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Salazar, the Portuguese Army

and Great War

Commemoration, 1936–45

FILIPPE RIBEIRO DE MENESES

Abstract

António de Oliveira Salazar, dictatorial premier of Portugal from 1932 to 1968, like most conservatives of his generation, had opposed Portugal's intervention in the Great War. Once in power, and especially during his time as Minister of War (1936–44), Salazar attempted to wind down the commemoration ceremonies, which centred on 9 April. His failure to do so is very revealing of the difficult relationship between Salazar and the Portuguese army, which was the main beneficiary of these ceremonies, and which saw itself as having a privileged role within Salazar's New State.

The importance for António de Oliveira Salazar, dictatorial premier of Portugal from 1932 to 1968, of good working relations with the Portuguese army does not require highlighting. The army held a monopoly over the use of force in the country, and it was a military government that had invited Salazar to join its ranks in 1928, as Minister of Finance. The army could, should it choose to do so, force Salazar's resignation from the position of President of the Council of Ministers either through legal means – via the Presidency of the Republic, an office held during the whole of the New State by a military figure – or by a *coup d'état*, an event against which Salazar remained on his guard for the duration of his time in power. Much of his political activity in the 1930s was dedicated to second-guessing his opponents within the armed forces, by receiving daily briefings about the attitude of an officer corps whose loyalty was constantly shifting. Many historians have already dealt with the co-operation between Salazar and the army, and also the conflicts that plagued this relationship. They have shown that Salazar had to accept the concept of a National Revolution, supposedly launched by the army in May 1926, and to pay homage to the men who had initiated it, beginning with General Óscar Fragoso Carmona, President of the Republic until

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his own death in 1951.¹ Only by this show of submission was Salazar able to seize the political initiative from the army, something he accomplished painstakingly over the course of the 1930s – especially after 1936, when he took over the war portfolio, which he kept until a major reshuffle in 1944. It is not the aim of this article to upset this consensus, but rather to point out that there remain unexplored dimensions in the relationship between civilian politicians, such as Salazar, and the military, within the context of the Portuguese New State. The scope of ongoing inquiries into this relationship must be widened in order to understand properly how this regime worked, and just how far Salazar's influence extended. This article aims to explore an issue which, although studied in great detail in national contexts, has so far attracted little attention from historians of Portugal: the commemoration of Portugal's military effort in the First World War and the treatment of the veterans of that conflict. In a previous article² the present author suggested that the lack of government support for the veterans' organisations during the period of the First Republic (that is, from 1919 until the military coup of 28 May 1926) was used by the Republic's enemies, notably within the army, as yet another weapon with which to weaken that troubled regime. The suggestion was also made that the most significant date in the Portuguese commemorative calendar was not 11 November, but rather 9 April – the anniversary of the heavy defeat at the battle of La Lys, in 1918 (known in Germany as Operation Georgette) – and that this indicates the lack of consensus over the meaning, and indeed the merit, of Portugal's intervention in the First World War. There were, in truth, many conflicting interpretations of what was being celebrated on 9 April. For apolitical veterans, this was the date of their supreme sacrifice. Whatever their opinion about the reasons for Portugal's participation in the conflict, they could not remain indifferent to 9 April, the day on which they caught the world's attention and in which so many of their comrades were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner. The same was true for most conservative anti-interventionist figures: Portuguese blood had been shed on 9 April, and Portuguese deeds should always be remembered when they had been carried out to safeguard the *Pátria's* honour and dignity. For interventionists, however, most of whom were radical republicans, 9 April 1918 was the day on which the 'humble sons of the people' rescued Portugal's honour with their blood, wiping away the dishonour caused by President Sidónio Pais' alleged treason, thus rescuing Portugal from the vengeance of the victorious Allies.³

The 28 May 1926 coup was presented by its authors not as a hastily prepared, even spontaneous, action by a number of military units, but rather as a powerful wave

¹ On Carmona, see Jorge Ribeiro da Costa, 'Carmona, António Óscar de Fragoso', in António Barreto and Maria Filomena Mónica, eds., *Dicionário de História de Portugal* Vol. 7, Suplemento A/E (Lisbon: Figueirinhas, 1999), 232–35.

² Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, 'A Comemoração da Grande Guerra em Portugal, 1919–1926', *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 38 (2006), 109–33.

