

The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in France (1917-18) and the Long Shadow of the Peninsular War against Napoleon

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Abstract

The dispatch of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (CEP) to France in 1917 was envisaged by Portuguese interventionists as an affirmation of Portugal's desire to reclaim an independent role in world affairs, emerging from the shadow of British influence. However, the CEP relied on the much larger British Expeditionary Force for instruction, supply, and guidance. The relationship between the two armies was fraught with difficulty and cultural misunderstandings due in large measure to a very different reading of their joint campaign against Napoleon in the Peninsular War, fought a century earlier. The British desire to correct the CEP's shortcomings was interpreted within the CEP as a desire to subjugate the Portuguese and to take credit for whatever they might accomplish on the battlefield.

Keywords

World War One; Portugal; Beresford; Armies; Memory

Resumo

O envio do Corpo Expedicionário Português (CEP) para França, em 1917, representou, para a corrente intervencionista portuguesa, a afirmação do desejo nacional de recuperar um papel independente na cena mundial, libertando Portugal da influência britânica. Porém, o CEP dependia da Força Expedicionária Britânica, muito maior do que ele, para a sua instrução, abastecimento e liderança. A relação entre os dois exércitos ficou marcada por dificuldades várias e desentendimentos culturais que resultavam em parte de leituras diferentes da campanha comum, um século antes, contra Napoleão, durante a Guerra Peninsular. O desejo britânico de corrigir os defeitos do CEP foi interpretado no seio deste como uma vontade de subjugar os Portugueses e ficar com os louros por eles conquistados no campo de batalha.

Palavras-chave

Primeira Guerra Mundial; Portugal; Beresford; Exércitos; Memória

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One of the most significant documents exchanged between the British and Portuguese governments during the First World War was the note addressed by Lord Derby, Secretary of State for War, to Norton de Matos, his Portuguese counterpart, on 8 September 1917. Building on a series of reports on the state of the *Corpo Expedicionário Português* (CEP) that had made their way up the British chain of command over the course of that summer,² the letter recommended that, in face of the coming winter, major changes be made to the plans for the CEP's immediate future. Instead of aiming to have their two divisions fighting alongside each other as an independent army corps, the Portuguese, Derby argued, should place one division behind the other. The first would remain incorporated into a British army corps (as was still the case at the time of writing); the second would serve as a reserve and instruction unit, its brigades periodically exchanged with the ones at the front. The Commander of the CEP, General Tamagnini de Abreu, would stay on as an Inspector General of the force. Alongside this change to the agreed plans, and remembering "the glorious history of our two armies during the Peninsular War when British officers served under the Portuguese flag to the great advantage of both nations," Derby suggested that an unspecified number of British officers be attached to Portuguese battalions and the corresponding non-infantry units. This, he explained, was essential to ensure "that unanimity of training and command that is so essential when two armies are so intimately linked in the face of the enemy as are ours" (MNE 1997: 196-198). This document elicited an angry response from Norton de Matos, who replied "with the rude frankness of a soldier" that it was "absolutely impossible" to agree with the hurtful proposals (MNE 1997: 202-203). The proposals were shelved, but only momentarily, being again put to the Portuguese after the December 1917 *coup d'état* which saw Sidónio Pais take power from the government of Afonso Costa. Eager for British recognition of his hold on power—and to escape the politically onerous obligation of sending more troops to France—Pais quickly agreed to the proposal.³

The brief exchange between Derby and Norton de Matos highlights the very different way in which their two armies understood both their respective histories and their common enterprise in Flanders against the forces of Wilhelmine Germany. The purpose of this article is to explain the cultural assumptions on which the British model of cooperation with the Portuguese at the front rested, as well as to explore why these would have rankled

² These are detailed later in the chapter. They include United Kingdom National Archive [NA], War Office [WO] 106/551, Sir Douglas Haig to Lord Derby, 27 August 1917; NA WO 106/551, Extracts from Report by G.O.C., XI Corps, R. Haking, 13 August 1917; and NA WO 106/551, Unsigned letter to Mackenzie (presumably General C.J. Mackenzie, commander of the 61st Division), 14 July 1917.

³ NA WO 106/551, N. 702, Barnardiston to Whigham, 29 December 1917.

with the Portuguese interventionists in power until the December 1917 coup. The misunderstandings, which were evident from the moment the CEP landed in France, made more difficult the task of those who, aware of the Portuguese Army's shortcomings, attempted to learn from the British in order to improve the CEP's overall efficiency. They also meant that whatever goodwill existed among the British military authorities towards the Portuguese quickly evaporated in the face of what they took to be insufferable pride and stubbornness. The relationship between the British and Portuguese armies was unique in the context of the Western Front given the disproportion between the two forces and the need for one to instruct the other in the complexities of modern warfare. The tensions that arose were not like those that characterized the links between the French and British armies and, at a later stage, these two entities and their American counterpart.⁴ However, the two armies were not strangers to one another—or at least they did not believe themselves to be so—and it was that presumed understanding which, to a large extent, dictated how they approached and evaluated each other. Not surprisingly, World War I's centenary commemorations have once more drawn the attention of Portuguese historians to the conflict. Rather than proposing a new field of exploration for historical research into Portugal's participation in the Great War, as has been done in previous issues of this journal (see Vol. 15, n. 1 [2017] and Vol. 11, n. 2 [2013]), this article is suggesting a more nuanced reading of the single most important event to arise out of that participation—the constitution and dispatch of the CEP to France. This reading arises out of the side-by-side comparison of Portuguese and British primary sources. This author is by no means the only historian to have attempted this in the recent past, but the conclusions reached in recent studies employing this approach have been rather different (Telo and Sousa, 2016, Meneses 2018a).

