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Anglo-Portuguese relations on the Western Front: the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps and the British High Command (Part II)

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ABSTRACT

The winter of 1917–1918 was a difficult time for the men and officers of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps [C.E.P.]. Its two divisions were now fighting side by side in Flanders, but were no longer receiving regular reinforcements from Portugal, where a *coup d'état* had replaced the committed interventionist leadership of Afonso Costa and Norton de Matos with Sidónio Pais' 'New Republic', which prioritized domestic concerns. Despite this change and an ensuing Anglo-Portuguese agreement to lessen the C.E.P.'s front, allowing only one division to remain in the trenches, the Portuguese corps in its entirety remained *in situ* until early April 1918 when, in the face of a looming German offensive, it began to be withdrawn. Serious questions remain regarding the timing of this withdrawal and its link to the Battle of the Lys, on 9 April, which saw the Portuguese Second Division wiped out in the course of a single morning's fighting.

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In the first part of this article, we considered the evolution of British–Portuguese relations in France during the First World War, focusing on the puzzling decision to allow the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps [Corpo Expedicionário Português, C.E.P.] to become a full army corps in November 1917, shortly after steps were taken that made its reinforcement almost impossible. The stretch of trenches assigned to the Portuguese in Flanders could not but, over time, become increasingly lightly defended. Part II of this article continues the examination of Anglo–Portuguese military relations until 9 April 1918, when what remained of the C.E.P. in the front lines – mostly its Second Division, reinforced by elements of the first and supported by the corps' artillery – was wiped out by a major German offensive. After that Sir Douglas Haig maintained a steadfast opposition to a return of the Portuguese to the trenches in large units, and by and large he was successful. He could count, as before, on the Admiralty to withhold the ships necessary to any significant movement of Portuguese troops.¹ On 24 April, Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour was requested by the War Cabinet 'to take the necessary diplomatic action with a view to preventing any further Portuguese reinforcements being sent'.² Long before the Battle of the Lys, however, the British High Command had acquired the power to reduce the C.E.P.'s front, choosing not to do so until

April 1918. The timing of what followed is difficult to piece together exactly, and at the very least it raises serious questions about the High Command's attitude towards the Portuguese soldiers and officers it controlled.

In December 1917, shortly after the C.E.P.'s two divisions had been placed side by side in the trenches of Flanders, Sidónio Pais, Portugal's former Minister in Berlin, seized power in Lisbon by force.³ The event naturally provoked concern in the Allied capitals and within the C.E.P.⁴ In Britain, however, this concern was short-lived. General N.W. Barnardiston, head of the British Military Mission at Lisbon since 1916, was an early fan of Pais, writing,

A man who could successfully carry out a Revolution for the overthrow of a Government, although at the last moment deserted by his affrighted colleagues and feeling sure of the support of but 250 soldiers, must be a man of strong personality and of great courage animated by faith in a high ideal.⁵

One of the consequences of the Sidónio Pais coup was the agreement reached between the two governments on a variant of the so-called Derby Plan, rejected by former Minister of War Norton de Matos on 1 October 1917, by which only one division would be kept in the trenches. Barnardiston was quick off the mark in alerting London to the possibility that Pais might be willing to strike a deal in this regard. It was his estimation that Pais would welcome being relieved of the need to maintain a large force in the trenches.⁶ Barnardiston had discussed the situation with Sidónio Pais on 18 December:

I also mentioned that the late War Minister [Norton de Matos] had been approached on the subject of certain changes in the organisation of the Portuguese Expeditionary Force in France, which, if accepted, might to a great extent relieve the Portuguese Government from the necessity of sending such large reinforcements as were at present required, and I spoke of the fears of Sir D. Haig for the health and efficiency of the Portuguese troops in the trenches during the winter and of the advantage which would accrue if it were agreed that only one Division should be kept in line, the other being occupied in training and in furnishing reliefs. He seemed rather impressed by this, and promised to consult with the General officers at the front on the subject.⁷

