonial wars in Morocco, but this article argues that they extended further back to the rebel officers' training at Spain's Infantry Academy, where, in the wake of defeat in the Spanish-American War, Regenerationist reformers within the academy recast the moral training that cadets received so that they felt it was the army's duty to lead a transformation of Spanish society to return it to the imagined glories of Spain's past.

**KEYWORDS** military education; Regenerationism; militarism; Spanish Civil War; Spanish-American War

## Introduction

The tragic fate of Spain's Second Republic, which began as a jubilant experiment in liberal democratic governance in 1931 but collapsed into civil war and dictatorship just five years later, has meant that historians have studied the origins and causes of the Spanish Civil War almost as much as they have the Civil War itself. In considering the origins of the war, the critical point is that it began as a coup attempt on

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Pamela Radcliff and Geoffrey Jensen for their comments and suggestions. Thanks as well to the staffs of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, the Biblioteca Central Militar, and the Biblioteca del Museo del Ejército for their help with retrieving primary source materials. Some of the research for this work was supported by the Fulbright Foundation.

17–18 July 1936 against Spain's Popular Front government. When the military rebels only managed to seize control of about one third of the country, the ensuing contest with the Republican government and allied workers' parties for the rest of the country constituted a civil war. The answer to why the Civil War began must lie, most immediately, in the question of why a group of officers rebelled in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

On a structural level, early attempts to answer this question situated the rebelliousness of these officers in a long tradition of praetorian politics in Spain dating back to the early nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> While the idea that the military had a duty to intervene in politics if the nation was threatened had certainly not been eliminated from Spanish military thinking, this observation does not provide a full explanation for the July 1936 coup because the nature of this coup was so different from its predecessors. Nineteenth-century military interventions were characterised by relatively bloodless seizures of the reins of government, which were then fairly rapidly handed over to civilian politicians more to the military's liking, even if some military officials did retain key posts in the government, including the premiership. The Restoration regime, which began in 1874, sought to end the chronic instability of Spanish politics by, among other tactics, keeping the military out of politics. In its first few decades, the Restoration largely succeeded in this respect. Yet by the 1910s the army was again intervening directly in politics, and in 1923 General Miguel Primo de Rivera took power in a *coup d'état* and established a military dictatorship. Nevertheless, even Primo de Rivera sought to establish a partially civilian government. By 1936, however, the goal of most of the leading rebels was not simply a change of government but rather a thorough cleansing of the Left from the society.<sup>4</sup> Within a few months of the start of the conflict, it also became clear that the liberal democratic government would not be replaced with another more to the military's liking but rather with a full military dictatorship.

In order to explain this shift, some historians have looked for changes in the military culture of the Spanish Army itself. The lens of military culture allows one to see how not only official regulations and orders but also habits, traditions, and social conditions influence a military organisation's behaviour.<sup>5</sup> These historians

<sup>2</sup> According to Fernando Puell de la Villa, 67 per cent of army officers with commands actively supported the rebellion. The question of why the other 33 per cent supported the Republic is beyond the scope of this article, but Puell de la Villa identifies some of the reasons to be problems in the planning and execution of the coup, the fact that many top commanders remained loyal, the presence of some socialist sympathisers in the army, and the fear that many officers had of losing their jobs: 'Julio de 1936: ¿Un Ejército dividido?', in *Los militares españoles en la Segunda República*, ed. by Jorge Martínez Reverte (Madrid: Editorial Pablo Iglesias, 2012), 82, 87–92.

<sup>3</sup> The most prominent such studies in English are Stanley G. Payne, *Politics and the Military in Modern Spain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) and, although it only covers the Restoration period, Carolyn P. Boyd, *Praetorian Politics in Liberal Spain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> For more on how I understand military culture: Foster Chamberlin, 'Honor Bound: The Military Culture of the Civil Guard and the Political Violence of the Spanish Second Republic, 1931–1936' (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2017), 15–16.

have located the shift in the Spanish Army's military culture in its colonial experience in Morocco from 1909 to 1927.<sup>6</sup> The conflicts there accustomed the officers who fought in them to a brutal style of colonial warfare and increased their distance from Spain's civilian population. During and after the Civil War, rebel leaders then sought to reconquer Spain's government and society to ensure the nation, the military, and the Catholic Church were respected.

Geoffrey Jensen traces the origins of this shift in thinking back further to the Restoration period and particularly to the aftermath of Spain's 1898 defeat in the Spanish-American War. He argues that the Regenerationist movement that followed the war, which envisioned a revitalisation of Spain's education, society, and culture in order to return the country to its former glories, gained a following in the army as officers lost their faith in the Restoration system.<sup>7</sup> Regenerationism began to concentrate the various intellectual currents within the army, which ranged from liberal to Catholic traditionalist, into a new consensus that revolved around an irrationalist embrace of a strident nationalism.<sup>8</sup>

This article analyses how these Regenerationist ideas were incorporated into Spain's military culture through officer training. Specifically, it examines the training of the generation of officers that would rebel in 1936 at the second Infantry Academy of Toledo, which operated from 1893 to 1927 and from which almost all the leaders of the 1936 rebellion graduated. A study of academy textbooks, yearbooks, and publications by professors reveals that after 1898, the Regenerationist movement led some professors to advocate for a shift away from the predominant 'technical' training that nineteenth-century liberals had encouraged, which was based on the memorisation of mathematical and tactical formulas, to a more 'practical' training that encouraged experiential learning that emphasised intangible moral values. While these reformers managed to win few changes to the formal structure of education at the academy, they did influence the daily life, classroom instruction, and speeches there, all of which introduced cadets to the idea that Spain's former glories had to be restored and that they were to be leaders in this transformation. The idea that the outcome of a war was not determined by how well technical plans were designed and executed but rather by the 'moral' characters of the combatants was further developed in Morocco. Then, in the Civil War, these same officers sought to transform not merely the government but all of