Upon receiving Derby's missive, Norton de Matos consulted with General N.W. Barnardiston, the head of the British Military Mission in Portugal, who had been in Lisbon for over a year. Initially tasked, alongside a French officer, with assessing the state of the Portuguese Army—to see whether or not it was ready to take to the trenches—Barnardiston had stayed on in Lisbon, continuing to report on local military matters to the War Office in London. In the meantime, a more junior officer, Lieutenant Colonel C. A. Ker, was appointed to head the British Military Mission to the CEP in France. Its job was

⁴ On the relationship between the armies of the major allies on the Western Front, see, for example, William J Philpott (1996), *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Elizabeth Greenhalgh (2005) *Victory Through Coalition: Britain and France During the First World War*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press; and Chris Kempshall (2018) *British, French and American Relations on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

to assist the Portuguese forces that arrived in France to acquire the skills necessary to be entrusted with a portion, however small, of the front lines. Ker reported to General Sir Richard Haking, who commanded XI Army Corps into which the CEP would initially be inserted. For these British officers, professional soldiers with a long service record that stretched back well beyond 1914, Wellington's campaign in the Iberian Peninsula represented the pinnacle of British continental soldiering. In the war against Napoleon, as they well knew, Wellington's force had contained a very significant Portuguese component. In 1809-10, as was now taking place in 1916-17, it had been found necessary to modernize the Portuguese army in a hurry and under fire. The first time around, the Portuguese, in the face of their recent defeat to Spain in 1801 and the subsequent failure to halt Junot's invading army, had asked for a British general to be placed in charge of their army. London sent them William Beresford, who, co-opted with the rank of marshal, quickly set to work. He acquired a fearsome reputation as a strict disciplinarian and ruffled local feathers by appointing a number of British officers to key positions within the force he now headed. Believing the situation in 1917 to be comparable, officers like Barnardiston, Ker, and Haking understood their task to be similar to Beresford's and expected the Portuguese to see matters in the same light. When they did not do so, baulking at too great a British interference in what they saw as internal Portuguese affairs, relations quickly soured, damaging the prospect of a positive contribution by the CEP to the fighting in France.

Always a topic of interest to a British readership, specialized or otherwise, the Peninsular War was the subject of a number of works published as its centenary was commemorated in the years that preceded the First World War. All of these naturally paid considerable attention to Marshal Beresford's efforts. Ever since W. F. P. Napier's *History of the War in the Peninsula and in the South of France*, published in the 1820s, Beresford had been regarded as a poor tactician but a great organizer. This is still how he was portrayed by Alexander Innes Shand in his *Wellington's Lieutenants*, published in 1902. Shand presented what was, all things considered, a positive view of Wellington's Portuguese allies, although they had needed, he explained, Beresford's impartiality, single-mindedness, and harshness to literally whip them into line:

His task was both difficult and invidious. But he had to work on excellent materials, although demoralised and disorganised [...] The Portuguese had made him marshal, and military master he meant to be. For a time he was the most unpopular man in the country, but he held steadily to his course

through stress and storm. Ere long he had his reward in the national gratitude, and the soldiers he literally lashed into obedience after a hard-fought field became his admirers. Yet, though they feared and respected, they never loved him, for he carried relentless severities to an excess (Shand 1902: 245-247).

According to Shand, Beresford had faced considerable difficulties: an army in chaos; a professional caste of officers who “regularly drew pay but scrupulously neglected their duties” (Shand 1902: 245); a corrupt and inefficient government; and resistance to his reliance on imported British officers, who were lured into Portuguese service by the guarantee of instant promotion.

A similar but more authoritative verdict was delivered by Charles Oman, whose seven-volume *History of the Peninsular War* was interrupted in its publication by the First World War, during which time Oman participated in the official British propaganda effort. In 1912, Oman also published *Wellington’s Army: 1809-1814*, in which he reminded readers of the importance of the Portuguese to Wellington’s success: a full two-fifths of Wellington’s army had been Portuguese. Naturally, then, Oman focused on Beresford’s efforts, being greatly appreciative of them:

[...] he did most eminent service in creating order out of chaos, and produced in the short space of a year a well-disciplined force that was capable of taking a creditable part in line with the British army, and won well-deserved encomiums from Wellington and every other fair critic for the part it took at Bussaco, its first engagement (Oman 1912: 119).

Like Shand, but in greater detail, Oman stressed the obstacles Beresford had been forced to overcome in order to create a battle-ready army. These arose not so much, as might be expected in an era of social darwinism and imperial arrogance, from the nature of the Portuguese as a people,⁵ but rather from the corrupt and corrupting atmosphere and regime which he believed prevailed in Lisbon in the early years of the 19th Century.⁶ As

⁵ On Darwin’s impact on existing theories of race, see Bethencourt (2013), 290-306.

⁶ This is not to dismiss the very significant literature on the subject of “martial races”—a concept which the Portuguese military authorities themselves bought into. Nevertheless, while it is entirely possible that British officers saw their Portuguese allies through the racial prism, the sources consulted, written during and after the war, concentrate instead on cultural and historical differences. On Portuguese use of the “martial races” concept see, for example, Colonel E. A. Azambuja Martins (1936) *O Soldado Africano de Moçambique*,

Oman put it, “The Portuguese Army before 1808 had all the typical faults of an army of the *ancient regime* which had rusted in a long period of peace” (Oman 1912: 231). Beresford had been forced to dismiss “scores of incapable officers—many of them *fidalgos* with great court influence” (Oman 1912: 120) in order to make room for “young and unknown men” of greater merit. British officers helped overcome these difficulties, instilling greater professionalism and compelling patriotic and proud Portuguese to emulate them. Meanwhile, the army was not allowed to operate on its own; instead, its brigades, once assembled, disciplined, and trained, were distributed among Wellington’s divisions. Only later in the war would the Portuguese authorities, desirous of greater international recognition for their efforts, hold out—without success—for a distinct force operating in the field under Portuguese command. According to Oman, the results of Beresford’s efforts were visible when, for the first time, the newly refurbished Portuguese units faced the French at Bussaco (or Buçaco) in 1810, fighting alongside their British comrades against Masséna’s invading force:

