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## Review of David A. Messenger, *Hunting Nazis in Franco's Spain*

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**David A. Messenger. *Hunting Nazis in Franco's Spain*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2014. 218 pp.**

This is the story of many inconvenient pasts. The Franco regime survived the demise of its friends Italy and Germany in 1945. Later, until the dictator's death in 1975, the Spanish regime claimed that the whole world, or more precisely the Allies, went mad in 1939. It argued that the Axis and the Western powers, instead of fighting each other should have united against the Soviet Union. What the regime's propaganda forgot to say is that during the war, Franco had both publicly and privately despised the Western powers, and that he did what he could to help Nazi Germany win. What Franco did was significant, even if Spain never formally joined the Axis. In addition to supplying the Nazi war effort with raw materials and logistics, Franco allowed German spies to roam freely in Spain. This country's territory became part of a proxy war of covert actions, propaganda, information and disinformation in which the Germans had the upper hand because they enjoyed the Spanish regime's connivance and support. Not surprisingly, in 1945 there were about 2000 Germans involved in the war effort in Spain. Of other neutral, only in Switzerland they were more numerous (25).

David Messenger has written a carefully researched, brief, but illuminating, account of who these Germans were and what happened to them. Like other combatants from the losing side, the Allies saw these Germans as possible sources of useful information, and intended to punish those found to have committed crimes. This put the Spanish dictatorship in a difficult situation. The people who they were supposed to arrest and surrender to the Allies were their "amigos", men who until the last moment of the war had been hailed by the press and treated by the authorities as heroic fighters for the Christian West against Communism. Not only had those Germans worked very closely with Spanish officers, officials and politicians but --- as David Messenger illustrates -- quite often had personal and business relations with Spain since before World War Two. There were, for example, many Germans who have lived in Spain long before the Civil War, then joined the Condor Legion, and afterwards continued their services to their motherland and the Nazi party during the world conflict. These residents were the most unlikely candidates to be surrendered by the Francoists. But many others found alibis and not too hidden support from the authorities and others, allowing them to escape persecution.

Even those who got caught and who were supposedly in the process of being deported to occupied Germany, were normally treated very well. For example, the internees found themselves in comfortable places such as the spa and surrounding hotels of Caldas de Malavella (71). Many others were given

advance notice of their impending arrest and disappeared from public view, even if many knew their hiding places. To the Allies and to anybody with a minimal understanding of the Franco regime it was obvious that the dictatorship was sabotaging the process of arresting Nazis as much as it could. By the end of 1946 barely 245 individuals had been deported. There were no big fish among them and many ended up returning to Spain in the following months or years (156-159). Others, more compromised, were allowed to escape to Argentina, often with the help of the Church (152).

The supposed plight of the arrested Nazis and their families was felt very deeply within the German colony in Spain. Catholic priests, and less prominently, Protestant pastors, collected money and other forms of support for their disgraced fellow Germans (124-125). They also helped to create the narrative that those men were just good patriots and God fearing people, who were unfairly targeted by the misguided, or worse, Allies. The Spanish Catholic Church and the Vatican tended to agree and act accordingly. However, this was part of a wider whitewash of recent history that implicated not only Franco's Spain or the Church but, eventually, the governments and many ordinary people in Western Europe. The big laundering of so many brown shirts stained with blood resulted in a convenient vision of the past in which the bad Nazis had been few and all at the top, while the rest, Germans and others, either had never been real Nazis or had gone along only because they were deceived, were good patriots and/or just feared the (much worse) advance of Communism. This fiction served the practical purpose of reinforcing the West during the Cold War. Even the United States ended up recruiting former Nazi spies and political policemen.

Franco changed the past when convenient and forgot or invented arguments and even data according to his political needs. It was a cunning cynicism that allowed him to survive the result of World War Two. But, as David Messenger so compellingly has shown, he was not the sole practitioner of the art of lying.

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