³ For an English-language overview of Sidónio Pais' year in power, see Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, 'Sidónio Pais, the Portuguese "New Republic" and the Challenge to Liberalism in Southern Europe', *European History Quarterly*, 28, 1 (1998), 109–30. For an exhaustive biographical study, see Armando Malheiro da Silva, *Sidónio e Sidonismo*, 2 vols (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2006).

of revulsion towards the politicians of the First Republic. The army, which carried it out, portrayed itself as acting on behalf of the whole nation. The movement triumphed, and so the army attempted to establish a link between 1926 and the events of April 1918. From the sacrifice of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps [Corpo Expedicionário Português, CEP] in the trenches of Flanders, on behalf of the *Pátria*, had arisen the moral obligation to build a better Portugal. This obligation had been neglected by republican politicians, forcing the army to act. *A Guerra*, the official newspaper of the principal veterans' organisation, the *Liga dos Combatentes da Grande Guerra*, greeted the military coup as a victory for its membership, since it had brought to power the man who had led the CEP at the La Lys battle, General Gomes da Costa; this officer was now going to implement a national policy, one whose importance all veterans should recognise:

. . . this is the hour of the veterans. The spirit which moves the military government is the spirit which moves those who fought for the *Pátria* in the heroic confusion of the trenches. Here we stand, General, ready to follow you, resolved to man the positions you might point out to us, so that we may serve the *Pátria* . . .

VETERANS OF THE GREAT WAR!

Let us sacrifice ourselves one more time, if needs be, and, like good soldiers, let us know how to obey the voice of the *Pátria*!⁴

During the military dictatorship that ensued, the commemorations of the Great War did not change from the format adopted during the First Republic, although the period did see the unveiling of the principal monument to the fallen, on the Avenida da Liberdade, Lisbon's main thoroughfare.⁵ What the army did manage, however, was to silence dissenting views on the 'true' meaning of the commemorative activities. Portuguese intervention in the First World War was now presented as a sacrificial gesture by the army; the ideological content of the conflict, and the reasons for the CEP's presence on the western front, always problematic, were now simply cast aside. What mattered to the army was to make it clear to all that it had sacrificed itself for the *Pátria*. The date of 9 April was presented by the military authorities now running the country as a date with many lessons for the Portuguese to learn, especially the country's political class: in a dangerous world, Portugal had to be ready to defend itself; it could no longer rely on the kind of improvisation that had marked, indelibly, the preparation of the CEP and the despatch of the wartime military expeditions to Africa. In other words, Portugal needed modern armed forces, but needed also to undergo intense moral preparation for a future struggle. On 8 November 1928 the

⁴ Sousa Carrusca, 'Pela Pátria', *A Guerra* (Lisbon), July 1926.

⁵ In the private papers of Augusto Casimiro, one of the main interventionist figures in Portugal, who served in the CEP, is to be found a very rudimentary sketch of a book of memoirs, entitled *Memórias de um homem do meu tempo*. In its pages Casimiro describes the process by which the phrase that adorns the monument – 'Ao serviço da Pátria o esforço da Grei' was arrived at, before adding, that 'the monument to the Fallen of the Great War was inaugurated . . . Many of those responsible, morally and materially, for its erection, were in exile, forced or voluntary'. Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Núcleo Augusto Casimiro, 'Memórias dum homem do meu tempo', loose leaf.

British Ambassador, Sir Colville Barclay, informed the Foreign Office that 'a great business is to be made of the Armistice Day celebrations', while a party of veterans, including some amputees, was set to depart for France where, in the village of La Couture, a monument to the Portuguese fallen was to be inaugurated. Barclay added,

I suspect that the Government is deliberately creating popular feeling and patriotism which can be turned to account as manifestations of political unity in favour of the Government. They are therefore perhaps not so foolish as they would at first sight appear.⁶

This close control by the army of the commemoration ceremonies was still in place when, in 1936, Salazar added the war portfolio to his other responsibilities.

Before we consider Salazar's attempts to review commemoration activities, one crucial question must be answered: how did he view Portugal's participation in the Great War? Before he took over the Presidency of the Council, and for some years afterwards, the Portuguese dictator had no diplomatic experience: he left foreign affairs to others. Salazar did, however, look to the past in the search of answers for the future. According to his diary, Salazar spent part of 9 August 1936, a Sunday, reading 'diplomatic documents pertaining to the first Spanish Republic'.⁷ The causal link with the civil war in the neighbouring country, raging for less than a month, is clear. When the Second World War broke out, Salazar immediately turned to the earlier global conflict to illuminate his path. He tried to secure, as a result, the documents which had been included in the second volume of the Portuguese White Book on the First World War, which had never seen the light of day.⁸ In order to track down these documents, Salazar turned to Armando Marques Guedes, the last Finance Minister of the First Republic (that such contact was maintained with a man against whom Salazar had to measure himself, and who was occasionally the victim of attacks by the press loyal to Salazar, was in itself remarkable). On 19 September 1939 Marques Guedes wrote to Leal Marques, Salazar's *chef de cabinet*, suggesting that the documents might be in the possession of monarchist journalist José Soares Cunha e Costa, who had, in 1918, conducted a press campaign on the basis of genuine diplomatic documents.⁹ Three days later, Marques Guedes wrote again, informing Leal Marques that the documents had been found in the Ministry of War.¹⁰

This simple desire to learn practical lessons that might guide his conduct in a Europe once again at war belonged to a private sphere, to which the public did not have access. Salazar, in truth, had said or written little on the question of Portuguese

⁶ Barclay to Cushendun, 8. Nov. 1918, no. 369, FO, Western Europe, W 10624/490/36, Confidential, Foreign Office Records, The National Archives, London.