The Portuguese line, indeed, had done their fair half of the fighting, as the return showed—in no instance with discredit, in some with high merit. If the 8th and 9th Portuguese had broken before Foy’s attack, it was under severe stress, and when attacked by superior numbers. On the other hand, Pack’s brigade, Coleman’s 19th, and the Caçadores of the Light Division won the highest praise from their commanders, and had taken a most distinguished part in the victory. (Oman 1908: 384)

In 1917, the lesson to be drawn from these works, as well as those that Shand and Oman had drawn upon (Halliday 1812: 275-280), was simple: the Portuguese, having entered the war, could make a positive contribution to the ongoing struggle against Germany but they would have to accept a high level of British supervision and even involvement in their military affairs. In other words, they would have to sacrifice the propaganda value of a fully independent force in order to leave a true mark on the conflict. Everyone knew that the CEP was not ready to go immediately into the trenches as it arrived in France: the Portuguese army had not faced a European opponent since 1814 and the nature of war had

Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 19-32. On the wider international debate see, for example, David Omissi (1994) *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940*, Basingstoke: Macmillan; David Killingray, “Introduction,” in David Killingray and David Omissi (eds) (1999) *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c.1700-1964*, Manchester: Manchester University Press; and Heather Streets (2004), *The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1957-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

changed extraordinarily even since the start of the present conflict. It was therefore agreed that a period of training and adaptation would be required in France, although there was less consensus around the question of who should administer the training. The Portuguese wanted the British to train Portuguese instructors, who would in turn train their own troops. For their part, the British believed that only they could and should carry out this job and, what is more, that their efforts would be welcomed by the Portuguese, aware not only of the contribution they had made to the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte a century earlier but also of the importance of Beresford's efforts in helping them to do so. This time, the Portuguese won. Given the scale of the manpower shortage faced by the Allies in the wake of Verdun and the Somme, the Portuguese government's enthusiasm for the conflict seemed to guarantee a potentially important source of soldiers; there was no *a priori* dismissal of their potential contribution to the allied cause.

British expectations, however, clashed with the mindset of Portuguese interventionism. For Portuguese interventionists, the war was a unique opportunity to achieve a number of goals. These included the securing of Portugal's overseas colonies, the domestic strengthening of the regime, and, crucially, for the purposes of this article, the emergence of Portugal from the shadow of Great Britain so as to pursue its own path in the world. There were also frequent mentions of the need to improve relations with other countries, notably Spain and Brazil. João Chagas, perhaps the most determined of Portuguese interventionists, was extraordinarily explicit in his diaries when it came to Portugal's relations with Britain; as he put it in the first days of the conflict, "Portugal does not understand that it is now or never the time to make up for its past as a protégé of England and to be its ally, to be somebody" (Chagas 1986: 128). Sometime later he would go further, writing,

Portugal's enemy in this war is England. It would be most convenient for England if Portugal were to have, at this time, no personality, as was the case in Napoleon's time. We must fight this objective, affirming, even if against her will, our personality. Our participation in this war has but one objective: To survive against the English. But this cannot be stated in the newspapers. (Chagas 1986a: 276-277)

This desire for freedom from British interference, although impossible to realize, was part of the Portuguese war effort from the start. In a comprehensive interview granted to

journalist João de Barros for the Luso-Brazilian review *Atlântida* after his return from long negotiations in London, Afonso Costa denied that the Portuguese would be inserted into the overall British war effort. The Portuguese army would have its own sector, its own command structure, and “complete autonomy:”

The Portuguese army, within the confines of its sector, will enjoy perfect independence. It will be subordinated only to whatever arrangements are reached between its General Staff and those of the allies. You cannot imagine how pleased I was, as a Portuguese and as a republican, by this compliment, made in advance, to my country’s army and to its reputation for extreme bravery. (Barros 1916: 1000)

For this reason, Article 2 of the Anglo-Portuguese Convention regarding the CEP stated that the unit would operate “subject to tactical considerations, always as a whole under the command of a Portuguese General” (MNE 1997: 108-112). Although the officer corps was by no means uniformly republican or even interventionist, there was a core of interventionist officers grouped around the CEP’s General Staff and its leader, Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Roberto Baptista. Like Norton de Matos, Baptista was a recent convert to the republican creed but had made up for lost time since 1910 and was generally identified as one of the “Young Turks;” those professional officers who rallied to Democratic party leader Afonso Costa and pursued his agenda within the armed forces. Having already been designated Chief of Staff of the CEP’s predecessor—the “Instruction Division” which had assembled in 1916 at Tancos, in central Portugal, in order to demonstrate to the Allies that Portugal had a force ready to send into the field of battle—Baptista was the spear tip of Portuguese interventionism. Above and beyond his duties as the CEP’s Chief of Staff, it was Baptista’s responsibility to ensure that the campaign in France met the Portuguese government’s political needs. To that end, he engaged in private correspondence with the government in Lisbon that bypassed the normal chain of command and that allowed him to report on the political evolution of the unit.⁷ Tamagnini would only learn of this correspondence when confronted with its existence after Sidónio Pais’s coup, carried out in December 1917. Others who engaged in this practice belonged to the handful of members of parliament serving in the CEP. They too felt imbued with

⁷ On the intrigue affecting the CEP’s higher echelons and Roberto Baptista’s role, see António José Telo and Pedro Marquês de Sousa (2016) *O CEP. Os Militares Sacrificados pela Má Política*, Oporto: Fronteira do Caos, 207-217.

the need to pursue the interventionists' diplomatic objective, whatever the cost to military discipline.