<sup>6</sup> Sebastian Balfour, *Deadly Embrace: Morocco and the Road to the Spanish Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Maria Rosa de Madariaga, *Los moros que trajo Franco: La intervención de tropas coloniales en la guerra* (Barcelona: Martínez Roca, 2002); Gustau Nerín, *La guerra que vino de África* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> For more on Regenerationism: Sebastian Balfour, *The End of the Spanish Empire, 1898–1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, 'Moral Strength through Material Defeat? The Consequences of 1898 for Spanish Military Culture,' *War & Society*, 17 (1999), 25–39; Geoffrey Jensen, 'Military Nationalism and the State: The Case of *fin-de siècle* Spain,' *Nations and Nationalism*, 6 (2000), 257–74; Geoffrey Jensen, *Irrational Triumph: Cultural Despair, Military Nationalism, and the Ideological Origins of Franco's Spain* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002); and the expanded translation of *Irrational Triumph*: Geoffrey Jensen, *Cultura militar española. Modernistas, tradicionalistas y liberales*, trans. by Jaime Blasco (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2014).

Spanish society in order to bring about that regeneration of Spain's glory and morality that they had first learned about at the academy. The Restoration regime had hoped that the military academies could train professionalised officers that would stay above the political fray, but the Infantry Academy instead, through the Regenerationist thinking it promoted, planted the seeds of a new kind of military interventionism that would eventually end liberal, constitutional government in Spain all together.

## The History of the Military Academies in Liberal Spain

Spain's military academies were a feature of nineteenth-century liberals' efforts to create a professional army. The long process of transforming the army from a force led by aristocrats to one led by middle-class professionals began with the Bourbon reformers of the eighteenth century, and with them came the first schools for officer training. These efforts were part of a broader effort throughout eighteenth-century Europe to found military schools as places where military theory could be taught. This interest in theory reflected the Enlightenment's desire to explain and control through formulating universal principles.<sup>9</sup> From the beginning, the Enlightenment's faith in reason and science meant that officer training in Spain placed great emphasis on mathematics.<sup>10</sup> The liberal governments of the nineteenth century further developed this training, and, in 1850, the first centralised school for training infantry officers specifically was founded in Toledo, the *Colegio de Infantería*. These nineteenth-century schools followed the liberal approach to education of the time by emphasising technical training that focused on studying mathematics, science, and historical models through memorisation. The colegio was dissolved in 1869 during a chaotic revolutionary period known as the *Sexenio Revolucionario*.

The Restoration brought the *Sexenio* to an end in 1874, and a new academy, the Infantry Academy, was founded in the same year. For the Restoration governments, maintaining the loyalty of the army to the civilian authorities was critical to ensuring that the army's constant interventions in politics during the mid-nineteenth century would not continue. Creating a military academy was the first step in accomplishing this goal because the academy could train a professional officer corps that would learn to understand nationalism as loyalty to the civilian state. But the Restoration governments made no effort to ensure that the academy's professors were teaching nationalism in this way.

Instead, a shift towards an illiberal, extremist form of nationalism took place through a push for more 'practical' instead of 'technical' training. This trend was born in part of an old rivalry between the different branches of the army. The 'technical' branches, particularly the artillery and engineering corps, tended to enjoy greater prestige, were more difficult to join, and required more training in mathematics and science than the non-technical branches, the infantry and cavalry.

<sup>9</sup> Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 9, 20, 59.

<sup>10</sup> José Luis Isabel Sánchez, *La academia de Infantería de Toledo*, vol. 1 (Toledo: Cecaif, 1991), 2, 5.

Therefore, the technical branches favoured separate academies for each branch in order to maintain their exclusive status and provide more technical training, whereas the non-technical branches advocated for the first three years of officer training to be at a combined academy to deemphasise the differences between branches.<sup>11</sup>

In 1882, the *Academia General Militar de Toledo* was created to unite all the academies under one roof and thereby reduce these internecine rivalries.<sup>12</sup> This academy trained many of the officers who would become professors at the second Infantry Academy, as well as the most senior participants in the 1936 rebellion. It was at the *Academia General Militar* that Spanish officer training first acquired a decidedly nationalist tone as a reaction against the scientific focus of the technical branches. The academy also was founded on the belief that making a historically rooted nationalism the central component of an ethos of military honour was the key to Prussian military success, particularly in its recent victory over France in the Franco-Prussian War. Therefore, the *Academia General's* professors began to teach cadets this conservative and traditionalist brand of nationalism based on a glorification of Spain's military past.<sup>13</sup> The *Academia General Militar* experiment was, however, short-lived. When a former artillery officer became minister of war in 1893, he brought back the practice of having a separate academy for each branch of the army.<sup>14</sup>

In Toledo, the *Academia General* was succeeded in 1893 by the second Infantry Academy, the school that is the subject of this article. Many graduates of the Infantry Academy were field officers by the time the military rebellion began in 1936, and a large majority of these ranks supported the rebellion.<sup>15</sup> Most of the leading rebel officers also graduated from this second Infantry Academy. The year 1910 had an exceptional graduating class that included Francisco Franco, Juan Yagüe, Emilio Esteban Infantes, Camilo Alonso Vega, and Lisardo Doval, all of whom would become important leaders on the Nationalist side of the war.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, this article will concentrate on this second Infantry Academy and especially the years 1907 to 1910 to demonstrate how the historically rooted nationalism first introduced in the *Academia General Militar* was further developed and taught to the next generation of officers through a push for enhanced practical

<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Cardona, 'Prologue', *La Academia General Militar de Zaragoza (1928-1931)*, by Carlos Blanco Escolá (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1989), 10.