⁷ Salazar's diaries are stored at the Arquivo Nacional [AN], Torre do Tombo [TT], in Lisbon, but can be accessed online at <http://ttonline.dgarq.gov.pt/aos.htm> (last visited 21 July 2011).

⁸ The first volume was published in Lisbon in 1920 as *Documentos Apresentados ao Congresso da República pelo Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros: Portugal no Conflito Europeu*. The two volumes were published in 1997 as *Portugal na Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)* (Lisbon: Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, 1997).

⁹ Marques Guedes to Leal Marques, 19 Sept. 1939, AN, TT, Arquivo Oliveira Salazar [AOS], Correspondência Particular [CP] 134.

¹⁰ Marques Guedes to Leal Marques, 22 Sept. 1939, AN, TT, AOS, CP 134.

intervention in the Great War, and Portugal's military effort during it, be it in Africa or in France. We do, however, have some important clues which suggest that Salazar was wary of all issues relating to Portugal's involvement in the conflict, seeing it, both as a diplomatic option and a military enterprise, as a disaster for the country he now led. On 27 October 1938, during a radio address which marked the end of the year's legislative elections, Salazar claimed to be working for the maintenance of peace in a Europe undergoing a period of difficult transition. The fact that Franco had just proclaimed Nationalist Spain's neutrality in case of a European conflict brought about by the situation in the Sudetenland vindicated, Salazar claimed, his approach. Salazar added,

In this way we created the conditions for tranquillity on our land border and we reduced the chances of the conflict reaching us, and embroiling us in it; in this way arrived at a palpable demonstration that we did not mistake the national interest when we defined our attitude in the civil war in Spain; in this way we ensured peace for ourselves, saving our strength for other occasions. All were left happy with this result, apart from some descendants of the old 'Friends of Serbia', whose bellicose enthusiasm, once the demonstrations had come to an end, I had decided to avail of whenever a clash first arose.¹¹

This extract should be compared with the following passage from an article published in September 1916 in the monarchist, and anti-interventionist, Lisbon daily, *O Dia*:

We find it ever stranger that no volunteer organisation is being set up to participate in the European war, which will integrate, as the vanguard of the Portuguese troops, wherever the fighting is fiercest, the friends of Serbia who some months ago were heard in loud demonstrations, and all the other patriots who should be the first, for the prestige of the Republic, which they defend, to march off to the theatre of war.¹²

We might compare it as well with the article 'The Lesson of the Great War', by the extreme-Right officer, Raúl Esteves, in *Diário da Manhã*, the New State's official press organ, on 9 April 1933:

All still remember the demonstrations carried out by the various friends of Serbia, who on that occasion went up and down the streets shouting 'long live. . .' and 'death to. . .' and I also believe that no-one will forget the accusations of treason, germanophilia etc. which were so often exchanged among the supporters and the opponents of our participation in the War.¹³

The phrase 'friends of Serbia' did not thus appear out of thin air in October 1938; Salazar chose it and uttered it deliberately, in order to reinforce the ties that existed between himself and the forces which had opposed intervention in 1916, and whose support he now wanted to mobilise, in order to demonstrate that his foreign policy was both responsible and in accordance with the national interest. While Salazar spoke little about the Great War, others did so in his stead. Spanish historian Jesús

¹¹ Oliveira Salazar, *Discursos e Notas Políticas*, Vol. 3, 1938–1943, 2nd edn (Coimbra: Coimbra Editora, 1959), 113.

¹² *O Dia* (Lisbon), 5 Sept. 1916 (emphasis in original). This article coincided with the presence of an Allied Military Mission in Portugal, whose task was to evaluate the strength of the Portuguese army and determine how it should participate in the Allied war effort.

¹³ *Diário da Manhã* (Lisbon), 9 Apr. 1933.

Pabón, in his *La Revolución Portuguesa* – whose writing was closely accompanied by Pedro Teotónio Pereira, the Portuguese Ambassador in Madrid¹⁴ – was extremely tough on what he called the ‘War team’:

The War team was formed, under the control of Bernardino Machado, by three men: Afonso Costa as Prime Minister and Finance Minister; Augusto Soares, at Foreign Affairs; Norton de Matos, at War. The four, in accordance with their functions and their character, shared that quality which is common to democratic sectarianism, indeed, to all sectarianism: the unbreakable persistence which is generated by tenacity and blindness; the capacity to reach one’s goal against everything and against everyone.¹⁵

According to Pabón, these men had taken Portugal to war against the will, and the interest, of the country, never even having attempted to explain their actions:

The interventionists, ready to employ violence, never bothered to convince anyone of the justice of their cause, neglected completely the question of morale and waged war leaving the Army and the Nation ignorant of their designs and divided in respect of the conflict.¹⁶

Pabón paid homage to the abnegation of the Portuguese troops, who had salvaged the country’s honour, fighting against a more powerful enemy. ‘Old’ Portugal lived still, and, in 1918, it was in the army that its most valuable elements were to be found.