Chagas's words make clear that for the culturally Francophile and historically Anglophobe (notably in the wake of the 1890 British ultimatum over southern Africa) Portuguese republicans who seized power in 1910, the Peninsular War was a profoundly problematic period. Undoubtedly a popular war (an argument could even be made for it being a total war, given the impact of Wellington's scorched-earth tactics on the civilian population) fought to drive out a thrice-invading force from home soil, it was also conflict fought for Crown and Church against France and the ideals of the Revolution of 1789. It seemed to republicans that the one hero that emerged from this period was General Gomes Freire de Andrade, sentenced to death for his part in a liberal conspiracy (designed in part to send Beresford, still in place after the war's end, home) after his return to Portugal from France, where he had served Napoleon. He was, in other words, a martyr for freedom whose very career during this period highlighted just how hard it had been to identify where the national interest lay—was it with the people against republican ideals or with those who had fought alongside Napoleon against Portugal's allies?

However, the sense of injustice that permeated the Portuguese army regarding the way it had been treated a century earlier (and the way in which the Peninsular War was still remembered, notably in Great Britain) was not restricted within the army to Afonso Costa's "Young Turks." The *Revista Militar*, Portugal's leading military publication, had naturally been marking the centenary of Wellington's six-year campaign. While not refusing to pay homage to the great commander, its contributors stressed the importance of Portugal's part in his successes, in the process explaining why it was that British officers had played such an important role in the modernization of the army. For example, in a series of articles which began in August 1908, Major Adriano Beça explained that it was a British suggestion that had led the Portuguese royal family to leave Portugal for Brazil in 1808, allowing for the country's conquest by Junot's pauperized army without a shot being fired (Beça 1908: 550-552). This decision led in turn to the dismantlement of the existing Portuguese army and the incorporation of some of its finest officers into Napoleon's military as part of the Portuguese Legion that served as far afield as Russia:

Generals such as the Marquis of Alorna, Gomes Freire and Pamplona, colonels Pego and Álvaro Xavier das Póvoas, among others, were officers capable of rivalling in merit, if not actually exceeding, the English generals

that served Wellington. With these men and a strong government, such as we had under Pombal, commanding the resources needed to keep 60 or 70,000 men under arms, we could have foregone Beresford and the English officers who aided him in the reorganization of the Portuguese army. (Beça 1908: 554)

What is more, the British, when negotiating the August 1808 convention of Sintra, which marked the end of the first French invasion of Portugal, should have demanded—and as the Portuguese wanted them to do—the return of the Portuguese Legion in return for allowing the departure from Portugal, aboard British ships, of Junot’s defeated force (Beça 1908: 554). Finally, Beça claimed that the officers who did shine during the actual fighting in the Peninsula were first sidelined by Beresford and then ignored by British chroniclers and historians of the campaign (Beça 1908: 555; 1910: 752). It was important, then, to remember and celebrate the Portuguese contribution to the allied victory as part of the centenary commemorations, rescuing the memory and reputation of officers and soldiers alike (Beça 1909: 85-94). It should be noted that British authors from Napier to Oman were regularly cited in these Portuguese articles—they were by no means ignored by Portuguese military historians who thought their verdicts flawed as they were based on an incomplete analysis.

In his reply to Lord Derby, Norton de Matos stressed that cooperation with the British during the Peninsular Wars was not, as the British seemed to think, the pinnacle of Portugal’s military tradition; his letter included a pointed reference to the Portuguese Legion and the way it singled out for praise by Napoleon during the retreat from Russia. General Barnardiston, increasingly aware of the emotionally charged nature of this question, urged caution on all sides. For the benefit of General Sir R. D. Whigham, Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Barnardiston explained that “the centenary of the so-called ‘martyrdom’ of Portuguese ‘patriot,’ General Gomes Freire de Andrade, who was executed by Beresford for conspiracy in 1817 is just about to be celebrated.”⁸ Addressing the inclusion of British officers in Portuguese units, Norton de Matos added that “the principle adopted during the Peninsular War has left most unpleasant memories in Portugal;” reproducing such a step would lead to “violent opposition.” Less than three weeks after writing this letter—at a moment when both the President of the Republic, Bernardino Machado, and the Prime Minister, Afonso Costa, were visiting the front lines in

⁸ NA WO 106/551, N. 487, Barnardiston to Whigham, 28 September 1917.

France—Norton de Matos led the Freire de Andrade centenary celebrations in the town of Oeiras. Three other ministers were present alongside a deputation from Lisbon's municipal chamber, delegations from all the military units in the Lisbon garrison, police forces, and local schools; according to the press, only the incessant rain kept a larger crowd away. A military band played the national anthem as Norton de Matos unveiled a plaque on the already existing monument to Freire de Andrade, which read, "To Gomes Freire de Andrade. First centenary of this death, 18-10-1917. An homage by the Portuguese people."⁹

