

CHAPTER  
**15**

HISTORYMAKERS **Francisco Franco**  
*Cautious Dictator*

Section 4

*"You know how a thing will start, but not how it will end."—Franco, to a journalist*

**F**rancisco Franco led a winning army, a successful revolt, and a long-lasting government. Yet he was a cautious man who avoided taking chances.

Franco was born in northwestern Spain. Four generations of Francos had served in the navy, but budget cutbacks prevented his enrollment. As a result, he entered the academy for the infantry and graduated as an officer at age 17.

In 1912, the 19-year-old Franco volunteered to fight rebels in Spanish Morocco because combat brought extra pay and a chance for promotion. He proved an able leader who was respected for his professionalism. When others went to town seeking entertainment, one officer recalled, "he used to stay in the barracks or in his tent with books and plans."

Franco's hard work and ability won advancement. He became the army's youngest captain in 1915 and, after receiving a near-fatal wound, a major in 1916. He returned to Morocco in 1920 as second-in-command of the Spanish Foreign Legion. Three years later, he became its full commander and led that elite unit to a victory that put an end to the Moroccan revolt. In 1926, at age 33, he returned to Spain a hero and the youngest general in Europe.

Franco's career was then caught in the turmoil of Spanish politics. In 1931, rebels, later known as Republicans, overthrew the Spanish king and proclaimed a republic. Franco was placed on inactive duty but did nothing to undermine the new government. When conservatives took control in 1933, he was placed on active duty again.

Republicans, supporters of the Spanish republic, and Nationalists, a more conservative movement, bitterly opposed each other. Their disagreements often produced street violence. When elections in early 1936 brought the Republicans to power, the chaos increased. Peasants seized crops or land from wealthy landowners, and workers struck. Franco asked the leaders to declare a state of emergency. He was ignored.

Other generals talked about taking control of the government, but Franco did not commit him-

self. His ability to command Spain's best fighting force made him strategically important, and his good reputation and fame were essential in winning the support of the Spanish people. Finally, on July 18, 1936, Franco issued a manifesto that proclaimed a revolt. He flew to Morocco and brought the army to Spain. In September, Franco was named as the overall commander and the head of the Nationalists.

The war took three long years. Both sides committed atrocities, and both sides used foreign aid. Franco won assistance from Germany and Italy. The Republicans received help from the Soviet Union. Franco accepted the support of the Spanish Fascists, but he made it clear that his government would remain in control. He won the war in 1939.

Franco soon faced a diplomatic challenge. His country was torn and weak from its long civil war, but Germany and Italy had now plunged into World War II. When Germany appeared to be winning, he almost joined on its side. However, he chose to keep Spain neutral. In 1943, as the tide turned, he broke diplomatic relations with Germany and Italy.

Nevertheless, the victorious allies were hostile to Spain after the war. Franco then moved to oust Spanish Fascists from power. The development of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union also helped his position. He was now viewed as a valuable anti-Communist, and relations warmed between Spain and western Europe.

Franco ruled Spain until his death. In 1947, he declared Spain a monarchy, but he still ran the government. He officially named Juan Carlos, a member of the royal family, as his successor. When Franco died in 1975, Juan Carlos became king.

## Questions

1. **Clarifying** What details support the idea that Franco was cautious?
2. **Making Inferences** How does the quotation explain Franco's caution?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** How would you characterize Franco's relationship with the Fascist party?