Anti-interventionist arguments were deployed again after the Second World War, as part of the 1949 presidential campaign that pitted the incumbent, Carmona, against the opposition candidate and former Minister of War, General Norton de Matos. Costa Brochado, a journalist and admirer of Salazar, quickly produced two volumes, *Para a História de um Regime* and *O Sr. Norton de Matos e a sua Candidatura*, which were designed to attack Norton de Matos, one of the leading figures of the First Republic. Costa Brochado wanted to compare, in the second volume, the dismay felt in Portugal at the time of the Versailles Treaty, which took no account of Portugal’s diplomatic objectives, with what he described as the country’s newfound prestige as the 1940s came to an end:

¹⁴ Teotónio Pereira wrote to Salazar, on 29 Oct. 1941, ‘And speaking of admirable things, I have the great pleasure of sending you the first volume of Pabón’s book on Portuguese politics. The prologue is very good and the final chapters – above all the one on our participation in the War – turned out as well as possible. I was able, without any difficulty, to get him to skip over certain facts and not to twist the knife in the wound. I am also certain that the volume dedicated to you will measure up. Pabón lunched with me yesterday and revealed himself to be pleased with his work and desirous of continuing with it . . . I believe as well that the recipient of this year’s Camões prize has already been found’. *Correspondência de Pedro Teotónio Pereira para Oliveira Salazar*, vol. 2: 1940–1941 (Lisbon: Comissão do Livro Negro Sobre o Regime Fascista, 1989), 441. It is worth highlighting the fact that Teotónio Pereira compared the despatch of the ‘Blue Division’ to the eastern front to the sending of the CEP to France, and that he recommended to Ramón Serrano Suñer that he read Pabón’s book: ‘I advised him to send warm clothes to the poor unfortunates whom they sent to Russia and told him to read about the effect of the climate on our soldiers who fought in France, as told in Pabón’s book. I gave him this reference with the secret hope that he might find there other significant lessons’. *Correspondência de Pedro Teotónio Pereira*, 456.

¹⁵ Jesús Pabón, *La Revolución Portuguesa*, vol. 1: *De Don Carlos a Sidónio Paes* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1941), 243–4.

¹⁶ Jesús Pabón, *La Revolución Portuguesa*, 256.

It does not seem to us that Mr Norton de Matos can be hopeful that the country will share the views of his *current collaborators* in regard to his achievements in government and in the party which sacrificed us in the Flanders mud.¹⁷

Thirty years later Franco Nogueira, Salazar's Foreign Minister from 1961 onwards and his first biographer, addressed Portuguese intervention in the Great War in the following terms:

It would be impossible, in truth, to go any further down the path of subservience, of irresponsibility, and of carelessness in how the country was being compromised: and without a guarantee, without any return, without any compensation, political or otherwise.¹⁸

Beyond the declarations, verbal or written, by Salazar and his supporters, there is one fact which clearly demonstrates Salazar's views on the Portuguese participation in the Great War. As Minister of War, he was never present at the commemoration ceremonies held every 9 April and 11 November. This was a complete departure with the past, when the War brief had been held by military men. On 11 November 1937, for example, the Armistice Day celebrations were attended by the Navy Minister (pictured in the press raising his right arm in the 'nationalist' salute), and by his Interior and Colonies colleagues; also present was the Undersecretary of State for War, Santos Costa, and a number of other significant military officers: Generals Morais Sarmiento (the army's highest ranking officer), Domingos de Oliveira (Military Governor of Lisbon), Ferreira Marins (the army's General Administrator) and Daniel de Sousa (Mayor of Lisbon). Where was Salazar? According to his diary, he spent the day in a series of meetings: with Leal Marques, with Ambassador Teixeira de Sampaio, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with Santos Costa, and with the Minister of the Interior, among others. In February 1938, Salazar was absent from a ceremony held at the *Liga dos Combatentes* to honour the memory of General Garcia Rosado, the last of the CEP's commanders, having been represented by Santos Costa. Raúl Esteves spoke on that occasion, his speech an almost exact copy of the April 1933 article already cited.¹⁹ Salazar was also absent, in November 1938, from the ceremony marking the twentieth anniversary of the armistice, despite the presence of the President of the Republic.