The stage was set, then, for confrontation in France between two contradictory goals: on the one hand, the British desire to take the CEP in hand and mold it into a force ready to defend a sector of the front line, in accordance with what was generally believed to have happened over a century earlier; on the other hand, the Portuguese determination to shake off British tutelage and demonstrate to the world that Portugal now stood on its own two feet as an equal among the allied nations. Years later, Ker, now a Major General stationed in India, was consulted by Brigadier J. E. Edmonds, author of the British Army's official history of the war, over the course of the battle of La Lys in April 1918. Ker suggested a number of alterations to Edmonds's original draft, which he deemed too hurtful to the Portuguese. In a highly revealing comment he noted, "I want to avoid the possibility of ill-feeling being aroused among the Portuguese, especially now that it is becoming ancient history. Their feeling against us after the Peninsular War was very acute, far more so than we ever realized until 1917."¹⁰ Ker and the other officers who had to deal with the Portuguese may have realized that this sentiment existed, but they did not act on it when first confronted with its manifestation; the task at hand—readying the CEP for the trenches—came first. However, their attempts to force the Portuguese to conform were resisted, which led to mounting frustration, but this was not a clash of equals and there could really be only one winner. This was so for a number of very powerful reasons. First of all, as has been mentioned, the CEP was by no means unanimous in its political viewpoints. Not all officers and men were republicans and among those who were, not all set off for France with the same understanding of Britain's role in Portuguese history. This was especially true of its commanding officer, General Tamagnini de Abreu, who was generally well-disposed towards his British colleagues and endeavored to cooperate when and where possible. Tamagnini may have been outflanked by men like Baptista or the many

⁹ *A Capital*, 18 October 1917.

¹⁰ NA Cabinet (CAB) 45/124, letter, Ker to Edmonds, 30 December 1931.

members of parliament who joined the CEP—and who like the CEP’s chief of staff had a direct line of communication with those in power in Lisbon—but he remained in command of the CEP and had to be obeyed. The same also held for General Gomes da Costa who commanded the 1st Division until April 1918, switching to the 2nd Division when it alone was left in the trenches (just in time to face the 9 April German offensive). A distinction was regularly drawn by the British between these two senior officers and Baptista, who they began to demonize. Secondly, of course, the CEP was in the British sector and had to play by British rules. It depended on the British army for most of its supplies and even for the pay of soldiers and men (Telo and Sousa 2016: 196-198), Portugal running an enormous tab for its participation on the Western Front. Although there was a convention between the two countries setting out the relationship between their armies, the CEP was under the orders first of General Haking and later, when it finally constituted an army corps, of General Horne, Commander of the British First Army. The notion of a ‘Portuguese front’ was very much an illusion. Finally, the Portuguese were dependent on the British for the communications between Lisbon and the CEP. Troops and materials were carried mostly on British ships convoyed by British destroyers; should this lifeline be cut, the CEP would be generally left to its own devices. This, of course, is exactly what happened in the fall of 1917.

The unit diary of the British Mission to the CEP provides us with a glimpse of this evolving conflict. After an initial first contact with a batch of Portuguese officers—including Baptista—which seems to have gone well, the First Army issued a letter stating that “Details as to training will be arranged direct between XI Corps and Lieut. Col. Ker, CMG, DSO, Commanding British Mission attached Portuguese Division.”¹¹ A footnote, however, indicated that “This paragraph was amended on the 14th Feb. to read: ‘Details as to training will be arranged by XIth Corps.’ This was the result of representations from the Portuguese, who, for political reasons, wished to keep the mission in the background. CAK.” Baptista had returned to France resolved to do battle with Ker and scored some early points. The truth was that the Convention regulating the CEP’s existence made no mention of the Mission, a unilateral British initiative. The Mission’s diary contains extracts from a letter addressed by Ker to Major General Anderson, of the First Army’s Chief of Staff, revealing that the former now found himself in a quandary:

¹¹ NA WO 95/5488, 6 June 1917.

[...] by the terms of the convention there should be no more British Officers attached to the Portuguese. At the same time, Burnett Stuart told me when I was appointed here, that G.H.Q. considered it essential that there should be a British Mission attached to the Portuguese, and that we were to make ourselves indispensable to them and tactfully help as much as possible.¹²

Baptista had returned from Lisbon saying that, according to his Government, the Mission could exist provided it was restricted to the CEP's headquarters—"half a gain, but [...] not as complete a gain as we would like." More to the point, however, Portuguese Brigade Majors were not willing to take advice from their British counterparts "and until they do so, we shan't progress much." Baptista had also prevented the sending of "British Officer interpreters" to every Portuguese battalion; they were to be permitted only at Brigade and Regimental HQs. Ker fumed. On the one hand, training was slow and hampered by the host of diseases affecting both the Portuguese and the cattle they had brought to France. On the other hand, British officers could not give orders to their Portuguese colleagues, only make suggestions: "My Officers are working like beavers, but find it hard to make bricks with their hands tied." He was sure of two things: that the Portuguese wanted "to get rid of us all," and that—as he added in a post-scriptum—"there is a hidden strand of barbed wire in the fence somewhere, and I'm sure it's chiefly political."

Horne's reply was, for the moment, equivocal; Ker met Anderson on 18 February and was told that "The Army Commander quite understands the situation and says he wants you to continue to go very slow."¹³ "Slow" was the operative word; the training of the CEP seemed to make little progress, so much so that it began to exasperate the British authorities. In these early days, both Ker and the Mission continued to suffer setbacks. On 20 February, Ker met Haking who confirmed that "in future all orders would be sent direct from the Corps to the Portuguese, and not through the British Mission as hitherto." This meant that "the status of the British Mission thus becomes changed as greater responsibility falls upon the Corps."¹⁴ On 6 March, Ker wrote Haking, sending a copy to a colleague in the First Army's General Staff, Lieutenant Colonel J. H. Mackenzie. He highlighted a number of the problems faced by the Portuguese so far, including disease, the

¹² NA WO 95/5488, 18 February 1917, appendix 1.

¹³ NA WO 95/5488, 18 February 1917, appendix 1.

