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Case 08

GLOBAL NET – STOP THE ARMS TRADE (GN-STAT)

Poison Gas in Warfare

**Part 1: Chemical Weapons in Spain's War in Morocco
(1921-1927)**

Executive Summary

by Jürgen Neitzert

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On 27 November 1912, a Franco-Spanish treaty granted Spain the north of Morocco on the Mediterranean with the Rif Mountains as a protectorate. When the Spanish military attempted to take increasing possession of this area from 1921 onwards, the Berber resistance began under the leadership of Abd-el-Krim. At the Battle of Annual on 22 July 1921, over 13,000 Spanish soldiers died fighting against the Rifkabyles, who were waging guerrilla warfare. Abd-el-Krim founded the Islamic Rif Republic in northern Morocco in 1923.

Spain now used chemical warfare agents, especially poison gas, on a massive scale against the population of the Rif. Spain had imported the poison gas from Germany. The German expert responsible for this, Dr Hugo Stoltzenberg, was also commissioned to build a factory for the production of poison gas in La Marañosa near Madrid in June 1922. He also converted an existing filling plant for chemical warfare agents near Melilla in northern Morocco into a production facility for poison gas.

There was now a massive use of various chemical warfare agents, especially mustard gas. On average, 127 bombers dropped around 1,680 bombs a day. In total, over 500 tons of mustard gas were used. The main targets were the markets and busy squares where the civilian population gathered. But farmers working in agriculture were also bombed. The goal of decisively weakening the Rifkabylians was reached with the German poison gas war.

The poison gas caused mostly fatal wounds to the victims of the poison gas attacks. The mustard gas remained on food. Eating it led to ulcers on the digestive organs and ultimately to death. This poisoning strategy with mustard gas for the north of Morocco was planned by the German chemist Dr Hugo Stoltzenberg for the Spanish military. He also developed the poison gas with ingredients so that it continued to work for weeks.

In 1924, the French, who ruled most of Morocco as a protectorate, cut off the necessary food supply for the Berbers of the Rif Republic from their territory. In 1924 and 1925, Abd-el-Krim's troops marched into the French zone of Morocco. This led to a combined battle between the Spanish and French with around 500,000 soldiers against the Rifkabylians of Abd-el-Krim, who only had around 7,000 fighters. Spanish and French troops had advanced far after major attacks in the summer of 1925. On 8 September 1925, Spanish troops landed in the bay of Al Hoceïma in north-eastern Morocco with the help of the French fleet and air force. It was the first landing operation with air support in history.

The poison gas attacks and the landing at Al Hoceïma were the turning point of the Rif War and led to the end of Abd-el-Krim's rule. He surrendered on 27 May 1926, but the war continued, also with poison gas attacks. On 10 July 1927, the last Rif Kabyle tribe ended the battle.

The contamination with mustard gas meant that the area around Al Hoceïma still has a high rate of lung cancer to this day. The Moroccan "Association for the Defence of Poison Gas Victims in the Rif" is convinced that the toxic effects of the bombings in the Rif region are still having an impact today, almost a hundred years later. However, no scientific study

has yet been carried out on the connection between the use of chemical weapons and the known extraordinarily high cancer rate in the region, especially lung cancer.

The text was originally written in German by Brother Jürgen Neitzert, Franciscan friar

Author Contact:

Jürgen Neitzert,

FirminusKlause Düsseldorf

Germany

Phone: +49 211 15201217

Email: juergen.neitzert@franziskaner.de