

2015

Review of Ángel Alcalde, *Los excombatientes franquistas (1936-1965): La cultura de guerra del fascismo español y la Delegación Nacional de Excombatientes*

David Messenger

University of Wyoming, dmesseng@uwyo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

Recommended Citation

Messenger, David (2015) "Review of Ángel Alcalde, *Los excombatientes franquistas (1936-1965): La cultura de guerra del fascismo español y la Delegación Nacional de Excombatientes*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 40 : Iss. 1 , Article 15. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol40/iss1/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact jesus@udel.edu.

Ángel Alcalde. *Los excombatientes franquistas (1936-1965): La cultura de guerra del fascismo español y la Delegación Nacional de Excombatientes* Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2014. 411 pp.

Ángel Alcalde offers an important perspective on an often overlooked element of the Francoist regime, the ex-soldiers of the Nationalist forces and their role within state and society after the Civil War. In four chapters, Alcalde examines this group from the Civil War through the period of first Francoism, the Cold War era of 1945-59 and into the beginning of the final era of the regime, up to 1965. His focus is primarily on the *Delegación Nacional de Excombatientes* (DNE), formed as part of the Falange after the conflict of 1936-1939.

Although formed by the violence and especially the use of violence vs. other soldiers, police and civilians in the Civil War, many Francoist soldiers volunteered having come from the growing street violence of the Second Republic in the years before the Civil War. What most got in the Nationalist Army that they did not have before was extensive and consistent ideological training. In the aftermath of the Civil War, an ideological focus remained, especially in the era of the Second World War due to support for and participation in Spain's Blue Division fighting the Soviet Union alongside Nazi forces and in the use of ex-combatants in the Francoist concentration camps and repression system; in April 1941, 300 of 400 guards hired that month were Nationalist ex-combatants (190).

The creation of the DNE as part of the national Falange in late 1939 was part of the larger Francoist and Falangist project to take the experience of war and mold it into a project of national renovation. Despite the "spiritual" nature of its mission, however, much of the DNE at first became involved in finding work for ex-soldiers or offering diverse services for them in DNE "Ex-Combatant Homes" that opened in Spain's major cities, the first in Barcelona in October 1941 (168). Nonetheless, the ideological element was strong, and the DNE was forced into a period of "hibernation" after the Second World War as the regime sought to recalibrate its ideology to appear less fascist and more Cold War-like to the United States and other western powers (226). Their re-emergence over the late 1940s, and especially in the 1952 National Congress of Ex-Combatants held in Segovia, was important in casting anti-communism as the ideological component most important to the group and the regime. This allowed Blue Division veterans to be equal to Civil War veterans in commemoration of shared values and the Falange to be more closely linked to the military in general (236-7). Over the course of the 1950s, the DNE moved closer to the Catholic Church, mirroring similar changes in the regime's public projections.

The major economic and social changes that occurred in Spain in the 1960s changed the DNE into the *Servicio de Antiguos Combatientes* (SAC) and a

BSPHS 40:1 (2015)

new group, the *Hermandad de Alféreces Provisionales* (HAP) emerged by the end of the 1950s. The HAP was independent but close to both the military and the Church, and positive toward the Falange, if not part of it. Its membership was more middle class and upper middle-class, somewhat younger, more open to the changes occurring in the country. The SAC, meanwhile, became more lower class in active membership, and some became involved in the emerging workers' movements of the era, and issues of economics and employment were more central to the group. The result in this last phase was a movement less focused on propagandizing a Francoist "culture of war" and one that remained pro-Francoist but with different interests and a new focus on the idea that Franco had brought Spain "25 years of peace," in conjunction with the regime's largest propaganda effort of that era.

Alcalde's work demonstrates the ideological importance of the Falange throughout the life of the Francoist regime by focusing on the use of ex-combatants and their national organizations in a variety of campaigns that fit with the general positioning of the regime itself at different times. The diversification of the movement in the final phase, although not as anti-Francoists, nonetheless demonstrated the impossibility of such efforts as the 1960s progressed. Nonetheless, the focus Alcalde brings to the work is an important reminder of how essential ideology was to Francoism far beyond the war itself and the use of ex-soldiers to reinforce ideological messages was more central to the regime than previously articulated.

David A. Messenger
University of Wyoming