For some days Barnardiston, by now fully aware of the doubts entertained by the British High Command regarding the C.E.P.'s suitability for the Western Front, believed he had been able to convince Pais to accept the deal in its entirety. He nevertheless informed his superiors of the difficulties that still stood in the way of this happening: 'it would be at once seized upon by the Democratic Party and other opponents as evidence of an anti-war and anti-ally spirit, an imputation which they are of all things most anxious to avoid.'⁸ Barnardiston's letter suggests that Pais, eager to see his government recognized by the Allies, was even willing to accept the presence of British officers in Portuguese units (not quite to the same extent as foreseen in the Derby Plan, but enough to exert 'an excellent influence' on the conduct of operations). Not for the first time during the war, a Portuguese Government was letting it be known informally that it required a formal request from London in order to implement a desired policy whose effects on public opinion it feared. This had been the case, for example, with the C.E.P.'s very creation, in 1916. Moreover, the letter reveals that Barnardiston was in touch with General Gomes da Costa, commander of the Portuguese First Division, who came to Portugal at the end of December. Barnardiston was sure that this Portuguese officer, well-liked by the British High Command in France, had exercised a good influence over Sidónio Pais, given the 'sane view he takes of the situation.'⁹

On 5 January 1918, Barnardiston was instructed to propose formally a version of the Derby Plan to the Portuguese Government. The C.E.P. would be left with two divisions, one integrated into a British Army Corps and another functioning as a centre for the instruction of reinforcements and for the recuperation and training of units removed from the front. This second division would be led by the C.E.P.'s Commander-in-Chief, to be left in charge of discipline among all Portuguese troops in France. In the meantime, and so as to strengthen the 'unity of action' of the Portuguese and British forces, a British officer of rank no higher than captain would be inserted into every battalion or similarly sized unit and placed at the disposal of its commander. The Portuguese communiqué would continue to exist. Barnardiston was also tasked with trying to convince the Portuguese to abolish their Corps H.Q., which in the proposed dispensation would merely complicate the lines of command.¹⁰

Barnardiston moved quickly, meeting Sidónio Pais the following day and reading out the note received from London.¹¹ Later he sent a personal letter, reminding Pais of the 'glorious victories of Roliça, Vimieiro and Bussaco', won by Portuguese and British troops led by a British general, in Portugal itself. That was all Great Britain wanted, be it in France, be it in Mozambique.¹² Sidónio Pais was obviously more receptive to this kind of appeal than Norton de Matos had been. That same day Sir Lancelot Carnegie, British Minister at Lisbon, wrote Pais, in the latter's capacity as Foreign Minister, with a similar proposal.¹³ On the eighth, Barnardiston forwarded Pais' response on to London. The Portuguese Government was willing to accept the principle of unity of command, in order to make the best possible use of available resources among the Allies, but only if Portuguese sovereignty was respected.¹⁴ Arthur Lynden-Bell, Director of Staff Duties at the War Office, congratulated Barnardiston – 'Barney' – on his success, since 'the system now in vogue was bound to come to grief in the end and has been the cause of anxiety to everybody'.¹⁵ That very day, however, Barnardiston wrote General Sir R.D. Whigham, Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff, explaining that Pais had disappointingly rowed back on what he had agreed verbally.¹⁶ At one stage willing to countenance the dissolution of the C.E.P.'s H.Q., he had subsequently concluded that this step was politically impossible, wounding as it was to Portuguese pride. There remained also some doubts regarding the duties of British officers assigned to Portuguese units. Sidónio Pais and Gomes da Costa were, Barnardiston explained, in agreement with the British point of view, that is, that in certain circumstances they could assume command – but the matter had yet to be decided on. In any case, 'the experience in France, and the late disasters in East Africa have brought the Portuguese to a frame of mind in which they are willing to admit their imperfections and are ready to remedy them even at the cost of the sacrifice of some "amour propre"'. The British had it in their power, from this moment onwards to reduce the C.E.P.'s front to that of a single division, something they had been fighting for since the summer. As we shall see, however, they did not follow through with this intention, with serious consequences for the C.E.P.'s efficiency and cohesion. The fact that the C.E.P. continued to occupy a quiet sector, amidst a British manpower shortage, might well have been responsible.¹⁷

