

**‘All of Us are Looking Forward to Leaving’:  
The Censored Correspondence of the  
Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in France,  
1917–18**

The lack of morale among the Portuguese forces fighting on the Western Front — and its link with the collapse of the Portuguese 2nd Division on 9 April 1918, before one of the most successful German offensives of the war — has already been demonstrated.<sup>1</sup> Even if only for one morning, the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (CEP), at the battle on the Lys river, found itself in the centre of the fighting in Europe, thus accomplishing the objective so desired by the politicians who had initially sent it to France. However, difficulties with supplies and reinforcements, political divisions, and a violent change of government in Lisbon in December 1917 had all contributed to the CEP’s inability to mount a co-ordinated defence against the German onslaught, which was both preceded by a sudden and violent artillery barrage and spearheaded by the shock-troops developed by Hindenburg and Ludendorff. After 9 April 1918 the remains of the CEP were used by the Allies in secondary duties, including the digging of trenches. Some combat-worthy battalions were assembled, but returned to the front only in November 1918, too late to see any fighting. The Portuguese experience of the Western Front, despite the small size of the CEP (an incomplete army corps), is of interest to historians of the Great War because it provides a unique perspective of that conflict: for Portugal the war was a limited, and not a total, war against a distant enemy; there was no consensus in Portugal over the need to send an expeditionary corps to France or even, among a significant and

vocal minority, to be at war with Germany.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Portuguese army reflected this lack of consensus, a substantial part of its officers believing the country's intervention to have been the result of partisan policy, born out of the material and political interests of a few, and not of national necessity. Finally, the CEP was, in its social and cultural composition, an exception on the Western Front (although not in the war as a whole, considering the campaigns in Eastern Europe): as an example of a largely rural and illiterate population, whose experience of war was limited to African campaigns, it naturally faced greater difficulties than its Allied counterparts in adjusting to the mass industrial battlefields of France.

Measuring the attitude of the Portuguese army during its time in France is not easy. Because of different political opinions, split essentially between, on the one hand, the monarchist and conservative republican and, on the other, the radical republican, officers interpreted their presence in France in very different ways — for some it was a needless sacrifice imposed by a demagogical clique while for others it was a bold and welcome departure in Portugal's history. This fundamental disagreement over the meaning of the war resulted in a divided memory of events, and comparatively few accounts and memoirs of the fighting were published in the postwar years: most of these, in any case, were the product of politically engaged men writing for clearly identifiable commercial or political reasons, or of officers trying hard to leave politics out of the CEP's story in an effort to focus attention on its tribulations and sacrifices.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, a virtual blanket of silence engulfed Portugal's war experience under Salazar's New State: for the Portuguese Right the war had been a catastrophe brought upon the country by the oversized ambition of a divided, corrupt, and intolerant republican political leadership. The official discourse on the subject of Portuguese participation in the conflict, initially sketched by Sidónio Pais in 1918, was limited to expressions of admiration for the men who, sent to fight in France for unclear reasons, had done so much to uphold Portuguese honour and the country's martial reputation: no further meaning was attached to the country's war experience.<sup>4</sup> In order to gauge the true opinions of Portuguese soldiers and officers in France, one must look for wartime accounts of life in the trenches by the members of the CEP. Some of these can be found in the soldiers' wartime correspondence, a historical

source already employed extensively in relation to other armies by historians of the Great War.

A number of methodological problems arise from this source, some of them specific to the Portuguese case. In the first place, the Portuguese army, unlike its counterparts on the Western Front, was largely illiterate. Seventy per cent of the adult population in Portugal could not read or write: and while the proportion of illiterate women was higher than that of men, the overwhelmingly rural (which, in Portugal's case, meant uneducated) nature of the Portuguese infantry ensured that the percentage of illiterates in the CEP made it an oddity on the Western Front. The volume of correspondence generated by the CEP was therefore smaller than that of other Allied army corps, and the need to have other soldiers write letters (and to have someone in Portugal read the letters to the intended audience) may well have had an impact on the nature of the correspondence above and beyond the usual constraints of wartime letters — the presence of the censor and the desire to ease the anxiety of loved ones. Another problem that arises is the very real lack of collections of correspondence; the most significant is to be found in the Arquivo Histórico Militar (AHM) in Lisbon, and consists of correspondence intercepted by the army's postal censorship service. This fact is not without consequences: the material for this article is a collection of letters which the Army prevented from arriving at their destinations precisely because they were detrimental to civilian morale. It is impossible to judge what percentage of the CEP's total correspondence was halted, and what percentage of halted correspondence has survived in the Army's archives. However, because we are starting from the principle that morale was poor — as is evidenced by a number of impartial witnesses,<sup>5</sup> and readily admitted by the CEP's commanders themselves — the intercepted correspondence can help us to explain the nature of the problems that afflicted the soldiers and undermined their morale.

What were the difficulties that preoccupied Portugal's soldiers as they lived and fought in the trenches of Flanders, surrounded on both sides by their 'historic' British allies? The most apparent, from their intercepted correspondence, was the impossibility of leave. Portuguese soldiers could not go on leave: whether this was the result of very real transport difficulties,<sup>6</sup> or of a fear that soldiers on leave would not return and would act as a source of detrimental stories about the war, is not clear. The fact that the

Portuguese soldiers were in close contact with British forces, whose members enjoyed the benefits of home leave, was significant. Whatever the reason, leave was only available for officers, in what was a tremendous blow for morale, especially since many of the officers who went on leave after 5 December 1917 simply did not return to France.<sup>7</sup> The government of Sidónio Pais, formed after the coup which had toppled the interventionist Sacred Union government of Afonso Costa, allowed officers to remain in Portugal indefinitely, while their troops endured the rigours of the French winter.