<sup>12</sup> José Luis Isabel Sánchez, 'La formación de los oficiales de Infantería entre 1909 y 1921', in *El Protectorado Español en Marruecos: La historia trascendida*, dir. by Manuel Aragón Reyes (2013), 3:326-7.

<sup>13</sup> Jensen, *Irrational Triumph*, 26-7; Jensen, 'Military nationalism', 262-3; Blanco Escolá, 222.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Cardona, 'La reforma de la enseñanza militar en la II República (1931-1932)', in *La enseñanza militar en España: un análisis sociológico*, ed. by Julio Busquets and Valentia Fernández Vargas (Madrid: C.I.F.A.S., 1986), 70.

<sup>15</sup> Lieutenants backed the rebellion even more strongly, and many of them were graduates of the second *Academia General Militar*, which was run by Infantry Academy graduates (see the last section of the body of this article): Puell de la Villa, 'Julio de 1936', 94-5; Sergio Sánchez Martínez, 'La reapertura de la Academia General Militar de Zaragoza (1927-1931)', *STVDIVM. Revista de Humanidades*, 21 (2015), 167.

<sup>16</sup> Ricardo de la Cierva, *Franco: La Historia* ([Madrid]: Editorial Fénix, 2000), 44-5.

training after 1898, which led to an increased emphasis on the moral values of discipline and sacrifice. This new mentality ultimately reintroduced the justifications for military interventions in politics in Spanish military thinking, this time in a more virulent and dangerous form than ever before.

### The Argument for Practical Training at the Second Infantry Academy

On paper, the second Infantry Academy followed in the footsteps of its predecessors in that almost all classes were of a technical or academic nature, and there were no classes specifically devoted to moral or cultural indoctrination.<sup>17</sup> Naturally, most of the courses were concerned with military regulations, tactics, and weaponry. Some professors at the Infantry Academy, however, began to push for a program that emphasised morality, military honour, and nationalism over scientific and technical training. Even though they never succeeded in changing the curriculum, their writings and the recollections of former cadets demonstrate that they did succeed in imparting their Regenerationist way of thinking to their students.

The shift started in 1898 with Spain's devastating loss to the United States in the Spanish-American War, known to the Spanish as '*El Desastre*'. Professors explained the defeat as a failure of Restoration politicians rather than of the Spanish military.<sup>18</sup> Regenerationism allowed the army to avoid placing blame for defeat on its own failings while suggesting a restorative path forward in which the military could envision itself taking a leading role. Therefore, professors at the Infantry Academy taught that it was army officers who would lead the regeneration of Spain.<sup>19</sup>

The New Education movement, which had begun earlier with the foundation of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, became a major part of the Regenerationist effort. Educational reformers hoped to prepare Spanish youth for the task of revitalising the nation by shifting education away from textbooks and memorisation towards holistic and experiential learning.<sup>20</sup> While this movement had a wide impact, it is usually associated with Republican and anarchist secularisers, whose efforts culminated in the educational reforms of the Second Republic, which were then quickly rolled back by the Franco regime.<sup>21</sup> The fact that reforms along the lines of New Education thinkers made education at the academy more vitalist and fervently nationalist suggests though that in this movement lay the origins of not only the educational reforms of the Second Republic but also the thinking within the military that would ultimately precipitate the fall of the Republic.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Jensen, *Irrational Triumph*, 115.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Preston, *Franco: A Biography* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Jensen, *Irrational Triumph*, 16; Fernando Puell de la Villa, *Historia del Ejército en España* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2000), 122.

<sup>20</sup> Anna Kathryn Kendrick, *Humanizing Childhood in Early Twentieth-Century Spain* (Oxford: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> Carolyn P. Boyd, *Historia Patria: Politics, History, and National Identity in Spain, 1875–1975* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Jensen, *Irrational Triumph*, 67.

Among Spanish military intellectuals, the disaster of 1898 inspired a renewed effort to learn from the success of Prussia and its German allies in the Franco-Prussian War. Yet to what German success was to be attributed was open to debate. Immediately after Spain's defeat, the tendency was to highlight the importance of the army in German society and its scientific approach to warfare, as had Spanish military thinkers since before the days of the Academia General.<sup>23</sup> Yet reformist officers began to note that Helmuth von Moltke had credited much of his success to studying Clausewitz, and one of Clausewitz's arguments was that 'moral' qualities like a fighting spirit were necessary for victory.<sup>24</sup> For Clausewitz, rigid mathematical strategy and grand manoeuvre were less important than having officers who would display bravery, directness, and resolution when leading men into battle.<sup>25</sup> Romantic military writers of the early nineteenth century like Clausewitz, in their arguments against the technical and scientific perspectives of the previous century's Enlightened military theorists, used the term 'moral' to describe these non-technical, psychological qualities generally. One can also see the word used in this way in contexts like the class schedule at the Infantry Academy.<sup>26</sup> But by the late nineteenth century, military thinkers began to move beyond the Romantics and attribute value judgments to these 'moral' qualities, considering them to be ethically superior and essential for the nation. The reformist professors followed this line of thought to conclude that the priority in training cadets needed to be in developing the 'moral' qualities necessary for leadership rather than their technical skills.<sup>27</sup>

Hence the calls for reform in yearbooks and publications by professors at the Infantry Academy were frequent beginning in the first decade of the twentieth century. At the core of the arguments against the focus on technical training and memorisation was a concern that the Academy should be teaching cadets more practical skills that would be more clearly useful to them as officers. By practical education the reformers meant more field exercises and hands-on learning that would allow students to learn adaptation, initiative, and critical thinking, as well as more study of geography, history, and writing and less of mathematics.<sup>28</sup> But for the academy's reformers, most of whom were professors writing for the military press, this also meant more moral education, that is to say, a move away from memorisation of mathematical formulas and tactical manoeuvres towards learning from professors' examples about values supposedly needed for a fighting spirit such as patriotism and honour. The shift is evident as early as 1903, when Major José Ibáñez Marín, who was influenced by the *Institución de Libre Enseñanza* and had previously encouraged the technical development of the army by founding the journal *Revista*

<sup>23</sup> José Ibáñez Marín and Luis Angulo Escobar, *Los cadetes* (Madrid: Establecimiento tipográfico «el trabajo», 1903), 87.

