

What did Germany Contribute to the Spanish Civil War?

Overview

Germany had a number of military, economic and political reasons for getting involved in the Spanish Civil War. In this lesson we will consider what she actually contributed to Franco's Nationalist forces and what further clues this gives us about Hitler's aims.

Task 1: Decision Making Exercise

Read through each of these events and decide which option you think Hitler chose. Your teacher will tell you what actually happened. Write notes in the boxes provided.

Stage 1: Transport

• It is July 1936. General Franco has written a letter to you from Morocco asking for transport planes to get his nationalist troops to the Spanish mainland. How many transport planes do you send across?

- (a) 5: token assistance, but nothing to provoke Britain and France?
- (b) 10: reasonable assistance, making it clear you mean business?
- (c) 20: substantial assistance, with little regard for international opinion?

What actually happened?

• It is July 1936. What name should be given to the military operation to transport Franco's nationalist troops from Morocco to mainland Spain?

- (a) Operation Magic Fire: So Franco doesn't have to advertise his links with the Nazis
- (b) Operation Nazi Flamethrower: So everyone knows who's providing the assistance
- (c) Operation Spanish Liberation: So Franco looks as if he's the good guy

What actually happened?

Stage 2: Weaponry

• It is November 1936. It is now clear that the Spanish civil war could go on for some time. You provide Franco with 100 fighter airplanes and 12,000 men as an efficient fighting unit. What do you choose to call it?

- (a) The Eagle Legion: To stress its German connections
- (b) The Condor Legion: To stress its strength in combat
- (c) The Bull Legion: To stress its Spanish connections

What actually happened?

Stage 3: Tactics

• **Guernica:** It is April 1937. You are keen to make use of the 100 planes you have provided to Franco. How do you use them?

- (a) Offensive role, military target - attack the enemy army
- (b) Offensive role, civilian target - terrorise civilians in enemy territory
- (c) Defensive role for a military target – provide air cover to Franco's ground forces
- (d) Defensive role for a civilian target – provide air cover for civilians in Franco's zone

What actually happened?

• **Asturias:** It is November 1937. Franco's forces are attacking Asturias, the industrial heartland of Spain. How do you make use of your fighter planes?

- (a) Carpet Bombing: Drop gigantic amounts of bombs upon the area all at once to inflict maximum fear and destruction – not only upon the Spanish, but as a clear threat to France and Britain.
- (b) Reconnaissance: Provide military intelligence to Franco's ground troops by flying over enemy territory taking photographs. In this way we can help Franco without provoking France and Britain with unnecessary violence.
- (c) Propaganda: Win the long-term battle for hearts and minds by dropping hundreds of thousands of propaganda leaflets stressing Franco's patriotism and warning the population about the threat posed by communism.

What actually happened?

Task 2: Reflection

To what extent did Hitler's actions in the Spanish Civil War help him to achieve his overall objectives? Explain your answer by (a) summarising what his aims were; (b) outlining the ways his actions helped to achieve these aims; (c) outlining the ways his actions undermined his objectives.

Sourcework Questions

Source A: A cartoon by David Low (November 1936). David Low was a bitter critic of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco.



Source B: Tom Goldstein, a liberal professor based at the University of Maryland, writing in 2008

Perhaps the most infamous incident concerning German involvement in the Spanish Civil War was the use of explosives and firebombs on the Basque city of Guernica on April 26, 1937. As part of a massive Nationalist campaign to split the Republican controlled area of Spain in half, the Condor Legion in spring 1937 launched an attack on the Basque province of northeastern Spain. Aiming to prevent Republican troops from retreating through Guernica to their strongpoint at Bilbao, the Condor Legion attacked and destroyed 70% of Guernica. The attacks came in the middle of the day when many people were at the city's market, and hundreds of civilians were killed as a result.

1. **Study Source A.** What is the message of this cartoon? Explain your answer using the "CID" detective approach you should now be familiar with.
2. **Study Sources A & B.** Do these two sources prove that Franco was barbaric? Explain your answer by considering both sides, using the provenance and content of each source to help you.