After Sidónio Pais' victorious coup, a batch of soldiers left for France aboard a French transport vessel. They were destined not for the C.E.P. but rather for the Independent Heavy Artillery Corps [Corpo de Artilharia Pesada Independente, C.A.P.I.], a smaller Portuguese force designed to operate alongside the French Army.¹⁸ The C.E.P. itself had received no reinforcements since late summer, and none were programmed. A worried General Tamagnini

de Abreu, the C.E.P.'s commander, noted in his diary that some battalions were missing between 300 and 400 men; that the C.E.P. was lacking in Infantry and Artillery officers; and that there was a shortage of cattle to pull carts and of lorries, with those still in operation being now in terrible condition: 'we are limited to manning the trenches and nothing else'.¹⁹ The lack of reinforcements was clearly beginning to bite. Some days later Tamagnini wrote to the Ministry of War, highlighting the difficulties he faced: a shortage of men (some 9000 in total) and officers; the cumbersome presence in France of soldiers who should never have been sent, given their physical inadequacy (2794 so far, many of whom suffered from some kind of venereal complaint); the inability to form a reserve of 4000 men, as agreed with the British; and the impossibility of giving key units, such as the Sappers, any sort of rest.²⁰ Tamagnini was then surprised by a telegram sent on 26 January informing him of the government's resolutions regarding the C.E.P.'s reorganization. He mistakenly believed that this had to be the work of Sidónio Pais, since the British had only recently given the green light to the presence of the two Portuguese divisions in the trenches side by side, under his overall command. Moreover, Tamagnini feared that the withdrawal of a division from the front would mean the loss to his command of the C.E.P.'s heavy artillery force, then undergoing training in Horsham, in southern England.²¹ Tamagnini left for Lisbon resolved to overturn this decision. Barnardiston, informed of his arrival, as well as that of the dismissed Roberto Baptista, the C.E.P.'s very political Chief of Staff (and *bête noire* of the British High Command), wrote to London, 'I hope there is no intriguing going on against the re-organization, but you can never tell here.'²² He need not have worried. Only when he met Sidónio Pais did Tamagnini learn that the proposal had really come from the British. He immediately offered his to resign, but Sidónio Pais asked him to stay on. Sidónio Pais also showed a crestfallen Tamagnini the letters received by Norton de Matos from Democratic Party officers in France complaining of Tamagnini's allegedly pro-British stance. Back in France, Tamagnini ordered two of these officers, Captains Matias de Castro and Vitorino Godinho, to return home, as he had lost trust in them; a month later, however, they were back in France, 'because their presence in Portugal was undesirable!!!'²³ Barnardiston, meanwhile, urged London to recognize Sidónio Pais' government, in order to strengthen his political and military hand.

According to a recent biography of Sir Henry Horne, the First Army's commander thought, by late February 1918, that he had done everything possible to secure the defence of his sector, identified as a possible target for a major German push. The C.E.P. was his great worry. The recent lack of rain, allied to ongoing drainage works, had led to the hardening of the soil, making it able to support a rapid infantry advance.²⁴ The First Army's weekly reports show a C.E.P. unwilling to undertake raids against German positions in January and February and, as a result, suffering fewer casualties than the other army corps in the sector.²⁵ Even so the C.E.P.'s official communiqués reflected the increasing activity in the trenches. That of 22 January told of a clash with a 'strong patrol' six days earlier, an attack carried out by 'three groups with artillery backing' on 18 January and intense on-going artillery activity; the Portuguese had taken three prisoners and inflicted various losses on the enemy, suffering eight killed and 46 wounded, 'two of which by accident and three due to asphyxiating gases.'²⁶ A month later the C.E.P. announced that it had repulsed 'various combat patrols, taking prisoner an officer and two soldiers'; this communiqué mentioned also the crash of a Gotha bomber in the Portuguese lines, leading to the capture of the crew.²⁷