These repeated absences by Salazar from events linked with the Great War were never mentioned in the press, but are, by themselves, sufficiently important to suggest a conscious and ever-present desire to keep his distance from those occasions on which the army sought to restate its overarching mission in Portuguese life. Salazar's opinion of the Great War, and of how it should be remembered and commemorated in Portugal, was not revealed exclusively by this behaviour. The dictator went much further, making a decision that deserves some reflection even if, in the end, its impact was limited. This decision can be traced in one of Salazar's most interesting correspondences, the one he maintained with his head of protocol at the Ministry of War, Lieutenant Colonel Esmeraldo Carvalhais. Carvalhais was in regular contact

¹⁷ Costa Brochado, *O Sr. Norton de Matos e a sua Candidatura* (Lisbon: Portugalia, 1949), 30.

¹⁸ Franco Nogueira, *Salazar*, vol. 1: *A Mocidade e os Princípios* (Coimbra: Atlântida Editora, 1977), 144.

¹⁹ *Diário da Manhã*, 11 Feb. 1938.

with foreign military attachés, but also busied himself with the officer corps' social calendar, and, of course, Salazar's presence – or absence – from military ceremonies. His reports to Salazar, during the Second World War, serve as a useful barometer of the political mood among the Portuguese officer corps and its vulnerability to the propaganda of the belligerent powers. It was Carvalhais who send the following memo, on 2 April 1943 (one week before that year's commemoration of the La Lys battle), on which Salazar wrote 'concorda-se' [agreed]:

Last year there was a reduced commemorative programme, which did not prevent a parade before the Monument to the Fallen of the Great War, at which the British and the American military attachés were present. This parade then made its way to the cemetery of Alto de S. João.²⁰ There was also a small ceremony at Batalha.²¹

There is, however, a resolution by the President of the Council, from 1941, to the effect that the date should *be entirely forgotten*.²²

The situation must be clarified:

- a) The Presidency of the Council must inform Censorship not to publish news about the preparation and the organisation of the commemoration.
- b) The Ministry of War must inform the *Liga dos Combatentes* about whatever resolution is reached:
 1. The suppression of any commemoration, thus rendering the date 'forgotten'.
 2. Restriction of the commemoration to the cemetery – the veterans' plot – and suppression of the parade in the Avenida [da Liberdade] and the laying of flowers.
 3. Repeating last year's reduced commemoration, which involved a small ceremony at the Lisbon Monument, in the Avenida, and a pilgrimage to Batalha.²³

Salazar's response was immediate, because that very day his *chef de cabinet* at the Ministry of War, Colonel Monteiro do Amaral, sent the following memo to the *Liga dos Combatentes*, the Military Governor of Lisbon, and the different army divisions around the country:

His Excellency the Minister of War has charged me with informing you that henceforth – beginning this year – there will be no occurrences on the 9th of April other than visits to the cemeteries where there are veterans' plots.

Parading before Monuments to those killed in the Great War is particularly forbidden.

In the same line of thought, any commemoration at the Monastery of Batalha should be on a small scale.²⁴

²⁰ Where there was a plot set aside for veterans of the Great War.

²¹ The medieval monastery of Batalha, built to celebrate the victory over Castile at Aljubarrota (1385), and which houses the remains of King *Dom João I*, his wife, Philippa of Lancaster, and their sons (including Prince Henry the Navigator), was chosen to house the remains of Portugal's unknown soldiers from the Great War – one from Africa and one from Flanders.

²² Salazar underlined the words 'be entirely forgotten' [ficar inteiramente esquecida].

²³ Memo, Ministry of War Protocol Service, 2 Apr. 1943, AN, TT, AS, CP 49.

²⁴ Round-robin letter, Ministry of War, Cabinet Section, 2 Apr. 1943, AN, TT, AOS, CP 49.

There are two things to take from these documents. The first was Salazar's desire to bring to a close the commemorations of 9 April, erasing them from popular memory; the second was a resistance against this design from the sole official entity capable of opposing Salazar – the army. There had been limited commemorations in 1942, and those of 1943, after this brief exchange of documents, were more limited still, but they did not disappear altogether as Salazar had wished. Coverage of the commemorations was, as is only to be expected, extremely limited during the Second World War. The *Diário da Manhã*, which in previous years would have dedicated most, if not all, of its front page to the 9 April events and their commemoration, dedicated in 1942 two small paragraphs to what was to happen on the day (the laying of wreaths in the S. João cemetery and the Avenida da Liberdade monument) in Lisbon; the following day, four paragraphs recounted events in Lisbon, Oporto and Coimbra:

At around 10 a.m. there appeared at the Alto de S. João deputations of British, French and Belgian veterans; representatives of the *Liga dos Combatentes da Grande Guerra*, led by its Secretary General, Mr Faria Afonso, who represented General Daniel de Sousa, who was ill; of the Lisbon section of the *Liga*, of the feminine section of 'Fidac', and of the *União dos Filhos dos Combatentes* [Union of Veterans' Children]; many veterans . . . The British military attaché, and the American naval attaché, as well as the foreign veterans and the representatives of the Portuguese laid beautiful wreaths of natural flowers.²⁵