¹⁴ NA WO 95/5488, 20 February 1917.

poor quality of the uniforms, lack of discipline among all ranks, dilatoriness (which he identified as “the national characteristic”), over-centralization (without the express approval of either Tamagnini or Baptista nothing seemed to happen), the lack of aptitude of the officers for command, and the inability of the staff to look after the needs of the force. Ker vented his spleen. On the one hand, “neither Officers nor men, as a whole, realise the conditions of modern warfare;” on the other, “they are quite unaware of their own shortcomings,” and resented any interference. Given the lengthy list of problems besetting the force, Ker could see only one really efficient solution: “to place British Officers in command of formations, substituting British for Portuguese Staff Officers as was done in the Peninsular War.” This, he recognized, was politically impossible; as a result, it was necessary to widen the scope and reach of the Mission’s task. Instead of just training Portuguese instructors, the British would have to undertake the training of the whole Portuguese force as well as oversee discipline in training areas; they should also send Portuguese units, great and small, to the front for temporary attachment to larger British forces as soon as they were ready.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, two days later a major conference was held between Haking and other senior officers of XI Corps, Tamagnini, Baptista, and other Portuguese officers, and members of the British Mission.¹⁶ Haking ruled that British officers involved in training could not simply wait until they were consulted by their Portuguese counterparts; they “should make suggestions to the Portuguese Officers as to the best methods of training and point out mistakes which were being made.” Haking also ruled on Ker’s role going forward:

Colonel Ker is in charge of all the British Officers in the Mission and will see that they carry out their duties as decided upon above by the Corps Commander and General Tamagnini. He will act as a liaison officer between General Tamagnini and his staff and the Corps Commander and his Staff. He will bring to the notice of General Tamagnini of his Chief of Staff Officer anything he thinks requires special attention or alteration, and he will do everything in his power to ensure that he and the officers of the British Mission do their utmost to help the Portuguese officers and men,

¹⁵ NA WO 95/5488, 6 March 1917, Appendix 2.

¹⁶ NA WO 158/850, “Notes of a conference held at Aire on 8th March 1917, but the General Officer Commanding XI Corps at the Headquarters of the British Mission attached to the Portuguese Expeditionary Force.” Note that this conference has been mentioned by other authors.

without in any way interfering with the responsible chain of the Portuguese command and control.

The meeting went some way towards clearing the air, emboldening British Mission officers to make suggestions, but their advice was not always acted on and centralization remained an issue:

Major Baptista has more on his shoulders than any one man can possibly carry. His decisions are always so framed that they keep everything centralised, instead of giving subordinates power to help themselves [...] he falls back on the argument that he knows the limitations of his own people, and that is a very difficult argument to answer.¹⁷

This article cannot provide a comprehensive overview of the CEP's preparation for battle or even of Anglo-Portuguese relations on the battlefield. The unit's training, analyzed at every step by its British minders, continued and eventually its men began to rotate in and out of the trenches they would be called on to defend, first as companies, then as battalions, and, finally, as brigades. British criticism of the CEP, as this process evolved, focused above all on the role played by officers and their apparent lack of concern for the other ranks, which manifested itself in a variety of problematic ways. This attitude, so different from the paternalism that informed the relations between officers and their men in the British Army (Watson 2008: 114-124), was corroborated by important Portuguese sources. What seems clear, however, is that the inbuilt defensiveness of the Portuguese, hyper-dependent on British resources but keen to distance themselves from London, and the growing frustration of the British in the face of what they took to be pointless obstructionism prevented the CEP from achieving the goals set for it by its political masters. By the late spring 1917, the Portuguese government had begun to send units destined for a second division when it was informed that the ships put at its disposal for that purpose were being withdrawn by Britain. This was a crisis of the first order and Norton de Matos set off for London to resolve it. He met en route with Sir Douglas Haig on 20 May. Haig, five days earlier, had informed Derby of the CEP's progress, which he believed to be "unduly slow."¹⁸ It would require another month's preparation before being

¹⁷ NA WO 95/5488, 18 March 1917, Appendix 5.

¹⁸ WO 158/114, Haig to the Secretary, War Office, Secret, 15 May 1917.

able to defend—under constant supervision—a quiet sector of the line. The Portuguese suffered from over-centralization, “very indifferent interior economy,” poor “horse management,” and the indifference of junior officers for the welfare of the men. It was also the case that many officers, especially senior ones,

regarded our army as composed mainly of amateurs from whom they had nothing to learn except a few details of trench warfare. They were unduly and needlessly jealous of their national independence and unwilling to make full use of the specially selected officers of the British Mission [...].

When the two men met, Haig thought Norton de Matos “quite an energetic and keen little man.”¹⁹ Haig noted in his diary how slowly the CEP was being prepared for service and singled out Baptista, “who has made difficulties and would not take advantage of the knowledge of the British officers whom I sent to the division as instructors.” During the meeting, Haig suggested that Baptista should be returned to Portugal. Norton de Matos, however, played for time by promising “to go into the matter” and to spend some time with the CEP on his return from London. But Baptista, who went with the Minister to London, stayed on with the CEP and this episode cannot but have soured Haig’s view of the unit. A very explicit request for the removal of an officer from a key position had been ignored.

Derby’s letter, quoted at the start of this article, was based on a missive, dated 27 August, in which Haig expressed great anxiety at the prospect of a Portuguese army corps holding a stretch of the front line.²⁰ His first solution was to simply remove them, sending them home or to another theatre of operations; his second was to post “a proportion of British officers to the various units to control and supervise their training, and actually to assume command in battle, as was done in the Peninsula;” his third was to prevent the creation of an army corps, by—as Derby would go on to suggest—keeping one division as a training and reserve force. Haig’s views on the matter were largely shaped by a lengthy report produced by Haking on 13 August on the subject of the CEP. In it, Haking explained that only by his constant supervision was the Portuguese division kept in any sort of fighting form. At the heart of the matter was the poor quality of the officers. Some were good and Haking singled out two battalions for praise (Infantry 34 and 28) but the rest

¹⁹ NA, Diaries of Sir Douglas Haig, Sunday 20 May 1917.