German preparations for a push in the West accelerated, and in March there began 'the most active period undergone' by the Portuguese at the front.²⁸ For the first time since their arrival in France, they now attacked as often as they were attacked. On 2 March a raid against Chapigny entered the Portuguese lines, being repelled by a counter-attack. On the dawn of 7 March, Infantry 15 repulsed another attack, carried out by 180 men. On the night of 9–10, the Portuguese retaliated, with Infantry 21 and a company of Sappers conducting a raid on the German lines, 'carrying out all their objectives, taking prisoners, destroying shelters in the second line and blowing up a Decauville [narrow gauge] railway'.²⁹ According to Humberto de Almeida, seven prisoners were seized, as well as two machine-guns, while various shelters were destroyed.³⁰ After this attack, Haig sent Tamagnini a telegram congratulating him on the operation – a gesture mentioned in the international press.³¹ On the afternoon of 14 March, the German army began an intense bombardment of the Portuguese front, including the Laventie, Fauquissart and Chapigny brigade sectors. There then occurred a significant raid against the C.E.P.'s right wing, which was repulsed. This was followed up by the shelling of its left. The 12th British Division noted that on its front, and that of the Portuguese Second Division, the enemy was cutting the wire, in order to permit an attack.³² On the nineteenth it was the turn of Infantry 14, again with the support of the Sappers, to enter the German lines, destroying shelters and capturing men and materiel,³³ a feat included in the British communiqué, reproduced around the world. A last Portuguese raid was carried out on the night of 2/3 April. During this period artillery activity was intense, and the C.E.P.'s increasing exposure to combat, which resulted in higher casualties, worried authorities in Lisbon. At the end of March Sidónio Pais asked his Minister in London, Augusto de Vasconcelos, to press the British Government to make available the ships needed 'to reinforce as urgently as possible our Expeditionary Corps'.³⁴ The answer, sent on 6 April, left little room for doubts: it would be possible to secure a medical transport for the repatriation of wounded and sick soldiers, but not to bring reinforcements to France. All transports were being made available to the United States and Canada for the next three months. Vasconcelos lamented that 'no matter how many times we try, we will get nothing'.³⁵

The increased combat efficiency and, in some cases, the aggressive spirit of the C.E.P. did not mean that its long-standing organizational defects had finally been overcome. On 14 March a report by the First Army's director of medical services, General H.N. Thompson, revealed that little had improved in sanitary terms:

On all sides one finds that a total disregard is paid to the elements of sanitation in regard to cook-houses, the storage of food, the care of latrines, and surroundings of billets.³⁶

It added that the Portuguese sanitary authorities were aware of the problem, but that they were powerless against the behaviour of soldiers and officers alike.³⁷ Overall, though, there were signs that the C.E.P. was being considered in a better light by its British overseers. Haig visited the Portuguese on 1 March and liked the comparison between what he now saw and what he had witnessed a year earlier, even if the absence of leave (available to officers only) struck him as dangerous for the soldiers' morale.³⁸ As has been shown elsewhere, this was indeed the great Achilles' heel of the C.E.P.³⁹ On 20 March Barnardiston wrote Gomes da Costa, congratulating him for the C.E.P.'s performance on 2 March. He added,

The last feat of arms gave me real pleasure because it shows that under your training the troops have acquired the spirit of the offensive, in consequence of which I am certain that they are

now really proud of themselves, full of confidence, and ready at any time to raid the Boche trenches again.⁴⁰

Although there were no reinforcements being sent to the C.E.P. during this period, there was intense speculation in Portugal about the force's future. One issue that was returned to again and again in the press was the so-called *roulement*, which by now had come to mean the replacement of soldiers in France by fresh troops. The British dreaded this idea, which would require them to once again oversee the training of large numbers of Portuguese soldiers arriving in Flanders. According to *A Capital*, officers and soldiers who had already fought in Africa would be the first to be replaced.⁴¹ By March, this interventionist newspaper was openly stating that the failure to implement a quick *roulement* was 'a true crime'.⁴²

The issue of *roulement* was addressed over the course of six articles in the same newspaper's pages by a C.E.P. officer, Major Cristovão Aires. Aires explained that the impossibility of returning home until the war's end was the cause of 'indescribable suffering', although he was keen to denounce those who, while in France, had never known danger, keeping well away from the trenches. He also blamed the deposed Norton de Matos, whom he called a 'sinister dictator', for the C.E.P.'s failings: 'the important thing was to force people to embark. The rest could be done over there [in France], it could be improvised'.⁴³ In the final article, Aires called for what Sidónio Pais had already agreed to, that is, the presence in the trenches of a single division, as part of a British army corps. This would be sufficient, he explained, to preserve a 'worthy' Portuguese representation on the front lines.⁴⁴ This call might very well explain why the articles, which drew Tamagnini's anger, appeared in the first place.⁴⁵