The policy of denying leave to the soldiers of the CEP was never altered until the end of the war; many soldiers would be repatriated by Sidónio Pais in 1918 — the wounded and infirm — but this was not part of a system of leave, or even of the replacement of unfit men; rather, it was a part of Sidónio Pais's attempt to reduce the scale of Portugal's involvement in the conflict, thereby increasing his domestic popularity. The stored correspondence suggests that, naturally, the soldiers were consumed by thoughts of home and the elaboration of stratagems for returning safely to their country. J. Esgalha, writing to his family from England, where he was undergoing instruction, asked his father to arrange his return to Portugal through a doctor at the Estrela military hospital in Lisbon who negotiated the recall of soldiers from the front: 'Many boys, who are as healthy as I, are being let go by the medical board; just today five left my company for Portugal and many have been let go.'<sup>8</sup> Francisco Rodrigues Marques wrote to a fellow soldier to inform him of a doctor who might be able to arrange for an early return to Portugal.<sup>9</sup> Casimiro Pinto, writing to what seems to have been a 'War Godmother', told her that leave was impossible, being availed of by only a handful of officers: it was rumoured, he added optimistically, that his Division would soon be replaced by another formation and that as a result there would be no need for leave.<sup>10</sup> António Correia was meant to have received an anonymous letter from his son at the front, who had hatched a plot to ensure his return to Portugal: along with a false mass card, the soldier would receive from his father the sad news of the 'demise' of his grandmother, along with a request to be present at the reading of the will: without his presence, no arrangements could be made.<sup>11</sup> The ultimate plot was hatched by Custódio, who wrote to his wife to tell her of the details:

As I am sick of all this I had an idea for going on leave and never returning here. Ask Isabel to write me a letter saying that you have pneumonia and that the doctor says you will not make it because you're anaemic and it's a double pneumonia; that our children are at her house and that Adélia has gone mad, and that, poor as we are, though it may be difficult to admit it, she asks me to go to Lisbon to take care of the children before some tragedy occurs . . . She should tell me all the time that your condition is getting worse, that you are constantly calling for me and that the girls are crying, that you are constantly worse.<sup>12</sup>

One soldier, writing to a friend, recommended asking for a doctor's appointment and eating a bar of soap fifteen minutes before meeting the doctor as a way out of the trenches.<sup>13</sup>

Lack of leave was indeed a serious problem for the men of the CEP, who, if uninjured or in good health, simply did not have a glimmer of hope for returning home safely until the war ended. Thoughts of revolt were entertained as a result of this condition. A letter sent in the civilian post by a soldier, Serafim Fernandes Leite, to his parents, mentioned the possibility of a mass desertion to the Germans if the troops were returned to the trenches before a spell of leave, which seemed to be reserved for officers, for whom the war had been a holiday — in his words, 'a Brazil'.<sup>14</sup> An anonymous letter, full of spelling errors, was sent to the Commander in Chief of the CEP, General Tamagnini d'Abreu, informing him that his men felt abandoned in France, and that one day he might find the Portuguese Division on the side of the Germans: he was asked to choose between sending his men home on leave or watching them cross no man's land to the German trenches.<sup>15</sup> The personal despair of Alves Mendes Cabral as he wrote to his wife was clear:

I'm the same as ever, always hoping for some order that will send us back to Portugal, but as far as I can see it's all fantasy, because those who are here stay here, lucky are those who are in Portugal because those of us in France might as well give up our intentions of returning because we've been here for nearly sixteen months and there is no glimmer of hope, only the hope of losing our life.<sup>16</sup>

António Pereira da Silva explained, to an acquaintance, the reason for another man's leave and not his own: 'Mr Fonseca was luckier when it came to leave and it is not surprising because he is an officer and I am a soldier,' adding that 'he is still there [Portugal] and I will only go later or never.'<sup>17</sup> However, even among NCOs and officers there was discontent over the matter

of leave. Captain Mattos Raymundo was such an officer; writing in December 1917 (he had heard of disturbances in Lisbon and Oporto but definite news of the overthrow of the government had not reached him yet) he complained that only the General and officers who were also parliamentary deputies had left for Lisbon: 'The moral is this: some are at the front, and do not enjoy the benefits to which they are entitled, while the shirkers have everything, they lack nothing and enjoy their leave like lords.'<sup>18</sup> Second Lieutenant Teixeira Moniz warned his father, in March 1918, that there were many officers ahead of him in the queue for leave, and that by his calculation leave would only be granted in August or September of that year: 'What I need is a great rest, far from all the problems of the war where for a while I will not hear of soldiers nor be bothered by them!'<sup>19</sup> Another Second Lieutenant, Santos Pedroso, wrote to his fiancée 'over here nobody seems to care about leave, nobody speaks about it any more. As those gentlemen have already gone on leave a couple of times, they do not care about those who, like me, have never had such a pleasure.'<sup>20</sup> Two days later he returned to the same subject:

As regards leave I know nothing and I don't think that there is anything to be known over here — what about at that end? Do you know anything yet? Oh! How I would like to go on leave, to see you and embrace you! At that moment I would be the happiest creature in the world, I swear! But it is too much happiness for us, and I'm sure that it will not be this month that we will know that happiness. Time marches on and nobody cares! The way these people act is criminal!<sup>21</sup>

Sergeant José dos Santos, who maintained a carefully numbered correspondence with his wife, found it hard to assuage her feeling of anger over leave:

You say, sweetheart, that in relation to the martyrdom of our absence what most upsets you is seeing all the others return and only me staying on. You cannot imagine how all of that upsets me; as you well know I'm not here for the simple pleasure of being in France. If I had been able and allowed to do so I would have left a long time ago, because I'm only too sick of all of this.<sup>22</sup>

Also related to the problem of leave was the sudden rumour among soldiers that leave could be purchased: with 300 francs the much desired passage home could be secured. This was the message of Francisco de Jesus to his mother in August 1918: his mother sent him little money, his daily wages (10 cents) did not

allow him even to buy an apple, and with 300 francs he could arrange for the leave — otherwise he would have to wait until the end of the war.<sup>23</sup> A soldier, in an unsigned letter, wrote to his father in the Algarve, complaining that while other soldiers were returning to Portugal, he simply did not have the necessary 300 francs.<sup>24</sup> Soldier Mateus Rodrigues attempted to blackmail his mother: either she sent him the money necessary to purchase the leave (which his officer had assured him would come soon) or he would have to marry a French woman, ‘one of those with many Francs’: otherwise he would never return to Portugal, ‘because the war will never end’.<sup>25</sup> Armando Martins, a patriotic soldier embarrassed by the use of the Portuguese troops as trench diggers in the aftermath of 9 April 1918, stated in relation to leave that ‘we have been fooled by a thousand promises’.<sup>26</sup> As the war entered its last weeks an American, W.E. Vanderbilt, of the American Red Triangle association, wrote his wife a letter that passed through the hands of the Portuguese postal censorship, and which was transcribed for the benefit of the CEP’s commanders. According to Vanderbilt, the Portuguese soldiers, ‘farmer boys and from the small towns’, did not know why they were at war and why they were being made to spend such a long time away from their homes: ‘They say they will be entirely willing to return here and go on with the fight after this short vacation.’ Vanderbilt felt confident, nevertheless, that his words of encouragement had been positively received by the Portuguese: in a Spanish learned in Mexico he pointed out to them that ‘they are not as badly off as the Canadians, the New Zealanders and the Australians, many of whom have now been away from home for three years and more’,<sup>27</sup> thus ignoring the fact that, unlike the soldiers from the Dominions, Portuguese soldiers had not volunteered their presence in France.