<sup>24</sup> Jensen, 'Moral Strength', 28–31; Gat, 67–8.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Howard, 'The Influence of Clausewitz', in *On War*, by Carl von Clausewitz, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 34–5.

<sup>26</sup> Gat, 199–250.

<sup>27</sup> The Spanish word '*moral*' could also mean 'morale' or 'mortality' in some contexts and could also sometimes have more than one of these connotations simultaneously.

<sup>28</sup> *Academia de Infantería: Memoria de los cursos de 1918–1919 y 1919–1920* (Escuela tipográfica y encuadernación del Colegio de María Cristina para Huérfanos de la Infantería, [1920]), 13.

*Técnica de Infantería y Caballería*, complained in a nostalgic book about the Infantry Academy that ever since the Restoration of the monarchy in 1874, ‘the moral factors stopped being given prominence so that with the peak in material interests [the academy] is abandoning its orientation into hands that, in the end, would incline one to the side of egotism and weakness’.<sup>29</sup> The sentiment is typical of the military Regenerationists, who attributed Spain’s recent defeat to a national moral decline rather than military weakness, a sentiment that Ibáñez Marín echoed when he drew a parallel between Spain’s defeat in the Spanish-American War and that of France in the Franco-Prussian War: ‘after periods of military grandeur and its political peak, Spain, like France, had their ordeal of disasters produced by egotism and lack of foresight’.<sup>30</sup>

Captain Antonio García Pérez, a professor at the academy from 1905–1912 and one of the most prolific military writers of early twentieth-century Spain, was particularly vehement in his condemnation of the curriculum’s scientific focus.<sup>31</sup> Influenced by Herbert Spencer, García Pérez believed that an English model of education that promoted imagination and initiative was key to getting Spain back on the path of patriotic progress.<sup>32</sup> Regarding the academy, he felt that ‘the mission of the officer is not military in all its forms or scientific in its varied development; to make military tactics or science the basis of an entire system is to undo the evolution of the army’.<sup>33</sup> He argued that the academy should instead refocus its course of study on practical subjects and morality:

Let’s have military tactics with a vigorous soul, with a thirst for sacrifice, with firmness in character, with group education, with chivalry in the air; let’s have science with mental stimulation, with strengthening regulations, with well-planned programs, with regularity for the methods, and with applications for the theories.<sup>34</sup>

One aspect of education at the academy that received special criticism from the reformers was its emphasis of memorisation, which was also subject to disparagement from the New Education movement. Rote learning was the norm in the academy, and exams tested only the students’ ability to memorise passages from their textbooks.<sup>35</sup> García Pérez, for example, thought memorisation important but

<sup>29</sup> Ibáñez Marín and Angulo Escobar, *Los cadetes*, 142.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>31</sup> For more information on García Pérez: Jensen, ‘Fighting for God and King: Military Traditionalism,’ in *Irrational Triumph*, 99–114; Jensen, ‘El tradicionalista: Antonio García Pérez,’ in *Cultura militar española*, 157–89; ‘Las preocupaciones magrebíes de un militar ilustrado en el primer tercio del siglo XX. La obra de Antonio García Pérez sobre Marruecos,’ in *Protectorado Español*, 429–518; Pedro Luis Pérez Frías, *La vida que fue: Antonio García Pérez—Un intelectual militar olvidado* (Estudios Especializados, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Antonio García Pérez, *Un programa para la enseñanza primaria en España* (Madrid: Imp. de Ambrosio Pérez y compañía, 1905).

<sup>33</sup> Antonio García Pérez, *Nuevo concepto de la enseñanza militar* (Barcelona: Imp. De la Revista Científico-Militar, 1910), 13.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey Jensen, ‘Morocco and Spain in the eyes of Antonio García Pérez,’ in *Protectorado Español*, 515; José Vicente Herrero Pérez, *The Spanish Military and Warfare from 1899 to the Civil War* (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2017), 36–7.

despaired at ‘all the energy consumed in learning the regulations word for word, in cramming the brain with thousands of geographical names, in memorising tons of numbers and formulas, in reproducing dull descriptions, in dumping into the mind all the articles of the Military Code or the Campaign Regulations!’<sup>36</sup> He believed students were better off freeing themselves from textbooks and instead learning more practical knowledge that professors could impart directly to them. In fact, he suggested eliminating textbooks entirely, arguing that the students ‘ought to be less slaves of the books and more products of explanation or of visual experience; they ought to be, in a word, less theoreticians and more real in comprehension’.<sup>37</sup>

The arguments of reformers like García Pérez did not go unnoticed. In 1908, he was appointed auxiliary to the director of the new Spanish Infantry Museum, which was founded inside the academy to provide history students with a hands-on learning experience.<sup>38</sup> The academy’s syllabi were also reformed in 1913 to place more emphasis on active learning, history and geography, physical fitness, and moral behaviour and less emphasis on textbooks and mathematics, yet these changes were reversed five years later.<sup>39</sup>

A key figure in the implementation of reforms was Colonel José Villalba Riquelme, a long-time professor at the academy who became its director in 1909.<sup>40</sup> His pet project was to increase physical education, which was a concept originally associated with the interest of the Enlightenment and nineteenth-century liberalism in human perfection.<sup>41</sup> In the nineteenth century, physical education became very popular throughout Europe, fuelled by romanticism’s interest in holism. Each country debated which gymnastics method to adopt, with leading contenders being those of the German Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852), known as *Turnwater* Jahn, and the Swede Pehr Henrik Ling (1776–1839). Jahn’s thinking relied on competitive exercises using gymnastics equipment to build nationalist bodies and spirits, while Ling sought to develop a ‘scientific’ method that brought medical benefits primarily through free exercises.<sup>42</sup>