Norton de Matos, in exile, reacted to Aires' articles with a letter to the Lisbon press. The C.E.P., he explained, represented the nation and the Army, and he had left arrangements in place for reinforcements for both it and the C.A.P.I.: three sailings were programmed for December, which would take 3900 men and between 300 and 400 animals to France. Barnardiston trusted in these numbers but he added, for Sir Lancelot Carnegie's benefit,

Now he understands that the Higher Command of the Portuguese Corps is to disappear which evidently signifies the disappearance of the Corps. The principal end in view, he says, appears to be to avoid having to send reinforcements. The result will be [...] that the representation of the Nation at the front will disappear and that sooner or later the Portuguese Expeditionary Force will disappear too.⁴⁶

Sidónio Pais reacted to Norton de Matos' letter by releasing an Official Note accompanied by the damning correspondence between Afonso Costa and Norton de Matos, cited in Part I of this article, which made clear that the Portuguese army was facing a severe shortage of officers suitable for service in France. This would be made use of again when Parliament reopened in August, being read out by the Secretary of State for War, Amílcar Mota.⁴⁷ In one telegram, dated 17 May 1917, Afonso Costa reminded Norton, in London, that should the latter's mission fail the government would have to announce its failure and resign. In another, dated 10 June, it was Norton de Matos' turn to write:

The situation caused by the lack of officers is highly deplorable; we cannot begin fighting and the English Ministry of War asks the reason for our desire to constitute an army corps and our hurry in shipping more troops when we do not even have enough officers for those already in France.

Barnardiston concluded, upon reading these documents, that 'Senhor Norton de Matos and Dr. Afonso Costa must have been well aware that they were attempting more than the country could do, and without having been asked to do so'. It is hard to disagree.

Despite all the doubts entertained by the British High Command in relation to the C.E.P., the truth is that the latter's two divisions withstood the 1917–1918 winter in the trenches. As spring approached and the German threat mounted the need for them to remain in their place was greater than the desire to see them gone, or even just to implement the agreement reached with Sidónio Pais in January. Apprehension among the Portuguese, military and civilians alike, grew. Either the corps as a whole should be reinforced or the First Division should be withdrawn, allowing its men the rest they so badly needed. But by now this was becoming impossible, for the British Expeditionary Force was feeling the effects of a severe manpower shortage. In March, Germany launched Operation Michael, aimed at the British Third Army, near Cambrai, and the Fifth Army, near the old Somme battlefields. Horne had to part with his elite force, the Canadian Corps which had acquired a privileged status earlier in the conflict. A week later, the German army launched a new attack – Operation Mars – with Arras as an objective, again aimed at the Third Army but also at the southern part of Horne's First Army. For the moment the C.E.P. remained untouched by any major operation, but the war's full fury was edging closer to it. Horne was increasingly concerned that his weakened forces would feel the brunt of the next attack. There were two possibilities: a new move towards Arras, from the north-east, or a northwards drive from the La Bassée Canal, targeting the dense logistical support network of the British army wedged between the front lines and the English Channel, as well as France's remaining coal mines. During the first days of April, it seemed as if Arras was the primary target. In any case the strengthening of the First Army for the coming clash was the priority, and this permitted casting a fresh eye over the C.E.P. On 8 April Horne wrote his wife,

I am working up back lines because it is prudent to do so. We have no intention of going back unless compelled to by finding our flank turned! There are anxious times as during this lull the Boche must be preparing a fresh attack and a heavy one and I think it may extend southwards from the La Bassée Canal at this time, with perhaps a small attack north of the Canal.⁴⁸