If a desire to return home, whether definitively or on leave, was a common theme in the censored letters of the Portuguese army, then the conditions endured at the front were also another frequent source of complaint among the soldiers. Among these the amount and quality of the food served to the men stood out. José Rosa dos Santos complained about the food at length to his wife in Lisbon: it was mostly tinned food, but frequently it was inedible: ‘Today was one of those days in which the whole meal was rotten.’ Limited solace was to be found in the bread, which was of good quality, but available only in limited quantities:

There is only one loaf for every three men, for the past three days I've only eaten one fourth of a loaf, if things continue like this then, if I am ever to know the joy of returning to Lisbon, I will have to go to the Rego Hospital, this is too much, the only thing missing here is the plague . . . on top of all of this unhappiness we have to work by night, with our bellies full of hunger.<sup>28</sup>

Chaplain J. Manuel de Sousa praised the courage of the Portuguese soldiers despite the fact that they were 'tired, their strength exhausted, ill, burdened by all kinds of problems, badly clothed and fed worse still'.<sup>29</sup> This admission led to an internal enquiry into the chaplain, who was defended by his superior in a letter of 5 March 1918: 'Father Sousa is a venerable priest of 59 years of age who, by stepping forward as a volunteer chaplain, proved that his soul is full of dedication for the cause of the Fatherland.'<sup>30</sup> Mateus Rodrigues attempted to depress his mother further by letting her know that in the aftermath of the battle of the Lys he had spent five days without eating; he was now much better off, however, working in a luggage deposit in the vicinity of which the soldiers had grown vegetables: 'we have eaten many times salad of lettuce and beans and peppers and cucumbers, not to mention cabbages, which are huge here'.<sup>31</sup> António da Purificação's fate was different: employed as a trench digger in July 1918, he wrote to his mother saying that 'we're dead with hunger, I don't know how we resist, a loaf is divided up between six and eight men'.<sup>32</sup> A letter signed simply Arnaldo, written on 3 February 1918, stated that the officers treated the soldiers like dogs, starving them and intercepting the food packages sent by the Portuguese Women's Crusade, whose contents they kept for themselves; if soldiers wanted something to eat, they had to buy it.<sup>33</sup> Even before the Lys battle a soldier presented a heart-breaking picture of deprivation to his wife:

I have even offered 10 francs for a piece of bread and been rejected . . . they give a loaf of bread for every twelve men, (no more than) a mouthful each, so we do the following: the 12 get together and carry out a draw, and so whoever wins keeps the loaf, the winner can fill himself up with bread. From this you can see everything.<sup>34</sup>

Similar to the complaints about the lack of food were the complaints about the Flanders weather, so different from Portugal's more benign climate. Second Lieutenant Luís de Souza Gonzaga, seeking a Brazilian war godmother, described France as 'cold and icy as the flowers on a tomb'.<sup>35</sup> Less poetic, but more symp-

omatic of the difficulties experienced by Portuguese veterans of other wars, were the words of Second Lieutenant Simões dos Santos, writing to an officer stationed in Africa, in July 1917, presumably one of the hottest months that year in France: 'It is very cold here and used to the African climate as I am I will not be able to withstand, even if I am not caught by the bullets, 20 degrees below zero!'<sup>36</sup> As we saw already, Father J. Manuel de Sousa, describing the soldiers under his spiritual charge, claimed that they were inadequately dressed for the winter: and he himself had suffered heavily from the bitter effects of the cold during the early months of the year.<sup>37</sup> Mateus Rodrigues continued his litany of woes by claiming that in the aftermath of the Lys battle he had gone for 22 days without being issued a blanket, sleeping on the ground despite the inclement weather, and with only one uniform; everything else had been left behind in the rout.<sup>38</sup>

The actual description, for the benefit of those at home, of the fighting in an age of brutal industrialized warfare was also a concern of the troops, although, as many studies of correspondence have shown, this desire for comprehension was often matched by the need to preserve loved ones from the horrible reality of the Western Front. Moreover, descriptions of the fighting were frowned upon by the military authorities, always careful not to allow military information to pass into unsure hands. Nevertheless, in the AHM's censored correspondence we find some attempts to translate the horror of war into a language understood by the civilians in Portugal, so far removed geographically and culturally from what the soldiers were going through. Pride of place would go to the Lys battle, the one moment in which the CEP was caught in the full fury of war, confronted by a deadly and accurate artillery barrage and by an attack carried out in accordance with the new infantry tactics of the German army. For the survivors of 9 April 1918 the Lys battle would remain at the heart of their war experience, the day in which the memory of the fallen should be commemorated — which suggests that to the veterans, or to those who spoke in their name, the sacrifice of the troops was more important than participation in the final victory. An anonymous letter written on 6 October 1917 left no doubt as to the grim reality facing the soldiers: 'All of us are looking forward to leaving. We've been here 5 months and it seems like 5 years. Imagine that in 5 minutes the gas kills a man, provoking the most horrible pains.'