In 1943, and as a result of the new approach taken by Salazar, not a single line was dedicated in the *Diário da Manhã* to the commemorative events. Victory seemed his – but this triumph was fleeting. On 10 April 1944, on its sixth page, the government organ reported, in terms similar to those of 1942, what had happened at that year's commemorations. Sometime later a major cabinet reshuffle was carried out, as a result of which Salazar handed the War portfolio to his military understudy, Santos Costa, and by 1945 the 9 April commemorations had returned to the first page of the newspaper, as if nothing had occurred in the meantime:

As happens every year, the 9 April commemorations will remind all Portuguese of those who died for the *Pátria's* honour, and of those heroic soldiers who are still alive.

The *Liga dos Combatentes da Grande Guerra* is promoting a number of commemorative acts.

The same newspaper also reported the *Venda do Capacete*, a replica of Britain's poppy appeal, designed to raise funds for veterans in need. The description of the day's events was published on 10 April on part of the front page, continuing into the inside pages. Ten days later, the American military and air force attachés visited the *Liga dos Combatentes*, where a ceremonial glass of port was served.²⁶ Santos Costa was absent from these ceremonies, but was present at the 1945 Armistice Day celebration, and photos of him laying a wreath at the Monument to the Fallen were published in the press. According to the *Diário da Manhã*, the 1945 celebrations had been widened to celebrate the memory of the 'Portuguese military men who died, during the recent World War, in the Atlantic islands and the lands of the Empire, where they were

²⁵ *Diário da Manhã*, 10 Apr. 1942.

²⁶ *Diário da Manhã*, 20 Apr. 1945.

serving as sentries on a permanent watch, defending the sacred rights of Portugal'.²⁷ According to the same newspaper, this initiative had been taken by the Minister of War himself.

This article has already suggested that Salazar's attitude towards Great War commemoration was born of his reading of Portugal's involvement in the conflict. Might there have been other motives? One might suggest that there was an intimate connection between the desire to curtail the 9 April celebrations and Portugal's precarious neutrality, whose preservation Salazar, as Foreign Minister, had made the primary aim of the government. The year 1941, during which Salazar's note tried to put an end to those celebrations, marked the apogee of Nazi power in Europe, and the Portuguese government naturally had to act in a cautious manner in order to avoid offending Berlin. As we have seen, the military attachés of the Allied countries regularly associated themselves with the commemoration ceremonies, as did veterans from countries now occupied by the German army, such as Belgium and France. Might this be badly interpreted by the German legation? This was a possibility, but in truth Salazar had distanced himself from the commemoration ceremonies as early as 1936, when he became Minister of War. For Salazar, 9 April 1937 and 1938 were typical days: they began with an early-morning reading of the newspapers, which was followed by a review of administrative matters with Leal Marques and routine meetings with Ministers and high-level civil servants. Mundane issues were discussed, such as the height of the wall that surrounded Salazar's official residence in São Bento; time was allotted also to news of the latest military conspiracy, discussed with the Minister of the Interior. There is no reference, in Salazar's diary, to the commemoration ceremonies taking place. In 1939 he was not even in Lisbon, being on a small break in his native Vimieiro, near the village of Santa Comba Dão. A trip to the nearby spa of Caramulo was the sole diary entry for the day. In 1942 and in 1944, Salazar was again in Vimieiro. In 1940 the day was dominated by news of the invasion of Denmark and Norway, which signalled the renewal of fighting after the 'phony war'. In 1941 Salazar met with the army's divisional commanders, saying 'some words about the moment we are living and the necessity of preserving both national unity and the cohesion of the security services [forças públicas]'. In 1943, Salazar spent the day working with Pedro Teotónio Pereira, momentarily back from Madrid.

There is another factor that must be weighed up: Salazar's distrust of the *Liga dos Combatentes*. An impartial and rigorous history of this association during the New State is yet to be written. The *Liga* had originally been formed from the ground up, as a result of disputes over pensions and other payments owed to veterans and their families; newspapers in the post-war years were full of stories about 'those who find themselves in the arms of misery, after having shed their blood for the honour and glory of Portugal'.²⁸ Having found it difficult to make any headway, the *Liga's*

²⁷ *Diário da Manhã*, 12 Nov. 1945.