Even if only as a diversion, it seemed certain that the front lines held by XI Corps, recently returned from Italy, and the C.E.P. would be targeted. The time had come to implement, at long last, the Derby Plan in its revised January 1918 form. Most of the First Division was removed from the battlefield, leaving a reinforced Second Division to hold the whole of the Portuguese front, as part of XI Corps. General Sir Richard Haking, once again responsible for the C.E.P. in the front lines, was quick to order the Second Division's withdrawal as well. The move was scheduled for the night of 9/10 April. Horne would later be accused of moving too slowly to remove the whole of the C.E.P. as part of his preparations for the coming onslaught. Basil Liddell Hart would write, 'We might aptly coin the phrase "First Army Aid" as a satirical definition for misguided first aid.'⁴⁹ This suggests that the fate that befell the C.E.P. on 9 April was the result of unfortunate timing, or British bureaucratic bungling. But matters are not so simple.

In November 1917, before he and XI Corps Staff left for Italy, Haking, through a secret order, had put in place a defensive plan which, he insisted, could not be shared with the Portuguese. In essence, the plan was a way of minimizing the danger which might result from the C.E.P.'s precipitate withdrawal in the face of a German attack. Should such an attack develop, each XI Corps unit would send immediately a battalion to secure a line to the rear of the Portuguese. Senior, Haking's biographer, writes,

Here, then, was official recognition that Haking, and indeed the hierarchy of the British Army, had finally given up on the Portuguese. While they were habitually referred to as Britain's

'time honoured allies', the average Tommy simply and disparagingly called them 'the Pork and Beans' or 'the Geese'. A century earlier, Wellington had described his Portuguese troops in the Peninsula as the 'Fighting Cocks' of his army, but in the First World War they were soldiers lacking in spirit, discipline and leadership.⁵⁰

This is confirmed by the official British history of the war. Sir James E. Edmonds notes that on 3 December 1917 Haig asked his subordinates what steps might be taken in relation to the defence of their respective sectors. Horne answered that the C.E.P. was in no shape to resist a German attack. As a result of this,

The front of the Corps was then shortened, its northern brigade sector (Fleurbaix) being, on the 20th December, taken over by the XV Corps, and it was arranged in the defence scheme that the line of the Lawe and the Lys behind the Portuguese would be held by British troops.⁵¹

Also according to Edmonds, Jan Smuts then toured the British front, pointing to the Portuguese sector, on his return to London, as a weak point in the line. Questioned by Sir William Robertson, still the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, on the matter, Haig replied that a German attack would result in the capture of part, if not the whole, of the C.E.P.'s sector. That is why a protective pocket would immediately be prepared, with the divisions to the north and south deploying a line to protect their flank, linking up with the troops marching up from the rear to the natural line of defence provided by the rivers Lawe and Lys. As winter turned to spring, concern grew among the British High Command, as we have seen, because an unusual lack of rain was making the ground harder, and therefore easier for attacking troops to traverse: but still the High Command kept the C.E.P. in place.

Haking and his XI Corps staff returned from Italy on 15 March 1918. Three days later, according to Edmonds, the CEP's reorganization began, only to be put back to 5 April owing to the lack of available replacements. On the appointed day most of the First Division withdrew, leaving the entire Portuguese sector protected by three brigades in the trenches and one in reserve. They were supported by the whole of the C.E.P.'s artillery, which stayed in place. A stretch of the front line hitherto defended by four brigades was now defended by three. On 25 March, with this coming reorganization firmly in mind, Haking had met with the commanders of the 55th Division, XI Corps' other formation in the front lines. No Portuguese were present as Haking went over the preparations for the defence of his sector. He explained that at that precise moment it was not thought probable that First Army would be targeted for a major push by the German army, which did not mean that vigilance was unnecessary. Still, Haking reiterated his philosophy:

If we have any idea of holding our front and holding our back systems at the same time with our limited number of troops, we shall have insufficient to hold either and shall run the risk of being beaten piecemeal.⁵²

In other words, Haking was discounting the increasingly popular idea of defence in-depth – an idea defended by his own superior, Horne and, until then, instilled into the Army's divisions, the Portuguese included. According to Haking, defence in-depth made sense only when there were enough troops to implement it; but when there was a shortage of men, as was now the case, it was imperative to choose one line and to make every effort to hold it. Haking insisted that the 55th Division's 'line of resistance' should be held at all costs. It remained for the divisional commander to decide where this line should be drawn, but he should keep in mind that the further to the rear it was established, the bigger the gap between it and the C.E.P.'s own line of resistance – and this because Haking had assigned the so-called