Within the Spanish military of the mid-nineteenth century, the engineering officer José María Aparici led the way in expanding physical education, establishing the Gymnasium of the Corps of Engineers in 1846 in Guadalajara.<sup>43</sup> By the time of the Restoration, interest in physical education had reached new heights in Spain, but this time its study in the military was led by Villalba in the infantry rather than the

<sup>36</sup> García Pérez, *Nuevo concepto*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> García Pérez, *Nuevo concepto*, 24. Jensen points out though that García Pérez himself published many textbooks that were designed to aid memorisation: Jensen, *Irrational Triumph*, 106.

<sup>38</sup> Pérez Frías, 118.

<sup>39</sup> Herrero Pérez, 39–40.

<sup>40</sup> Hilario González, *Resumen histórico de la Academia de Infantería* (Toledo: Imprenta-Escuela Tipográfica del Colegio de M.<sup>a</sup> Cristina para Huérfanos de la Infantería, 1925), 148; Isabel Sánchez, *Academia de Infantería*, 276.

<sup>41</sup> Xavier Torredadella Flix, ‘Antecedentes en la institucionalización de la gimnástica militar española (1800–1852)’, *Revista de Historia Militar* 56 (2012), 185–244.

<sup>42</sup> Christiane Eisenberg, ‘Charismatic nationalist leader: *Turnwater* Jahn,’ *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 13 (1996), 14–27; Samantha Melnick, ‘Per Henrik Ling – Pioneer of Physiotherapy and Gymnastics,’ *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*, 1 (2015), 15–16.

<sup>43</sup> Torredadella Flix, ‘Antecedentes en la institucionalización,’ 224–6, 234–5.

Corps of Engineers. In 1910, Villalba dispatched officers to France and Sweden to study their physical education methods.<sup>44</sup> Villalba and his followers were particularly interested in Ling's 'Swedish Method'. Ling's appeal to the infantry may have been because of his movement's combination of scientific and holistic language.<sup>45</sup> The officer sent to Sweden advocated the army's adoption of the Swedish method in rationalist terms — 'gymnastics ought to be, not just another class, but an integral part of a methodical and reasoned plan of studies' — but also spoke of physical exercises with more idealistic, nationalist language: 'they will give the youth more strength, more health, and greater ideals upon which a great *patria* [fatherland] can rest'.<sup>46</sup> The shift in initiative away from the liberal perspective of the engineers was completed in 1919 when Villalba, as minister of war, founded a Central School of Gymnastics, which was intended for the entire army but housed in the Infantry Academy.<sup>47</sup>

When the Infantry Academy was founded in 1893, its instruction very much followed the nineteenth-century liberal model of technical training with its emphasis on the memorisation of mathematical and tactical formulas. But the Spanish defeat in 1898 attracted some professors to the Regenerationist and educational reform movements of the time, and they advocated for more 'practical' instruction based on experiential learning, physical activity, and moral indoctrination. While these reformers won few changes to the academy's curriculum, their writings indicate that the military brand of Regenerationism that glorified moral renewal and physical vitality was being echoed in the halls of the academy. These teachings were passed down to cadets through classes, daily routines, and special events.

## Moral Training

The second Infantry Academy only had one course specifically dedicated to the moral training that the reformers so encouraged. Even this class was in fact about how to give moral instruction to enlisted men, but of course, the lessons would be absorbed by the students as well. *La educación moral del soldado* by Enrique Ruiz Fornells was the regulation textbook for this course for decades. The primary military virtues that he urged cadets to instil in their future subordinates were duty, patriotism, discipline, abnegation, valour, and honour, with discipline being the most important of these.<sup>48</sup> These virtues remained an accurate summary of the values that Spanish officers consistently emphasised throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite the fact that Ruiz Fornells was himself a liberal

<sup>44</sup> Xavier Torredadella Flix, 'La Educación Física Comparada en España (1806–1936),' *Social and Education History*, 3 (2014), 30–1, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Anders Ottosson, 'The First Historical Movements of Kinesiology: Scientification in the Borderline Between Physical Culture and Medicine Around 1850,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 27 (2010), 1901.

<sup>46</sup> Federico González, *La educación física en Suecia* (Toledo: Imp. Lib. Militar Vda. e hijos de J. Peláez, 1911), 54–6, quoted in Torredadella, 40–1.

<sup>47</sup> 'Escuela de Educación Física,' *Diario Oficial del Ministerio de la Guerra*, 30 December 1919, 1084–5.

<sup>48</sup> Enrique Ruiz Fornells, *La educación moral del soldado*, 6th edn (Toledo: Imprenta Librería y Encuadernación de Rafael Gómez-Menor, 1909).

and his book was written in 1894 before the height of the Regenerationist period. For the reformers, such instruction was of special importance for steering the Spanish Army in the right political direction. One curriculum proposal asserted that 'it is very dangerous to allow one to speak to the soldier about anarchism, socialism, morale, discipline, or *Patria*, and to imbue him with ideas and provide him with moral habits, who does not know what an idea, a habit, an emotion, an act of charity, a social body, a duty, or a right is'.<sup>49</sup>

With only one class on moral education in the curriculum, most moral training took place informally through the examples of professors, the structure of daily life, and special events. The academy reformers emphasised the examples of the professors themselves as keys to teaching cadets proper military values. Professors were specially selected to be examples of military virtue, glorified as the most important component of the cadet's education, and expected to mould every aspect of course instruction and time spent outside of the class alike into a model of how to live a virtuous life.<sup>50</sup> This emphasis on the example of the professors placed responsibly for moral education primarily in the hands of each individual instructor, rather than in the curriculum, thereby giving the instructors the freedom to teach their students largely as they saw fit, even if this instruction went against the wishes of the state.