The anonymous correspondent then attempted to explain the concept of trench warfare: 'Here no advances are made. Those who try to do so lose all their men as a result of the mines which the enemy explodes: we have mines under their trenches and they have mines under ours.' He continued,

This is what trench warfare comes down to: artillery attacks, gas, raids to cut each other's wire, and the machine guns constantly firing to stop the enemy, mortars that bury a live man and every once in a while half a dozen are killed, and this is how we spend our days until our turn comes.<sup>39</sup>

Francisco Simões dos Santos, as a junior officer, bemoaned the fate of those who held similar ranks:

It would be better to be a sergeant and live than to be a dead Second Lieutenant. By my calculations only 5% of the Second Lieutenants will make it out of this war; 50% will die and the remaining 45% will be mutilees. This is indeed the 'war of the Second Lieutenants'! And while the Lieutenants and the Captains have 90% probability of making it, the Second Lieutenants have 5%, as I've already said.<sup>40</sup>

A letter by another Second Lieutenant, Henrique Ernesto Teixeira Moniz, provides clear proof of the tension felt by those at the front to inform, in order to be pitied, and at the same time to preserve families from the horrors of war. Replying to his father's complaint about the lack of concrete information about life at the front (or as the young officer called it, 'these horrible lands of France'), Teixeira Moniz asked

Why should I sadden you even more, and have you continuously worried? Can they not be left to myself, my sadness and these bitter tastes in my mouth? Why should I worry you with my tales, filled as they are with fears, privations and shocks?<sup>41</sup>

Although he would like to tell his father of life in the trenches, Teixeira Moniz claimed that he would prefer to wait until he was home, safe once again. Slowly, however, his account was made: so far there had been little fighting in his sector, but already he had witnessed the carnage of the war:

I tell you frankly, my dear and missed father, that I have never been through anything similar, and God willing I never will again! Nothing can be compared to it; one cannot have even the slightest idea of it! A horrible thing! Seeing death a number of times, hearing and seeing the enemy shells bursting a few

metres away, seeing my soldiers fall dead next to me, killed by the shrapnel of the bursting shells; the confusion of the moment itself, for someone who is entering a trench for the very first time, is a horrible thing; one cannot make the smallest idea of it.<sup>42</sup>

Despite Teixeira Moniz's stated desire to preserve his father from the worst, the desire to let him know what the trenches were like reasserted itself:

Hearing the shells whistle and burst near me has happened many times. One could even call it our *daily bread*, and I have grown used to them. We get used to this, and after a while we no longer care about it. In any case, all we can do is to see more or less where they are landing and run to either one side or the other in order to get as far away from them as possible. The war, this damned war!<sup>43</sup>

Teixeira Moniz, finally, pointed out how close they were to the enemy: the lines were never further than 150 metres away, and sometimes they were as close as 50 metres: 'And this is where we spend our best days, our youth!'<sup>44</sup>

A heroic account of the Lys battle was provided by Second Sergeant João C. da Costa, writing under the pseudonym of Evangelista. In this account the Portuguese line held while the British forces which flanked the CEP gave way, provoking the Portuguese retreat. Speaking of his sector, Evangelista told of three attacks which were beaten back despite being preceded by shells and mortars. 'The attack began at 4:15 and only at 10 o'clock did our line break!! Heroic soldiers: 90% of your numbers fell, but the honour of Portugal is saved!! You died, soldier from Minho, but you died heroically . . . may the earth not weigh you down.' Evangelista then enumerated the reasons for the impossibility of holding out any longer:

We were one against ten; we were tired and demoralized from the long stay at the front; we were betrayed by the munitions, which ran out a few hours into the fight — both infantry and artillery; we put up with over 60,000 gas shells; communications were cut right from the start; due to the artillery barrage it was impossible to move up the division's reserves quickly enough; the officers were killed, there being thus no superior direction; for all these reasons we Portuguese did not hold out, but nobody — absolutely nobody — held out.<sup>45</sup>

The final act of Portuguese heroism came with the realization that the battle was lost:

Portuguese officers resisted and died; the majority of those who while resisting

realized that they, while not being able to triumph, still had their lives, and that those lives would be spent interned in the enemy's concentration camps for prisoners, remained heroes to the end — that is, better death than being a prisoner: they committed suicide . . . a Portuguese battalion (Inf. 15), being out of munitions, carried out a bayonet charge! Not a single man survived.<sup>46</sup>

According to the letter, 11,000 men had missed the most recent roll call of the Division. The scale of losses was indeed impressive. Second Lieutenant Joaquim Ribeiro, from the safety of the Grand Hotel du Louvre et Terminus in Boulogne-sur-mer, wrote that 'entire battalions, entire artillery groups were left there, miserably abandoned by the command, which survived. They died, but with glory.'<sup>47</sup> Francisco de Jesus gave a more colourful description of the fighting, in which, as he wrote to his mother, he had nearly been taken prisoner: 'There was so much firing and it was so thick that it was like the winter rain there.'<sup>48</sup> Informing his mother that from their region only he and another soldier had made it through the battle, Francisco de Jesus asked her to tell him if she, in Portugal, had heard news of their acquaintances at the front or if their families were now receiving a pension. The scale of losses had obviously impressed this soldier: 'over 16 million men — just counting the Portuguese — were killed, those killed of other nations were countless, gas shells are best not spoken of, there were many and I did not have a mask to wear and I was caught by some gas.'<sup>49</sup> A more realistic — but still grossly inflated — estimate of the casualties and Portuguese resistance was given by António da Purificação, whose 'good fortune' it was to be in hospital on 9 April. According to him the Lys battle had lasted for 8 days and there had been 5,000 killed and 13,000 prisoners taken.<sup>50</sup>

While Evangelista's account of the Lys battle was one of an epic struggle between Germans and outnumbered Portuguese, Mateus Rodrigues's narrative was one of self-preservation in the face of a terrifying ordeal. The German shelling, which began at four, found Rodrigues 'very peaceful in my bed': and it seemed to Mateus Rodrigues that Judgement Day had arrived.<sup>51</sup> On 9 April most of the 2nd Division was destroyed on the battlefield. Rodrigues and a few men made a judgement to withdraw in the face of the shelling and the German advance, unlike anything they'd experienced before — but still found themselves in the fighting:

I, to see if I could escape from the enemy's fire, leaned against a wall of a hotel, and there a few minutes were spent, but when I heard the bullets of the enemy's rifles and machine-guns I said boys, today will be our end but we should not run away because those who run away are also shot, running away will not help us, today its down to luck, may God give us luck, only God can help us.