²⁸ See *O Século* (Lisbon), 18 May 1926. See also *A Guerra*, 1 Jan. 1926, which carried an article on the *Liga's* origins.

founders entrusted the organisation's fortunes to a few well-known officers, including Francisco Aragão and João Ferreira do Amaral, who represented opposing political viewpoints.²⁹ In January 1926 the *Liga* began to publish its own review, *A Guerra*, in which were reproduced the minutes of all its earlier meetings, beginning with that of 16 October 1923, when the transfer of power was carried out. According to its editorial line, the *Liga* had come into being because of the way in which veterans had been abandoned to their fate by successive governments. Only their union could reverse this injustice. As Colonel Mardel Ferreira put it, in almost mystical terms,

We represent a spiritual force whose importance will be mistaken only by those who ignore the incoercible power of the imponderable. We could not remain indifferent, and complicit. Everything pointed in the direction of unity: from the duty of loving our comrades in arms, condemned by the country's ingratitude to a cruel isolation, to the right to demand, proudly, the consideration and the compensation which were legitimately ours.³⁰

The *Liga's* leadership also wanted to represent Portugal in the international gatherings of veterans and work for the elevation of the morale of the 'Portuguese race'.

Among the regular contributors of *A Guerra* could be found some die-hard enemies of the First Republic. One was General Sinel de Cordes, who would plan the 1926 military coup, and who would use the magazine to castigate the wartime interventionists who, he claimed, had taken the country to war without worrying about its material preparation for it. Another was António de Cértima, a nationalist critic of the regime, who published his views in a variety of extreme-Right newspapers, and who tried to turn the veterans into a nationalist phalanx, a politically driven elite.³¹ Mardel Ferreira linked the indifferent treatment meted out to veterans to the concept of a 'mutilated victory':

No-one provided the nation with an understanding of the new world that emerged from the war; no-one awoke its energy to face resolutely the dangers which threaten us. Worst of all, being counted among the victors, we adopted the attitude of the vanquished. Our victory, like that of Samothrace, is mutilated: it has no head to think and no arms to act. This is the only explanation for the fact that, like hungry crows, nebulous ambitions plague our dominions, and that foreigners continue to consider moribund a people which, during the war, provided irrefutable evidence of its astonishing vitality.

²⁹ Ferreira do Amaral, who went on to act as commander of the Lisbon police, wrote one of the most significant accounts of the Portuguese presence on the western front, *A Mentira de Flandres . . . e o Medo* (Lisbon: J. Rodrigues, 1922). Francisco Aragão, a hero of the 1914 clash with German forces in Naulila, Angola, is probably best remembered as the target of poet Fernando Pessoa's spleen in his 'Carta a um Herói Estúpido'. See Fernando Pessoa, *Da República* (Lisbon: Ática, 1978), 193–212.

³⁰ Colonel Mardel Ferreira, 'Vitória Mutilada', *A Guerra*, May 1926.

³¹ António de Cértima spoke at the 9 April celebrations in 1927, the first to be staged by the military dictatorship. Before, among others, General Sinel de Cordes (Minister of Finance), Cértima stated that '[the Portuguese soldier] was not told where he was going or why he was going, nor did he enlist in any given political party or faction. He went because he was sent, and he fought because he had to fight'. Concluding his remarks, Cértima went on to state that 'let us now and forever honour the *Pátria*, so that she may remain throughout the centuries the same Portuguese land, birthplace of heroes and saints, of miracle-workers and poets! Let us follow the commands of the Great War's Fallen!' *A Guerra* (Lisbon), Apr. 1927.

As an openly patriotic and even nationalist organisation which preceded the New State and which had intimate links with the army, the *Liga dos Combatentes* could not be repressed openly. Nevertheless, its national organisation, its military character and its organic link with an event which Salazar disliked all combined to make it the subject of surveillance and intrigue – as did the wide range of political views which, beneath the nationalist façade, found refuge within the organisation. In December 1932 Assis Gonçalves, a subaltern officer who had won Salazar's trust, wrote to the dictator asking for clarification when it came to the *Liga dos Combatentes* and two political groupings – the *Liga 28 de Maio* and the National Syndicalists. All three were, he said, 'elements of political manoeuvres which can be both useful and dangerous, should we not take advantage of them'.³² Some days earlier Assis Gonçalves, detailing the latest military conspiracies, had alerted Salazar to the way in which the *Liga dos Combatentes* provided a haven for republican officers to meet and plan their moves. The organisation's potential incompatibility with the regime was demonstrated in the spring of 1933 when a banquet was organised by 'republican veterans', something which the *Liga's* then President, Hernani Cidade, an academic with little sympathy for Salazar, refused to condemn. This made him a target for the *Diário da Manhã*:

It was not enough for Caesar's wife to be honest – she had to appear to be honest as well. So too for the *Liga* it is not enough to 'appear' to be, as it in fact appears, above and beyond the games which some people want to play with the 'veterans'.³³

The danger posed by Rolão Preto's National Syndicalists was a more pressing one, and Salazar was able to split that organisation and force its leader into open opposition, where he was crushed. The Second World War might well have been seen as a good opportunity to asphyxiate the *Liga*.