²⁰ NA WO 106/551, Haig to the Secretary of State for War, 27 August 1917.

were poor, as were the NCOs; the morale of the force, he thought, was weak, and it would break if attacked “simply for want of good leaders.” Haking expressed the wish that the Convention could be overruled so as to place a British officer “in temporary command of all units teaching the corresponding Portuguese Officers their duty and making them do it.” Only then would it be possible to extract the best performance from the CEP’s “not at all bad soldiers.” Such shortcomings were evident in the Staff as well, whose members were “tarred with the political brush.” Exceedingly secretive and bureaucratic, they systematically opposed British wishes, many of them belonging “to a secret political society.” Baptista added, “If this Officer could be removed to a sphere where his political proclivities could be more usefully employed by his country I know that both the G[eneral] O[fficer] C[ommanding] CEP and the GOC 1st Portuguese Division would be very pleased.”

Many of the British complaints about the CEP were, it seems, well-founded (Telo and Sousa 2016, Meneses 2018a, *passim*). The British Mission produced report after report on the various units that made up the expeditionary force, detailing their shortcomings as well as the improvements being registered. Its members also singled out individual Portuguese officers for praise—not all were tarred with the same brush. Their criticism was matched by other criticisms found in Portuguese sources. Tamagnini’s memoirs are full of complaints about the attitude and aptitude of his subordinates and their anti-British sentiment, motivated, in part, because of the widespread belief that it was Britain’s fault that Portugal was at war and that they now found themselves in France (Pereira (ed.) 2004: ccxx). As far as Tamagnini was concerned, the officers who best performed their duties were those who bore the British no ill-will (Pereira (ed.) 2004: ccxxi). Tamagnini, echoing Haig’s view, also stressed how the Staff officers gathered around Baptista, as well as other politicized elements, and repeatedly questioned their British counterparts’ military knowledge: before the war, they insinuated, the British had been totting up numbers in banks or selling butter behind a counter (Pereira (ed.) 2004: clxxix). Incredibly, one such officer, Lieutenant Colonel Freiria, would, at a lecture in Lisbon’s *Escola Militar* in 1918, pin the blame for trench warfare on the British army, whose small professional core had been decimated in 1914 and who had thus gone underground; replacement officers lacking the technical knowledge and even the offensive spirit necessary to continue the fight above ground. As he put it, “an army built for the trench and which had always fought in the trench, will only launch itself with the greatest of difficulties, of its own volition, into a War of Movement” (Freiria 1918: 8-9). In consequence of his conversation with Haig in May and subsequent time in London, Norton de Matos wrote Tamagnini, urging him to step up

the promotions to officers from the ranks and expressing the view that “not enough work was being done, that many officers lacked interest” or viewed their time in France as an exile or a punishment that would cease once the government had been removed from power (Pereira (ed.) 2004: cxxxvi-cxxxvii). He was not the only interventionist to have doubts about the army sent to France; João Chagas would write, some months later, after the battle of La Lys:

The mentality of our officers, their total lack of self-sacrifice and desire to fight, the germanophile tendencies of many, combined with the situation in Portugal and the *sidonista* reaction against the war lead me to very pessimistic conclusions. (Chagas 1986b: 49)

There was one last opportunity, as the British saw it, to exercise pressure on the Portuguese decision-makers to reform the CEP, accepting its limitations and recognizing the need for greater British participation. This occurred in October when President Bernardino Machado and Prime Minister Afonso Costa visited the front shortly before the 2nd Division joined the 1st in the trenches, bringing to life a Portuguese army corps. As General Sir R. D. Whigham, Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wrote in a letter to Barnardiston, “We have the Portuguese President over here now, and I hope something satisfactory will be settled.”²¹ Machado met with Haig on 17 October 1917, the latter raising his long-standing concerns with the quality of the CEP’s officers. Machado—“an alert little man of 66 years of age,” as Haig called him—generally agreed with Haig, explaining that this was a consequence of Portugal’s long decline, which the Republic was trying to reverse:

The President assured me that the Revolution was the result of the national desire that Portugal should take its place in the world. The majority of the former ruling classes were effete and thought only of amusement. I told him that the weak part of the Portuguese division in France was the officers. He said we must train others from the young soldiers. I agreed that was the only thing to do, but we must have his support.

Machado and Costa, for their part, painted a picture of a postwar world in which the Atlantic would be dominated by the English and Portuguese-speaking powers: “Brazil is to

²¹ NA WO 106/551, Letter, Whigham to Barnardiston, 18 October 1917.

America what Portugal is to England. All four, said the President, must co-operate closely after the war.”²²

The notion of promoting officers from the ranks was, however, a mirage; Portugal’s illiteracy rate of 70%, unique in Western Europe made candidates for this kind of promotion unusually difficult to find. What Haig meant as a precise criticism about the CEP, republicans took to be encouragement for their grandiose project of national affirmation and renewal—both, it seemed to them, had a common enemy in the shape of reactionary officers. This is unsurprising, not least because, as João Chagas put it, of the evident ill-will towards Machado and Costa of the officers in France. At the Laventie train station, Chagas recognized only three officers known for their republican sentiment (Chagas 1986b: 47-48). The words of Machado and Costa made little impact at the end of the day, however, since, shortly after their return to Lisbon, the decision was taken in London to withdraw the last British ship ensuring the transport of reinforcements in men and animals to the CEP just as it was set to establish itself as an independent army corps, with the 1st and 2nd Divisions side-by-side in the trenches.²³