Rodrigues and his party of stragglers were rescued by the prompt arrival of British and Australian troops, but his personal retreat continued, reaching the rear lines — 'Village Paradis' — only to be shelled again: there were a number of casualties, but he could not say how many because he was on the move again:

As soon as I saw it land I retreated to a field on my left and then another one came from the same direction and landed further forward, really close to me, it was my good fortune that it did not explode because otherwise it would have been the end of me, but my guardian angel was keeping me company along with the Good Lord and Holy Mary.<sup>52</sup>

Also interesting were accounts of aerial bombardment, an experience for which some of the soldiers were clearly not prepared and which they struggled to convey to their home audience. Arnaldo Lopes Ribeiro strove to find a comparison: 'On the day of the September holiday, while you were all at the dances, listening to the music and enjoying yourselves I was here racked with worry for the bombs were bursting very close to me, they were louder than the holiday fireworks.'<sup>53</sup> Ribeiro's bitterness quickly turned to despair: 'One cannot live like this, if I ever find myself there [in Portugal] nobody will be able to take me away.' Another letter, signed only Arnaldo, sent the next day, stated that there were entire cities destroyed by the bombardments, which 'kill children, kill women, kill civilian men: be they guilty or innocent, they all die. This is very sad, don't you think, daughter? This is a complete horror.'<sup>54</sup> Adriano dos Santos's description of events in Calais was equally demoralizing: 'This is horrible. This city is bombed by enemy aircraft, these are aeroplanes that travel through the air but drop on us below bombs called aerial torpedoes. I can't begin to tell you — where these bombs fall they destroy everything.'<sup>55</sup> The effects were indeed devastating: 'It is pitiful to see so many buildings pulled down and so many children and women, so many people, killed by the bombs. One cannot live like this; it is such a sad situation that I don't know what will befall me and my comrades.'<sup>56</sup> Writing later

in 1918, Manuel Martinho showed a certain amount of contempt for the bombs: 'The biggest danger for me are the aeroplanes, which every night attack the city where I am posted; this city is called Havre. At the start I was very afraid when we were bombed, but today nothing scares me: I have seen so much that nothing amazes me.'<sup>57</sup> Martinho then attempted to describe the scenes that occurred during an attack: 'The bombardment continues! What to do? "Run away!" To run away is to be brave. Where is the bed? I don't know, forward is the only way . . . 10 minutes later someone reaches me and says: "the church has been knocked down, and we have to withdraw." Mother, you can imagine the night that lies ahead of me.'<sup>58</sup>

That there should be criticism of the CEP and its organization was not surprising, considering the frequent shortages of supplies, the lack of reinforcements, and the divisive political climate within its units. Some officers tried to distance themselves from the rest of the Army, maintaining a critical stance that revealed a deep hostility to the mission they were being asked to perform, seeing in the CEP not an agent for the affirmation of Portugal and its republican regime but merely an expensive and dangerous waste of resources and time. This attitude can be found in many letters sent by officers but nevertheless apprehended by the army's censorship service. Lieutenant António Vaz Monteiro Gomes was appalled by the sight of his countrymen at the front. 'I was up North, where alongside the organization, method, order, and cleanliness of the English and the colonial troops I had the occasion to see for myself the chaos, lack of method, and dirtiness of our people, especially of the officers.'<sup>59</sup> These officers, who had looked their best on the Parisian boulevards, now wore greasy uniforms and three-day beards; and their headquarters was described as 'a nest of shirkers and pedants, who criticise everything, but with a criticism wherein was noticeable only the envy that insults and not the stimulus to improve'. Monteiro Gomes added that his only consolation was that while the soldiers were as dirty as the officers — 'dirtier would be impossible' — they were nevertheless much more interesting, 'less full of themselves'.<sup>60</sup> Eugénio de Morais complained above all about the delays in the mail: 'imagine: some of my letters have taken two months to arrive! One would think we were in Timor! Portuguese postal services abroad — we know what they're like. *All these shirkers spend their*

*days in different towns enjoying themselves with whores and business will take care of itself.*<sup>61</sup> He then drew a comparison between the CEP and the surrounding British troops, which extended to the way in which the war was seen by the two armies:

We're the ones who suffer, we who command troops, we who spend day and night in these decrepit and badly separated trenches, badly fed, badly clothed, badly . . . bad. I will explain one day. The English, they have everything in abundance, and because it's their war, they are all happy and satisfied, despite dropping like flies.

The implication of his words, of course, was that the war was not a Portuguese affair; moreover, he could not see how victory might come about:

Everyone wants peace, except all the English. But the truth is that we have the whole of Europe fighting the Boche, and the English still had to call upon the Senegalese and the Australians. We have Indians, now we have Americans, in other words troops from all over the world. Well, let me tell you, my friend, by force of arms alone the Boche will not be beaten, not even by the whole world!<sup>62</sup>

Captain Mattos Raymundo, worried about the question of leave, thought that this applied only to the shirkers behind the lines.<sup>63</sup> These views were shared by Second Lieutenant Santos Pedroso. Those behind the lines had gone twice to Lisbon, so they did not care about the officers in the front: 'if there really was divine justice, many would already have been punished — and well punished — so great are the infringements that have been carried out'.<sup>64</sup>

This lack of esprit de corps was a characteristic of the CEP, driven apart by the political differences of its officers. Adelino Frazão, a monarchist (in fact a supporter of the proscribed *Miguelista* branch of the Portuguese royal family, exiled in Austria), poured out his scorn for the interventionists, who 'tire themselves out in the various bases, valorously battling against French women, and spreading dishonourable rumours about the comrades at the front to justify their cowardice'. Arguing that senior officers never appeared in the trenches, Frazão concluded that it was the subalterns in the trenches who were bearing the brunt of the fighting: 'Have you heard of a post commander mentioned in despatches? I have not. All of this is the fault of this damned politics that here, as in Portugal, continues to ruin everything.'<sup>65</sup> The massive change in politics that resulted

from Sidónio Pais's coup — which had dramatic effects for the CEP — was reflected in correspondence. Second Lieutenant João Herculano de Moura, part of General Gomes da Costa's staff, chose not to accompany the General on his return to Portugal in June 1918; to one of his correspondents he wrote, 'according to people who arrive from Lisbon, things there are really stupid';<sup>66</sup> to his mother he wrote 'I'm staying here because from what I hear the weather in Lisbon will surely harm my nerves.'<sup>67</sup> Sergeant José dos Santos, after complaining to his wife of the leave arrangements, sought to account for the CEP's failure:

What has happened here is shameful and it destroys the morale of those who love their Fatherland and call themselves Portuguese. And who is to blame? I'm sure that you are well aware! . . . We, who in this conflict and this terrible war might have filled History with pages of gold and diamonds, have done the complete opposite. And who is to blame? Those who claim to govern us? Yes, maybe they and only they are most responsible for everything.<sup>68</sup>

More positive were the views of an army chaplain, Father José Parente. Writing to his brother, who served in an artillery unit, Father José asked, 'and what say you to the Portuguese revolution and the arrest of the demagogues? There is no need to tell you that satisfaction with the success of the 8 December movement was general. May God illuminate our new leaders so that they may raise Portugal from the degrading state that it was in.' Father José went on to add that the situation was not yet safe in Portugal: 'everyone says that one can now breathe peacefully there, but that the 'ant' still seems to want to move'.<sup>69</sup>

The letters to be found in the AHM in Lisbon, although limited in number and grouped as a unit precisely because they had been censored, nevertheless provide unique insight into the failings of the CEP, a force undone by politics and cultural differences even as it set off from Portugal in 1917. The letters illustrate vividly the lack of unity, morale, and common purpose of the officers, NCOs, and soldiers who composed the Portuguese army in France: the splits in the officer class are especially significant, with monarchists, republicans, and the sympathizers of Sidónio Pais struggling to provide the experience in France with a meaning. These splits and the organized guerrilla they generated added to the exasperation felt by the men, who endured terrible con-

ditions for which they were not prepared, without the leadership and example of unity they needed in order to be sure that their sacrifice was of value. It was not surprising that mutinies would greet the attempts by officers committed to the CEP's mission to raise combat-worthy units from the remains of the 9 April 1918 battle, thereby returning elements of the Portuguese army to the battle front. For all of its obvious interest, however, censored correspondence did not attract the systematic attention of the Army — it was never used methodically as a source of intelligence regarding the needs and morale of the troops. The politically sensitive nature of the CEP's mission, and the impossibility of maintaining secrecy in its politically divided midst, might be one reason for this failure; the ad hoc nature of much of the CEP's organization might be another, and simpler, explanation for this oversight, so damaging for the army command and, ultimately, the historian. Nevertheless, João Chagas, Portugal's Ambassador in Paris, was told of some censored letters by a republican officer, and his reaction was one of worry, for political divisions had not been left behind by the officers:

On the one hand a group full of faith and enthusiasm; on the other a group of sceptics, who only see the negative side of things, some monarchists, others republican of the Camacho variety, for whom Portugal's intervention in the war is the work of the Democrats and therefore odious.

The soldiers' letters, Chagas was told, revealed optimism despite the cold initially felt after the arrival in France.<sup>70</sup>

The continuation of political feuds — so damaging to morale — was also reflected in an army information report sent to Lisbon in 1917, based on the observations of a 'capable' source.<sup>71</sup> This report is a long list of motives for concern. At the very top, disagreement between the commanders of the two divisions over the nature of relations to enjoy with the British forces; elsewhere, open contempt by the soldiers and junior officers for officers from the General Staff, who rarely if ever visited the front; who, it was claimed, protected monarchist officers; who abused their privileges — such as use of automobiles; and who, lastly, were terribly incompetent, ordering the execution of impossible tactical actions against the enemy. Soldiers had written a song — the *Hino dos Caxapins*, which ridiculed these General Staff officers, regarded as shirkers and cowards — which they sang whenever a staff officer appeared in the trenches. The report

went on, highlighting the material deficiencies of the health services (which, it claimed, also discriminated against known republicans, leaving them to wait for a day before attending them), the danger posed by chaplains ('constant and odious spreaders of pro-restoration propaganda and true instruments of calumny against the Republic's men'), and the problems caused by the lack of an independent Portuguese air force. Also selected as a target were the officers engaged in the censorship of correspondence, whose lack of secrecy was affecting morale through the publicization of personal matters, and the legation in Paris. João Chagas, according to report, had fallen prey to a complete apathy. The outlook was far from good for the Republic:

The restoration of the monarchy is viewed as a fact that, under German protection, will follow immediately from the cessation of hostilities between Portugal and the central empires; all Portuguese troops should surrender to Germany in order to be repatriated at a later date. This is the propaganda spread by the germanophiles, the monarchists, and above all the priests among the soldiers, ignorant and abandoned by their superior officers.<sup>72</sup>

The report, whatever its accuracy, is useful because the picture it portrays — of an army on the brink of mass surrender — is taken sufficiently seriously by the Army's intelligence service to be passed on to Lisbon. In other words, the report shows the extent to which distrust of the monarchists still present in the officer corps ran — and begs the question of why such an army was sent to the battlefield in the first place.

The decision to send an Expeditionary Corps to France was the expected response from the leading Portuguese parties to the state of war with Germany, a condition they had sought for Portugal since August 1914. The presence of the CEP in France was meant to symbolize the resurgence of Portugal and the credibility of the new republican regime: it was intended to better Portugal's standing with the democracies of Europe — thereby ensuring the survival of its colonial empire — and to strengthen the Republic's hold on the country. The practical results were quite the opposite. Awareness of Portugal's military effort remained low in Allied countries, and what testimony survived of the CEP is anything but flattering; a drop in the ocean of the Western Front, it would never be able to achieve a victory merely on its merits — and of course it was destroyed as a fighting unit on 9 April 1918. Worse still were the effects on the Republic's

credibility: military defeat in East Africa at the hands of the German General Von Lettow; the Republic's legitimate government toppled only for Sidónio Pais, the usurping President, to receive universal praise from the Allies, despite his clear policy of not sending more troops to France; the shame of two different negotiating teams at Versailles — the necessary result of Sidónio Pais's murder and the subsequent bout of civil war in the country. The soldiers of the CEP, more than anyone else, paid the price for this policy, enduring the experience of trench warfare without any signs of widespread support at home for their actions in France. A politically divided and largely apathetic officer corps was unable to compensate for this situation, failing even to ensure that the level of comfort and supply of its troops was the same as that of the other Allies. These failures are clearly reflected in the soldiers' correspondence, which reveals the soldiers' indignation over the duality in leave criteria and the harsh circumstances in which they had to survive, especially after the Lys battle.

### Notes

I would like to thank Dr Edward Arnold and Dr Gerry Cronin, both of Trinity College, Dublin, for their helpful comments regarding this article. I have attempted to preserve the flavour, and the urgency, of the censored letters in their English translation.

