

CHAPTER I – PROJECTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY

The so-called '98 disaster had a substantial impact on the Navy and pointed an accusing finger at it, unfairly blaming the naval service for all the past tribulations. But the progressive plans of Silvela, Maura and Ferrandiz brought justice, and the Spanish Navy once again played a leading role in the evolution of the nation.

The efforts to develop a modern and operational Navy were not spared and when the war of Africa broke out, it already had excellent troops, which were used with success in support of land operations and decisively contributed to the amphibious landing of Al Hoceima.

When the Second Republic was established, the Spanish Navy was by then one of the first in the European continent, but the Civil War, with 2 navies fighting against each other, yielded an inevitable tear and the difficult post-war years were years of great struggles and sacrifices.

With the different naval plans and programs that from 1939 to 1960 were conceived or executed, primarily after the signing of the Hispano-American cooperation agreements, the Spanish Navy underwent a thorough process of technical upgrading and modernization.

Programs and Naval Bases

The year 1898 marked the end of the Spanish empire and the destruction of the best units of its fleet, but after a few years of inactivity, a recovery process began mainly fostered by Prime Minister Antonio Maura, which included several naval programs that led to the construction of modern warships.

The colonial disaster plunged Spain into a deep moral and economic crisis, which also affected the Armed Forces and, specifically, the Navy which –on top of that– was even blamed for the failure of the war.

It was not until 1903 that the first Squadron Plan was presented by the Minister of the Navy, Sánchez de Toca. It was a very ambitious plan that included no less than 7 battleships and 3 cruisers, as well as torpedo boats, submarines and a variety of other smaller ships.

The permanent state of anarchy in Morocco forced the European powers to divide the country into 2 zones of influence under the respective protectorates of Spain and France, at the Algeciras Conference of 1906.

The latent threat of war, in which the Spanish Armed Forces necessarily needed the support of a, then, non-existent naval force, gave a decisive boost to the recuperation of the fleet.

The 'Ferrándiz' Law of January 7 1908, included the shipbuilding of 3 battleships, 3 destroyers, and 4 gunboats, which would give rise, respectively, to the 3 'España'-class the 3 'Bustamante'-class and the 4 'Recalde'-class, along with 24 torpedo boats. The type of battleship chosen was the '*Dreadnought*'-type, which since 1906, had displaced all previous types.

The continuation of the previous, but frustrated plan, was the new 'Miranda' Law of May 7, 1914, that initially contemplated the construction of 2 more battleships, a cruiser, a torpedo boat and a series of submarines. Modified in 1915, the planned constructions were further enhanced by 4 cruisers, 5 destroyers, 24 submarines, 3 gunboats and 18 coast guard ships.

The submarines had already proved their effectiveness in the second year of World War I and Admiral Miranda himself was able to rectify his initial mistake of not including them in the scheduled shipbuilding plan in sufficient numbers.

Along with the combat units, the construction or the procurement of new training ships was also programmed, resulting in the commissioning of the 'Galatea' and the 'Juan Sebastián de Elcano', the latter still in operation.

The last naval program of the reign of Alfonso XIII was organized by Rear admiral Salvador Carvia during the Berenguer government. It included 4 battleships, 2 aircraft carriers, and a proportionate number of destroyers and submarines. However, this plan, had it been carried out, would have placed Spain among the first naval powers in the world, but came to nothing with the fall of the monarchy and exile of King Alfonso XIII.

During the second Spanish Republic, the ongoing constructions continued, but no new units were commissioned, except for 6 'Jupiter'-class minelayers.

Surface and submarine units

This new era involved a gradual transformation of the fleet, which no longer needed to rely on blue-water squadrons and began an adaptation to the new conditions and new inventions.

The experience acquired after World War I imposed a new tactic and a new type of warfare, as the submarines had proved their efficiency to the detriment of surface units.

The main types of warships in this period were battleships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines. The battleships were named 'España', 'Alfonso XIII' and 'Jaime I'. Although the 'Ferrándiz' Law of 1908, intended to build the ships of the '*Dreadnought*' type like the Royal Navy's 'Orion' and 'King George V', they ended up opting for smaller and inferior condition units so as to be able to have the 3 battleships. They were less protected, not so fast and of poorer ordnance capability. Their construction, on the other hand, was further hindered by World War I, being launched in 1913 and 1914, but delivered several years later.

The cruisers were of two types: the light cruisers and the 'Washington'-class. The first group included the 'Reina Victoria Eugenia', 'Blas de Lezo', 'Méndez Núñez', 'Príncipe Alfonso', 'Almirante Cervera' and 'Miguel de Cervantes', all built between 1920 and 1931.

The naval program of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship led to the construction of the 'Canarias' and 'Balears', which started in 1931 but had to be finished in a hurry in the last months of 1936, due to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, without torpedo launchers or catapults for the embarked seaplanes.

The first submarines came from the naval program already planned in the 'Miranda' Act of May 1914. The first units were procured abroad: the 'Isaac Peral' in the United States in 1916 and the following three: the A-1, A-2 and A-3 in Italy, in 1917. With them, the first and decisive step towards the creation of the Spanish submarine service was taken.