This freedom that the professors enjoyed allowed them to advance the moral education of the cadets in other courses not specifically dedicated to the subject, and the cadets' one semester of military history was the most obvious place to do so. For decades, the textbook for the military history course was *Curso de Historia Militar* by Francisco Martín Arrúe, first published in 1887. The work is an example of how texts that still broadly conformed to the liberal worldview also contained within them the roots of hyper-nationalist and vitalist thinking. This text was palatable enough for all factions within the army for it to be the regulation military history textbook at all the military academies, and, despite going through many editions, little of the text was ever changed. In many ways, the work reflects a liberal, scientific attitude that history is a progression of developments in technology, strategy, and tactics from which lessons can be learned. Nonetheless, the lesson that Arrúe drew from the events he narrated was essentially that warfare is not just a science. Instead, he traced the development of the 'art of war', concentrating on the examples of brilliant tacticians (preferably Spanish) like Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba 'El Gran Capitán', Alexander Farnese, Gustavus Adolphus, and Frederick the Great. In his introduction, Arrúe argued that history cannot be reduced to a collection of facts and formulas to be memorised. Instead, he described history as governed by God's moral order and highlights the humanistic side of history in a way that foreshadows the language of the Infantry Academy reformers: 'History is not an arid narration of facts ... today one studies History with a preference for, in all the diverse manifestations of human knowledge, the customs, beliefs, and preoccupu-

<sup>49</sup> *Academia de Infantería: Memoria*, 22.

<sup>50</sup> González, *Resumen histórico*, 195.

pations that in each period excite Humanity and drive it forward'.<sup>51</sup> Above all, Arrúe deployed historical examples to reinforce the academy's incessant message for cadets: discipline and valour were the keys to victory. Even as much of the text describes the strategies and tactics of famous generals, Arrúe always took the time to point out the rigid discipline of history's most successful armies and highlighted cases where soldiers' valour beat the odds.

The teaching of history was an essential feature of the liberal effort to encourage nationalist sentiment, but it was also another aspect of that project that could easily be used for illiberal ends.<sup>52</sup> In his history textbook, Arrúe went out of his way to describe examples from Spanish history, while ignoring less glorious moments such as Spain's recent defeat in the Spanish-American War. Naturally, he exalted the sixteenth century as the age of 'Spain's Military Supremacy', but concluded that by the seventeenth Spanish military power had entered a decline. 'The military decadence of Spain began to manifest itself through the lack of Spanish names among those who led our armies ... with military decadence comes, as always happens, political decadence'.<sup>53</sup> The implication here is that if a nation's military is not well maintained, the prestige of that nation can also be damaged, a fate that must be avoided at all costs. When treating foreign examples as far back in time as the ancient Greeks, Arrúe consistently emphasised the importance of having motivated troops that came from the people while warning against the untrustworthiness of mercenaries. This argument was typical for liberals who saw service in the military as essential to the process of creating nationalist feeling, but it implies that a military leader who is fighting for a nation is on the right side of history.

Beyond what the professors could teach through their examples and classes, the structure of academy life itself was thought to be part of the cadets' moral training. It was built around instilling the most important of all the virtues cadets were to learn: discipline. Discipline was important to the academies' liberal project because it would make officers believe that they had to obey the orders of their civilian commanders and maintain their loyal to the government in power. The teaching of discipline began with each cadet being assigned a number that was displayed on all his clothing and would stay with him throughout his time at the academy.<sup>54</sup> In this way, the cadet would immediately begin to subsume his individual identity to that of the military collective. Once classes began, cadets followed a strict schedule that spelled out how they would spend every hour of the day, including when they would get up, pray, go to class, study, eat their meals, and go to bed.<sup>55</sup>

While these methods had all been standard ways to teach discipline at military academies in the nineteenth century, they were also subject to criticism from the

<sup>51</sup> *Curso de Historia Militar*, 2nd edn (Toledo: Imprenta, librería y encuadernación de Menor Hermanos, 1893), VI–VIII.

<sup>52</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 332–6; Boyd, *Historia Patria*, 67–8.

<sup>53</sup> *Curso de Historia Militar*, 6th edn (Toledo: Imprenta y encuadernación del Colegio de María Cristina para Huérfanos de la Infantería, 1912), 193–4.

<sup>54</sup> Francisco Franco quoted in Vicente Pozuelo, *Los últimos 476 días de Franco* (Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1980), 92.

<sup>55</sup> *Academia de Infantería: Memoria*, 158, 164.

reformers. A 1920 report on the academy went so far as to claim that the only method of educating had previously been ‘scolding, threats, and punishments’.<sup>56</sup> The newer attitude was that ‘moral punishment and dignified humiliation are the most effective methods’.<sup>57</sup> Villalba authorised each cadet to be required to carry a handbook with him at all times, which had to be presented to any professor at any time upon request. The handbook contained, in addition to a variety of useful information such as the schedule of classes, the cadet’s grades, a list of all the more serious punishments he had received, an evaluation of his various capacities, such as temperament, memory, imagination, love of work, and character. In particular, the cadet himself was required to write down each punishment he received, the hope being that this act would promote reflection and that, in the words of the aforementioned report, ‘every time he presents the handbook he will blush upon showing his offense, each presentation being a new punishment’.<sup>58</sup>