1. F. Ribeiro de Meneses, 'The Abandoned Army: The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in France, 1917-1918', *Portuguese Studies Review*, Vol. 5 (1996), 59-72.

2. Opposition to war with Germany was to be found at the political extremes — syndicalists, some socialists, and the majority of monarchists (with the obvious exception of the exiled monarch, Manuel II) opposed Portugal's participation in the conflict. Their views are expressed in newspapers such as *O Combate* (socialist, Lisbon), *A Aurora* (syndicalist, Oporto), *Trabalho e União* (syndicalist, Funchal), and *O Dia* (monarchist, Lisbon). The best descriptions of the debate that preceded Portugal's entry into the war are Hipólito de la Torre Gómez, *Na Encruzilhada da Grande Guerra: Portugal-Espanha 1913-1919* (Lisbon 1980), and Nuno Severiano Teixeira, *O Poder e a Guerra 1914-1918: Objectivos Nacionais e Estratégias Políticas na Entrada de Portugal na Grande Guerra* (Lisbon 1996).

3. See, for example, Humberto d'Almeida, *Memórias dum Expedicionário a França* (Oporto 1919); Alexandre Malheiro, *Da Flandres ao Hanover e Mecklenburg (Notas dum prisioneiro)* (Oporto 1919); André Brun, *A Malta das Trincheiras: Migalhas da Grande Guerra, 1917-1918* (Lisbon 1923); Augusto Casimiro, *Nas Trincheiras da Flandres* (Oporto 1918); Jaime Cortesão, *Memórias da Grande Guerra* (Oporto 1919); Joaquim Ribeiro, *Na Guerra: Depoimento dum Voluntário*

(Lisbon 1919); João Maria Ferreira do Amaral, *A Mentira de Flandres . . . e o Medo* (Lisbon 1922).

4. A veterans' organization, the Liga dos Combatentes da Grande Guerra, was created after the First World War, but its structure was, like the British Legion's, and unlike that of the corresponding French organizations, built from the top down, with significant military commanders in positions of leadership. Under such conditions, and considering those commanding officers' sympathy for the New State, the Liga was never to develop an original and independent stance on the war experience, its interpretation of the conflict remaining subordinated to the prevailing discourse.

5. See, for example, F.P. Crozier, *The Men I Killed* (London 1937); Sir James E. Edmunds, *History of the Great War: Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1918* (London 1937); Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (Harmondsworth 1986).

6. See Ribeiro de Meneses, *op.cit.*, for a discussion of the shortages of shipping assigned to the supply of the Portuguese forces in France, and the consequences of these shortages for the fighting strength of the CEP. Officers returning to Portugal on leave travelled by train through Spain — but the possibility of allowing soldiers to use the same — and expensive — means of transport seems, from the lack of references in either military documents or the press, to have been dismissed from the very start of Portugal's intervention.

7. Ribeiro de Meneses, *op.cit.*, 64.

8. Arquivo Histórico Militar (AHM), 1st Division, 35th Section, box 1298, J. Esgalha (Corpo de Artilharia Pesada) to his father, 12 November 1917.

9. AHM, box 1298. Francisco Rodrigues Marques (Infantry 4) to António Luíz (Infantry 3), 14 October 1917.

10. AHM, box 86, Casimiro Pinto to Senhora Borzies, 9 February 1918.

11. AHM, box 86, letter to António Correia, Correio de Porto de Mós, Fonte do Leiro, 25 June 1918.

12. AHM, box 86, Custódio to Maria José, June 1918 (sent by civilian post). The fact that Portuguese troops made frequent recourse to civilian mail was a constant source of complaint from British military authorities to their Portuguese counterparts.

13. AHM, box 86, letter to Francisco Gomes de Figueiredo (Infantry 8), 3 July 1918.

14. AHM, box 85, Confidential report from Captain E. Shirley, head of the postal censorship. An intelligence report relating to the unit in question, Infantry 24, and dated 11 December 1917, is appended to Shirley's own report, and it paints a dismal picture: Portuguese soldiers, like their British and French counterparts on the Western Front, resented the way in which their resting time away from the trenches was spent in drill and instruction. However, they had to face other problems: 'numerous soldiers no longer present themselves for instruction, because of the terrible condition of their uniforms', which had not yet been replaced. Moreover, leave was a factor: '[the soldiers] were greatly disheartened by the fact that some officers went on leave, no soldier having done so'.

15. AHM, box 85, anonymous letter sent to General Tomagnin (sic).

16. AHM, box 86, letter, Alves Mendes Cabral to Prazeres de Jesus, Correio de Gouveia para Aercozêllo, 14 May 1918.

17. AHM, box 86, postcard, António Pereira da Silva (chauffeur) to Madame Leopoldina Fernandes, Lisbon.

18. AHM, box 86, letter, Captain Mattos Raymundo to Judith, 10 December 1917. Asked to explain the contents of the letter, Captain Mattos Raymundo argued that 'reading the letter from the start one can see that it makes clear the profound sadness of someone like me who has been sacrificed, for, having been part of an expedition to Angola, a few months later I was sent to France, to serve constantly in the trenches, not having been allowed even the lightest convalescence'. Mattos Raymundo argued, moreover, that his wife was the 'sole confidant of my way of feeling and thinking', and that she 'had sufficient intelligence and education not to divulge her husband's confidences'.

19. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant Henrique Ernesto Teixeira Moniz (Infantry 1) to [?] Silva Moniz, Funchal, Madeira, 15 March 1918.

20. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant António Rodrigues Santos Pedroso to D. Martha Morais, Lisbon, 4 May 1918.

21. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant António Rodrigues Santos Pedroso to D. Martha Morais, Lisbon, 6 May 1918.

22. AHM, box 86, letter no. 126, Sergeant José dos Santos to Rita d'Almeida, Lamego, 4 September 1918.

23. AHM, box 86, letter, Francisco de Jesus to Maria Pincha, Correio de Val-Passos para Carrizado, Montenegro, Trás os Montes, 12 August 1918.

24. AHM, box 86, unsigned letter to Manuel Joaquim, Sítio do Poço do Queime, 12 August 1918.

25. AHM, box 86, letter, Mateus Rodrigues to his mother, Ermida de Jesus, Correio de Vidago por Val Verde d'Oura, 12 August 1918.