Although we cannot determine with absolute certainty that a note of perpetuity was attached to Salazar's 'entirely forgotten' remark, Salazar's attitude over the years, as well as his way of dealing with the army – small tactical victories rather than one big strategic push to limit its power – suggest very strongly indeed that he wanted to put a definitive end to the commemoration of the La Lys battle. There is one last element that might help us understand Salazar's attitude, and better interpret his actions at this time. On 9 April 1938 the *Diário da Manhã*, in an editorial entitled 'The Lesson of 9 April', charted a new course. Declaring it 'pointless to repeat what everyone already knows', the newspaper once again paid homage to the army, reaffirming the now established link between the La Lys battle and the 28 May 1926 rising. Nevertheless, and making use of a recent speech (22 March) by Salazar, the newspaper claimed that the 'lesson' of 9 April had finally been learned; there was now a communion of ideals between the army and the regime, both of them sharing essential values. If

³² *Assis Gonçalves: Relatórios para Oliveira Salazar, 1931–1939* (Lisbon: Comissão do Livro Negro Sobre o Regime Fascista, 1981), 25. The *Liga 28 de Maio* was an early attempt by the military dictatorship to create a popular support base. It would be eclipsed by the later União Nacional. The National Syndicalists were Portugal's fascist party, led by Rolão Preto, and they would indeed become a serious threat to Salazar.

³³ *Diário da Manhã*, 2 Apr. 1933.

we keep in mind that the army was by then undergoing a process of reform led by Salazar and Santos Costa, we might see in this editorial the suggestion that the army's traditional approach to the 9 April commemorations, full of warnings to politicians about the need to have a strong military and a spiritually united citizenship in place, no longer made sense. This editorial, in turn, was remarkably similar to another speech delivered by Salazar, on 29 May of the same year, before 1,000 officers, at Lisbon's Eduard VII park:

The army stands with the Revolution; I am driven to ask if the Revolution also stands with the army . . .

It stands with it in its hunger for renovation and progress, in the desire for a technical education befitting the intelligence and the theoretical knowledge of the best elements, in the need for moral reform, in the cult of the military virtues, in the conscious and complete – body and soul – subordination, in the total sacrifice to that higher reality which is the life of our people and the history of our land.³⁴

The reform of the army, which involved the reduction of its numbers, in order to fund the purchase of sophisticated foreign equipment, was, as ever in the New State, a slow and laborious process. It provoked considerable discontent within the armed forces, which rendered Salazar more vulnerable than usual – and a considerable effort was made to sell the reforms, not only to the army, but also to the country at large. For Salazar, the rewards were immense: a smaller, technically proficient army led by young technocrats such as Santos Costa, busying itself with its training, was infinitely preferable to a larger inefficient force, which blamed civilians for its failings and which carried political intrigue in its blood. For the dictator, commemorating 9 April meant not only associating himself, even if only indirectly, with an interventionist policy which he repudiated, both because of its principles and its results, but also it entailed subjecting himself to a message delivered by the army's senior officers – and acknowledging its validity – about their corporation's special place in Portuguese life and politics. Every 9 April the army, as the self-appointed embodiment of the spirit of the trenches, reaffirmed its right to intervene in national life, so that the voice of the fallen should not be forgotten. Part of this message was that the army should be sufficiently strong to protect the country from any foreign threats, so as to avoid, in the future, defeats such as those of 1918.

In other words, being present at the 9 April commemorations would mean, for Salazar, questioning the importance of his own reform programme for the military, through which he expected to be delivered from the army's heavy tutelage. As far as he was concerned, his reform programme, and the expensive purchase of modern weapons, had paid off his, and the country's, debt to the armed force. There was no longer any good reason to continue to celebrate a military defeat, and to be forced to hear the admonishments of the top ranks of the army. By 1941, Salazar thought that the time had come to put an end to the whole affair. However, the army did not agree to 'forgetting' about 9 April, as Salazar wished both it and the country

³⁴ Oliveira Salazar, *Discursos*, 97.

to do. It accepted, in wartime, the reduction in the scope of the commemorations, and the lack of press coverage imposed by Salazar, but it resisted their total abolition. Even if diminished, commemorations took place in all major cities, and retained their basic appearance. When the Ministry of War was returned, as the war ended, to a military man – even though it was Santos Costa, the army officer closest to Salazar – commemorations resumed their normal scale, while contacts between the military attachés of the Great War Allies and the *Liga dos Combatentes* were renewed, and publicised, now as part of the post-1945 campaign designed to stress the importance to the Allies of Portugal's 'collaborating' neutrality. We are faced here by a clear impediment to Salazar's designs, a clear demonstration of the limits of his personal power. In a question which overrode the political tensions that existed within its ranks, the army was able to defy Salazar's will, defending the official interpretation of a date that was dear to it and bearing a message which, the officer corps believed, should be listened to.