The shift in emphasis that the reformers suggested from physical to social methods of control was in line with a broader trend towards the professionalisation of Western militaries in the early twentieth century that Morris Janowitz describes in the United States as a ‘shift from authoritarian domination toward a greater reliance on manipulation, persuasion, and group consensus. It represents the beginning of a more rational and more managerial approach to the problems of organizing men for combat’.<sup>59</sup> The effect in Spain, however, was far from a move to ‘a more rational and more managerial approach’. Again, German military thinking had a strong influence on the Spanish, but German ideas came to Spain by way of the French. In fact, France’s reaction to its own defeat in the Franco-Prussian War served as a model for how Spanish intellectuals would respond to defeat in the Spanish-American War.<sup>60</sup> The French method of adopting the German model was to glorify the idea of *élan*— a fighting spirit that rejected complicated battlefield manoeuvre in favour of a blind glorification of the offensive.<sup>61</sup> The rhetoric in the Spanish Army followed a similar line, emphasising the winning of glory through sacrifice to the *patria*, while still rigidly insisting on blind discipline. For example, García Pérez explained that ‘the military life is not all fun and games; discipline, that harsh law, breaks ambition and limits one to nobler purposes. The soldier does not belong to himself; he is only an atom of the formidable organism that governs him’.<sup>62</sup> This glorification of abnegation and discipline was meant to teach blind obedience rather than initiative.

The change in thinking about discipline did have its effect, nonetheless, on how officers thought about their loyalty. Instead of being primarily a means of ensuring obedience to the civilian state, discipline primarily came to refer to loyalty to the

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 35.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 38–40.

<sup>59</sup> Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1960), 38–9.

<sup>60</sup> Vicente Cacho Viu, ‘Francia 1870–España 1898,’ in *Repensar el 98* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1997), 77–115.

<sup>61</sup> Howard, 34, 36–7; Gat, *Development of Military Thought*, 114–72.

<sup>62</sup> *Breve Bosquejo Histórico de la Academia de Infantería*.

army itself, which was represented as a new family that the cadets would join. Cadets learned to earn respect for their obedience from their closed military society rather than from the broader society. In fact, academy professors hoped to train officers who would be models for civilian society, leaders in enhancing discipline and order. This desire to impose military order on society was central to the ideology of the rebel officers in the Civil War.

The ceremonies and speeches that dotted the Infantry Academy calendar were another way to instil military values outside of a formal classroom setting. The speeches cadets heard displayed a remarkable uniformity in the messages they conveyed. Sacrifice and abnegation were their central points, and cadets were urged to have a religious devotion to these ideas. This idea of sacrifice was of course also instilled to ensure that the future officers would be willing to die in battle. As General Primo de Rivera put it in an address to cadets, 'for whom could one give better one's life than for the *Patria*, in which is contained all the most sacred loves of man! ... Military science is, essentially, the science of sacrifice'.<sup>63</sup> The idea of sacrifice was further extended to be a glorification of the hardships that went with living a military life — the harsh conditions, the physical rigor, and the potential for psychologically jarring experiences. Together, discipline and sacrifice fell under the category of abnegation, a willingness to give up the entirety of civilian life for the rigours of a military one or, in the words of one book of advice to cadets, the demand that 'the soldier sacrifice his pleasures, his passions, his liberty, and even renounce his life in service of the King and the interest of the *Patria*'.<sup>64</sup> Cadets were expected to become officers for whom self-interest was entirely replaced with concern for the collective interest of the army and, by extension, the *patria*. Note that these examples characterise sacrifice as being made for the *patria*, not for the state or a particular government, thereby leaving open the possibility that sacrifice could be made for the *patria* and against a government that was perceived to be an enemy of the *patria*. By 1919, in the midst of a period of social unrest, the academy's director was bold enough to link this idea of sacrifice directly to that of political intervention. He told the graduating class of that year that 'it is Spain for which you have sworn to sacrifice everything ... Spain, threatened today, like all civilised nations, with becoming a prisoner of anarchism ... Only the Army can prevent that from occurring'.<sup>65</sup>

Even if cadets did not have much class time dedicated specifically to moral training, the values they were expected to teach their men once they were officers, especially discipline and sacrifice, were ones they themselves were taught in every facet of the academy experience. The examples of professors, their history course, the speeches they attended, and the very structure of daily life all reinforced these core values for cadets. When it came to moral training, they for the most part learned through experience rather than memorisation, as the academy's reformers had desired. In so far as this training was conducted primarily outside of the official

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in González, *Resumen histórico*, 222–4.

<sup>64</sup> *Consejos a los Alumnos de la Academia de Infantería* (Toledo: Imp. particular de la Academia de Infantería, 1917), 12–13.

<sup>65</sup> *Academia de Infantería: Memoria*, 150.

curriculum and courses, it was done with no supervision from Restoration governments. Without this supervision, academy instructors could easily teach the the army's core moral values, meant to ensure its unwavering obedience to the government in power, very differently after 1898. Discipline was to be followed and sacrifice made in the name of the army itself and a mythologised *patria* that was to be restored, rather than in the name of the civil state. By 1936, many officers who had attended the academy were ready to take over that state itself in order to impose upon all of Spain the values they had first learned at the academy.

## The Impact of the Second Infantry Academy on the Rebel Generation of Officers

Many of the specific tactics that the rebel officers employed during the Civil War, as well as their glorification of violence and brutality, can be traced to their experiences in Morocco. The understanding of military values and patriotism that these officers had, which allowed them to justify establishing a military dictatorship of a kind previously unknown to Spain, has its origin in the officers' training at the Infantry Academy in the context of the growing conservatism and ultra-nationalism within the army in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The Infantry Academy professors who were taken with the Regenerationist nationalism of the time provided inspiration and assistance to cadets who would go on to be leaders in the rebellion. In 1912, Villalba Riquelme agreed to have some of his former students, including Francisco Franco, join him at a posting in Morocco.<sup>66</sup> The glorification of the physical by a professor like Villalba was easily converted into the glorification of combat by officers who made their careers in the wars in Morocco. Indeed, it was Villalba who authorised the founding of the Spanish Legion in 1920 while he was minister of war. The Legion's first commander was José Millán-Astray, who linked its violent ethos to his moral teaching at the academy. Like the Regenerationist thinker Ramiro de Maeztu, Millán-Astray admired the Japanese Bushido code, which he said inspired 'my moral teaching to the infantry cadets in the Alcázar [castle] of Toledo, when I had the honour of being their teacher in the years 1911–1912. And the Bushido also supported the credo of the Legion, with its spirit of combat and death'.<sup>67</sup> Franco took command of the Legion in 1923, and it went on to become one of the Nationalists' elite units in the Civil War.