The next batch, the B series, which envisioned 6 units, was built between 1921 and 1923 in Spain, as well as the C series, a notable upgrading compared with the first units, in addition to their greater displacement. In order to create an adequate support infrastructure and a training center, the Royal Decree of February 27, 1918 established the Cartagena submarine school and base.

Naval Aviation

The experience of World War I, determined that in September 1917, the Naval Aviation Service was set up, with a school in Cartagena where Navy personnel

who had obtained a pilot's degree at the Military Aviation Academy could acquire this flight specialty. In addition, naval aviation stations were created in the existing bases of Cadiz, Cartagena and Ferrol and the other detachments in Marin and Mahon.

Soon afterwards the name Naval Aviation was changed to Naval Aeronautics to include aerospace units such as air-stations, airships and hot-air balloons. All these assets were considered essential for reconnaissance work in the service of fleet operations. In 1921, the school, located in Barcelona, began its courses and became a provisional base.

At the beginning, the Spanish Navy used 'Avro 504k' and 'Martinsyde' aircraft, similar to those used by the Military Air Force since the wheels of their landing gear could be changed for floats. Among the latter, it is worth mentioning the F-6, two-seater reconnaissance and bombing aircraft suitable also for pilot training. The F-3 was also a two-seater and the F-4 a single-seater.

In 1922, the steamship 'España', fitted out as an aircraft carrier changed her name for a new one: 'Dédalo'. The baptism of fire of our air service took place in July of that same year, when the fleet's seaplanes were dispatched to bomb Moroccan insurgent positions.

The first bomb dropped on enemy lines by Navy aviators was fired over Cebadilla beach by Lieutenant Julio Guillén, observer and bombardier of the aircraft piloted by Lt. Francisco Taviel de Andrade.

The naval aeronautics continued the following year its activity in North Africa, cooperating later in the landing operations of Al Hoceima.

The first fatal accident occurred on June 20 1923, and the first casualty in war action was Ensign Vara, on 2 October 1924 in Morocco.

From 1929 onwards, modern 'Savoia 62', 'Dornier', 'Hawker' and other seaplanes were acquired for the Spanish Navy and the main activity was transferred to San Javier. In 1934, the gyroplane of the brilliant Spanish engineer Juan de la Cierva took off and landed on the flight deck of the 'Dédalo'.

The Spanish Navy in Africa. Al Hoceima

One of the first concerns of the dictatorship of general Primo de Rivera in 1923 was to definitively solve the Moroccan problem which, after the disaster of Annual in 1921, threatened to become a permanent problem.

To this end, it was decided to occupy the territories near the Bay of Al Hoceima, center of the greatest focus of the Riff insurrection, which presented serious difficulties if the attacks had to be started from land (Melilla, Ceuta or Tetouan).

An amphibious landing in this place would allow the control of the coast and the establishment of a base for subsequent intrusions into the most distant areas. Counting on the necessary collaboration of France, the planning was carried out

by general Primo de Rivera himself, together with generals Sanjurjo, Soriano and admiral Yolif, Chiefs of Staff of the respective land, air and naval components.

The landing force was composed of 20,000 men, transported by 21 merchant ships and escorted and supported by a squadron made up of 2 battleships, 4 cruisers, 2 torpedo hunters, 6 gunboats, 6 torpedo boats, 18 coast guards, all under the command of Rear Admiral Guerra. Twenty-seven type-K barges, were also used during the operation. Air cover was provided by 3 aircraft squadrons, with their corresponding reconnaissance and bombing groups, plus 12 seaplanes as well as 1 reconnaissance airship.

After a series of drills off the coasts of Ouad Lau and Sidi Dris, in which French units collaborated, at noon on September 8, 1925, the whole force landed under enemy fire, forming a beachhead where the rest of the units and logistic support elements disembarked the following day.

After the heavy fighting that took place between the 11th and 13th the general progression began leading to the capitulation of the leader of the revolt Abd-el-Krim, who surrendered to the French after his final defeat on September 22.

The Marine Corps

The first third of the 20th century was also a hard period for the Marine Corps as a whole.

After the campaigns of Cuba and the Philippines and as a consequence of the restrictive measures to reduce manpower, a Royal Decree of February 21 1900 suspended the calls for admission to the Marine Corps Academy, its officers coming, from then on, from the Army Academy and also from the General Corps of the Spanish Navy.

In 1908, Minister Ferrándiz reorganized the Marine Corps into three departmental regiments plus the already existing, Madrid Ordnance Company. An expeditionary regiment was also created to defend the African interests. In 1925 an expeditionary battalion was organized to participate in the Al Hoceima Landing.

On July 10, 1931, by Decree of the Provisional Government of the Second Republic, the Marine Corps was declared extinct, withdrawing the flags of its Units, reintegrating them by decree of September 7, 1935.

By Law of 17 October 1940, the missions and tasks of the Marine Corps were definitely established as an integral element of the Spanish Navy.