Within a month of this decision being taken, Machado was in exile and Costa behind bars, power having been seized in Lisbon by Sidónio Pais, who initially took on the role of Prime Minister, Minister of War, and Minister for Foreign Affairs. Meeting Pais on 18 December, Barnardiston mentioned Lord Derby’s approach to Norton de Matos, explaining that it “might to a great extent relieve the Portuguese Government from the necessity of sending such large reinforcements as were at present required.” Barnardiston also reiterated Haig’s concerns “for the health and efficiency of the Portuguese Troops in the trenches during the winter.”²⁴ Before the year was out, Pais had acquiesced to the proposals. Not only did this signify withdrawing one division from the front, it also meant posting British liaison officers (of a rank no higher than Captain) to the CEP’s battalions and similar-sized units (there being some haziness as to the precise contours of their respective briefs).²⁵ Where Pais drew the line was in abolishing the CEP’s corps command. Not surprisingly, interventionists were now in retreat. There was a clear-out in the CEP; Baptista was soon sent recalled, meeting Chagas—who had resigned his position but stayed on in Paris—in the French capital (Chagas 1986b: 5). Baptista was replaced by João José

²² National Archives, Diaries of Sir Douglas Haig, Wednesday 17 October 1917.

²³ For Barnardiston’s disappointment after Machado’s return to Lisbon, see Liddell Hart Military Archives, King’s College London, Private Papers of N.W. Barnardiston 3/4, Personal Diary & Notebook 1917-1919, 3 November 1917.

²⁴ WO 106/551, N. 681, Barnardiston to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 19 December 1917.

²⁵ WO 106/553, N. 740, Barnardiston to Whigham, War Office, 11 January 1918, Secret.

Sinel de Cordes, who years later would mastermind the 28 May 1926 coup that overthrew the First Republic. Freiria too was replaced. However, the manpower crisis hitting the British in the wake of the battle of Passchendaele meant that the CEP's two divisions were forced to remain on the front line until April 1918; only then was 1st Division removed from the trenches, the 2nd being incorporated into Haking's XI Corps after which it was decided to remove the 2nd as well. This was due to happen on the night of 9-10 April but never took place given the German assault which occurred on the 9th.

After the fighting on 9 April 1918, known in Portugal as the battle of La Lys, the British took measures to ensure that what remained of the CEP in France was neither reinforced nor meaningfully reorganized (Meneses 2018b). The brigades of the 1st Division and the survivors of the 2nd were distributed among British divisions to work on building and repairing rear defenses. Artillery units were also distributed among British forces; retaining their primary function, they were, however, separated. Only in the very last days of the war (and after a number of very serious mutinies) were some infantry battalions returned to the trenches, again parceled out to various British brigades. An enormous opportunity had been lost. Interventionists had failed to raise Portugal's prestige and had actually imperiled the survival of the republican regime that had arisen out of the October 1910 revolution. Under the guise of restoring the Republic to its purity, Sidónio Pais moved Portuguese politics very far from democratic ideals before his murder in December 1918 allowed for the reestablishment of constitutional order. At the front, the Portuguese war effort, which had promised so much and had shown itself capable of enthusing a Portuguese readership around the globe (Meneses 2017: 3), was snuffed out by the British High Command amid accusations and counter-accusations of who was to blame for the German gains at La Lys. All that the Portuguese had insisted on—an independent army corps, a distinctly Portuguese sector, a Portuguese communiqué—had counted for little. Worse still, as postwar correspondence with J. E. Edmonds showed, the 2nd Division's rout became the defining image in British minds of Portugal's contribution to the common effort. Episodes from the retreat became tales that grew with the telling. Brigadier A.T. Beckwith, commander of the elite 51st Highland Division's 152nd Brigade, stationed behind the Portuguese on 9 April, would describe them as “in full *ventre-à-terre*” by the time his unit reached their line, adding that he had witnessed many episodes unworthy of inclusion in a work such as Edmonds’.”²⁶ The commander of another Highland brigade, the 154th, mentioned “the complete and hasty flight of the Portuguese from the front,” explaining

²⁶ NA CAB 45/122, Beckwith to Edmonds, 19 June 1931.

that once his men had set themselves up for battle he could not see a single Portuguese soldier, wounded or not.²⁷ Various officers mentioned the theft by the Portuguese of the bicycles belonging to the XI Corps Cyclist Battalion, which had also moved forward to support the embattled Portuguese.²⁸ Another officer explained that the Portuguese had fled, with three men riding each mule found on the way. The CEP had become a simple and, for some, amusing, footnote in the history of the conflict.

However, the British also lost an opportunity to make the most of a willing ally's offer of help. There were evident shortcomings in the Portuguese Expeditionary Force—not least of all a shortage of officers, whatever their competence, as well as very real doubts about why Portugal had entered the conflict—but there was also a genuine desire on the part of the Lisbon government to contribute to the overall Allied victory, an outcome on which, for its members, the future of the Republic seemed to depend. What is more, as figures like Ker admitted, the CEP did improve over time. Even Haig noted in his diary, on March 1918, that the “Portuguese men look very much fitter than when they arrived just a year ago”—although the officers remained, in his eyes, “a poor lot,” who did not “look after their men when off parade.”²⁹ Norton de Matos had dreamt of sending a much larger force to France. Even if Portugal's economic difficulties and the need to defend its colonies rendered this an impossible dream, it cannot be said that the British capitalized on what was made available to them by Lisbon.

²⁷ NA CAB 45/122, Buchanan to Edmonds, 23 July 1931.

²⁸ NA CAB 45/122, Collis to Edmonds, 23 March 1932; CAB 45/123, French to Edmonds, 6 December 1931.

²⁹ NA, Diaries of Sir Douglas Haig, 1 March 1918.

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