26. AHM, box 86, letter, Armando Martins to Adelina Silva Carvalho, Linha d'Oeste, Pataias, 16 November 1918.

27. AHM, box 86, Confidential report from Captain E. Shirley, head of the postal censorship to CEP headquarters, 7 October 1918.

28. AHM, box 85, José Rosa dos Santos to Beatriz Fernandes dos Santos, Lisbon.

29. AHM, box 86, Chaplain J. Manuel de Sousa to Manuel José dos Santos, Esposende.

30. AHM, box 86, letter, Head Chaplain to CEP HQ, 3 May 1918.

31. AHM, box 86, letter, Mateus Rodrigues to his mother, Ermida de Jesus, Correio de Vidago por Val Verde d'Oura, 12 August 1918.

32. AHM, box 86, letter, António da Purificação to Margarida dos Santos, Correio de Vinhais, 28 July 1918.

33. AHM, box 86, letter, Arnaldo to Ezília Jesus Ferreira, Lisbon, 3 February 1918.

34. AHM, box 86, letter, Francisco Fernando de Castro, 10 February 1918.

35. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant Luís de Souza Gonzaga (Inf. 21) to the editor of *O Paiz*, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

36. AHM, box 85, letter, Second Lieutenant Francisco Simões dos Santos to Captain José Antunes, Commander of the military post in Tamboco, 17 July 1917.

37. AHM, box 86, Chaplain J. Manuel de Sousa to Manuel José dos Santos, Esposende.

38. AHM, box 86, letter, Mateus Rodrigues to his mother, Ermida de Jesus, Correio de Vidago por Val Verde d'Oura, 12 August 1918.

39. AHM, box 85, anonymous letter to Amadeu de Jesus Figueiras, 6 October 1917.

40. AHM, box 85, letter, Second Lieutenant Francisco Simões dos Santos to Captain José Antunes, Commander of the military post in Tamboco, 17 July 1917.
41. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant Henrique Ernesto Teixeira Moniz (Inf. 1) to [?] Silva Moniz, Funchal, Madeira, 15 March 1918.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Sergeant João C. De Costa (Inf. 3) to his godfather, 27 April 1918.
46. Ibid.
47. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant Joaquim Ribeiro to Pedro Gouveia, Tomar. (Although the envelope is addressed to Maria Violante Ribeiro. Asked to account for the discrepancy, Ribeiro informed the censorship authorities that he had mistakenly placed two letters into the wrong envelopes.)
48. AHM, box 86, letter, Francisco de Jesus to Maria Pincha, Correio de Val-Passos para Carrizado, Montenegro, Trás os Montes, 12 August 1918.
49. Ibid.
50. Casualty figures for the CEP, assembled weeks after the end of the war, were the following: 25 officers, 35 sergeants, and 856 men killed in action; 1 officer, 25 sergeants, and 58 men killed by gas; 29 officers, 115 sergeants, and 1,050 men missing in action; and finally, 259 officers, 171 sergeants, and 2,753 men held as prisoners in Germany. AHM, box 464, Direção de Serviços de Estatística, Mapa de Perdas — Morte (30 November 1918) and Mapa de Perdas — Ferimentos, desaparecidos, Prisioneiros (30 November 1918).
51. AHM, box 86, letter, Mateus Rodrigues to his mother, Ermida de Jesus, Correio de Vidago por Val Verde d'Oura, 12 August 1918.
52. Ibid.
53. AHM, box 86, letter, Arnaldo Lopes Ribeiro, 2 February 1918. The contents of this letter and others posted from Calais were deemed by the censorship officials to be 'inconvenient and demoralizing for the country's population'. AHM, box 86, Capitão E. Shirley, Serviço de Censura da Base, to the SCEM.
54. AHM, box 86, letter, Arnaldo to Ezilia Jesus Ferreira, Lisbon, 3 February 1918.
55. AHM, box 86, letter, Adriano dos Santos, Calais, 2 February 1918.
56. Ibid.
57. AHM, box 86, letter, Manuel Martinho to José Bartolomeu da Silva, Ourique, 13 August 1918.
58. Ibid.
59. AHM, box 1298, letter, Artillery Lieutenant António Vaz Monteiro Gomes (Corpo Independente de Artilharia Pesada), to Mlle Sára Bedford, Lisbon, 25 September 1917.
60. Ibid.
61. AHM, box 86, letter, Eugénio de Morais to João Manuel Madureira, Bragança, 3 October 1917. Complaints about the postal service had already surfaced in the Portuguese press. The Oporto newspaper, *O Primeiro de Janeiro*, covered the postal situation in an article published on 21 August 1917: 'letters from the front, which used to reach Portugal in five or six days — not of itself a speed record — have now begun to take, normally, eleven or twelve days. This is

too much. We believe that those who are shedding their blood for the Fatherland, as well as their families, have the right to a little more consideration on the part of the army's postal censorship service, the famous SPC whose personnel constitutes a small army but whose service has given rise to an ever greater number of general and well-founded complaints.'

62. Ibid.

63. AHM, box 86, letter, Captain Mattos Raymundo to Judith, 10 December 1917.

64. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant António Rodrigues Santos Pedroso to D. Martha Morais, Lisbon, 4 May 1918.

65. AHM, box 85, letter, Adelino Frazão, 30 July 1917.

66. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant João Herculano de Moura (Cav. 7) to Fernando [?], Lisbon, 17 June 1917.

67. AHM, box 86, letter, Second Lieutenant João Herculano de Moura (Cav. 7) to Melita Gonzaga de Melo, Lisbon, 17 June 1918.

68. AHM, box 86, letter no. 126, Sergeant José dos Santos to Rita d'Almeida, Lamego, 4 September 1918.

69. AHM, box 86, letter, Father José Parente to Second Sergeant Domingo Gonçalves Parente (4th Battery), 2 January 1918. 'Ant' was a reference to the 'White Ant', the nickname for the secret paramilitary republican organizations such as the Carbonária.

70. João Chagas, *Diário Vol. II (1915-1916-1917)* (Lisbon 1986), 324-5.

71. AHM, box 1298, Ministério da Guerra, Serviço de Informações report no. 57, 'Informations from the CEP, France'.

72. Ibid.

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