The influence of the reformist professors at the Infantry Academy on the generation of officers that led the rebellion of 1936 can be seen most clearly at the second *Academia Militar General*, which was founded by Primo de Rivera in 1927 (after a failed attempt to do so by Villalba in 1918) as an attempt to lessen the divisions between branches of the army after the artillery's involvement in a coup attempt the previous year and to reduce the number of new officers entering the army. With

<sup>66</sup> De la Cierva, 45.

<sup>67</sup> 'Prólogo del general Millán Astray a la edición castellana de la obra *El Bushido*, de Inazo Nitobë (1941)', Blanco Escolá, 238; Jensen, *Irrational Triumph*, 151.

Franco as director, the *Academia Militar General* drew inspiration from the French and German models and instituted the reforms for which the Infantry Academy's would-be reformers had long advocated. The new academy's planners openly cited the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* and the leading educational reformer Francisco Giner de los Ríos as among their influences.<sup>68</sup> Even the decree establishing the new academy stated its object to be moral training; it was 'to educate, instruct, and morally prepare future officers, with the purpose of giving them the spirit, comradeship, character, dignity, and austerity that the military profession in all specialities requires'.<sup>69</sup> Franco and his team abolished textbooks and exams and decreased the class time devoted to theoretical training and studying in favour more time for physical education and training in the field.<sup>70</sup> He argued, as had his reformist predecessors, that rather than through textbooks, cadets would learn best through the examples of their professors, and so the academy gave priority to officers with combat experience in making appointments to professorships.<sup>71</sup> By all accounts, Franco was obsessed with the moral training of the cadets, saying later that 'the military academies are the laboratories where not only is the doctrine of armies forged, but also where the morale of generations is created. It is not enough that instruction be perfect and morale good; something more is necessary: that it transcend these walls, that it arrives in all corners'.<sup>72</sup> In his speeches to cadets, Franco evoked a nostalgic vision of the past while praising 'dreams and romanticism' rather than rationality.<sup>73</sup> He was echoing the Regenerationist language he had heard as a cadet at the Infantry Academy in a more extreme form, indicating the growing prevalence of this outlook within the Spanish Army by the 1920s. It would take a civil war to make it hegemonic.

## Conclusion

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Spain's military academies were part of the Restoration regime's effort to end the country's tradition of military interventionism through professionalising the armed forces, but, in its efforts to placate the military, the Restoration also ceded control of the teaching and indoctrination that took place at these academies to the military itself. After 1898, the calls for reform by professors at the Infantry Academy, who were interested in the Regenerationist and educational reform movements of the time and the example of the Prussian/German military, seemed innocuous: more 'practical', experiential, and physical training as opposed to memorisation, and more 'moral' training to build a fighting spirit in the cadets as opposed to 'technical' training focused on math and science. While these reformers achieved few changes in the

<sup>68</sup> Sánchez Martínez, 144, 166; Herrero Pérez, 163, 168–9, 171.

<sup>69</sup> 'Real Decreto Núm. 369', *Gaceta de Madrid*, 22 February 1927, 1100.

<sup>70</sup> 'Discurso del General Director en el acto de despedida de los alumnos por el cierre de la Academia, el 14 de julio de 1931', in Blanco Escolá, 196, 205.

<sup>71</sup> Blanco Escolá, 100; Sánchez Martínez, 164.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Blanco Escolá, 106.

<sup>73</sup> 'Discurso pronunciado por el General Director en el acto de la apertura del curso (1929–1930), el 1 de octubre de 1929', *ibid.*, 232.

curriculum and teaching methods, their arguments were representative of a changed Spanish military culture that the academy introduced to cadets in the early twentieth century. Professors' examples, speeches at special events, and the structure of academy life itself taught cadets that they were entering a military family that was to be a leader in the regeneration of Spanish society and the return to its glorious past. Discipline and sacrifice would be their guiding principles, principles that could serve to ensure loyalty to the liberal state. But when these values were presented as being owed to the army and the *patria* rather than the state, the seeds of a new military interventionism were planted. This interventionism would seek not simply a change of government to keep the nation on the proper path, but rather a transformation of society to regenerate it in the image of a traditional, Catholic, and disciplined past. The officers who rebelled against the government of the Second Republic developed these ideas in the Moroccan Wars and during the Republic, but most were first introduced to such thinking in the wake of the Spanish-American War at the Infantry Academy in the 1900s and 1910s.

### Notes on contributor

Foster Chamberlin is an assistant professor in the Program in Cultures, Civilisations, and Ideas at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. He holds a doctorate in modern European history with a specialisation in Spain from the University of California, San Diego. He has received fellowships from the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, The Fulbright Foundation, and the HISPANEX program, and has published previously in *European History Quarterly*, *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*, and *Revista de Historiografía*. He is currently writing a book on how the military culture of Spain's gendarmerie, the Civil Guard, contributed to the political violence of the country's Second Republic.

Correspondence to: Foster Chamberlin. Email: [fosterpchambers@gmail.com](mailto:fosterpchambers@gmail.com)

### ORCID

Foster Chamberlin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2301-3210>