B line to the C.E.P. as its line of resistance, where it must hold at all costs, and where its reserve brigade would also deploy in case of attack. The 55th Division's commanders opted for the so-called Village Line as its 'line of resistance'; this consisted of a series of concrete strongpoints whose firepower could be fully employed only once the B line had been lost. As a result, the A and B lines would be lightly manned only. Haking then instructed the 55th Division on how to respond if the enemy broke through to the north, that is, through the C.E.P.'s lines: it was to establish a defensive flank running perpendicular to its line of defence. This would be mirrored by a similar action to be undertaken by the 40th Division (part of XV Corps), to the North of the Portuguese, thus establishing the protective pocket around the Portuguese sector. It remained necessary to coordinate the defence of the sector with the Portuguese. Haking explained that

He was meeting the G.O.C. Portuguese Corps in the afternoon and he would tell them that the XI Corps would join with the Portuguese Corps at INDIAN VILLAGE, and that it would be necessary to connect INDIAN VILLAGE and CAILLOUX Post with a trench. He was also going to tell the Portuguese Commanders that they must hold and fight in their front system of defence, and that their main line of resistance would be the B Line.

Why this difference of criteria? Why were the Portuguese instructed to defend en masse an advanced line, being exposed to an outflanking manoeuvre, when the neighbouring British division was being given the freedom to decide which line it would hold? According to Haking, for two basic reasons. Firstly, the wire defences in front of their B Line were in good condition, which was not the case in the 55th Division's sector, at a time when a great shortage of wire was being experienced. Secondly, the loss of Neuve Chapelle would generate a crisis of morale (presumably among the British who had fought for it in the past), the Portuguese being therefore obliged to defend it. It is very difficult to establish the veracity of these claims, which at the very least seem to contradict the accusation regularly levelled against the C.E.P. that it was incapable of looking after its sector's defensive apparatus. In any case, the C.E.P.'s fate was being sealed without its leaders being present. What happened in its front did not really matter, this arrangement seems to suggest, since the real battle would be fought elsewhere, on the river line, or the Village Line immediately in front of it, to be defended by Haking's other troops, whose numbers were now growing.

On 5 April, the First Portuguese Division was withdrawn from the trenches and sent to Ambleteuse to rest, the Second Division being entrusted to Gomes da Costa and formally transferred to XI Corps. The Portuguese General, 'a very capable soldier', in Edmonds' estimation, was then informed that the front line would remain as before, although he need not worry about a dispersal of forces, since he would only have to man the front lines.⁵³ The rest of the sector, including the lines to the rear, would be defended by XI Corps' remaining units, starting with the First King Edward's Horse Regiment and the XI Corps cyclists. While the 55th Division, to the south, defended 4000 yards with nine battalions, the Second Portuguese Division covered 10,000 yards with sixteen,⁵⁴ and these were missing large numbers of men and officers.⁵⁵

One is entitled to ask what the British High Command expected from Gomes da Costa and his men, given their vulnerable position and their evident weakness. While on the one hand it distrusted the Portuguese army's ability to hold on in the face of a German attack, on the other it seemed to assign the C.E.P. a pointless mission, manning an indefensible line that would count for little in the ultimate course of the battle. Were the Portuguese simply the lure for German forces to rush into a trap, with the hopefully impassable river

and village lines blocking their advance and flanking fire from the 55th and 40th Divisions to the south and north cutting them down? Was the C.E.P. being deliberately sacrificed by Haking? Had nothing else happened until the 9 April battle this argument might seem convincing. But on the morning of 8 April, a conference took place among the heads of the First and Third Armies and of XI and XV Corps. Haking explained that the C.E.P.'s solid performances during the March raids had not convinced him of its effectiveness. A better indicator of its current mood and ultimate potential was the recent mutiny in the Infantry 7 battalion (whose men on 4 April had refused an order to return to the front lines), taken as a sign that the C.E.P.'s soldiers had reached the end of their tether. If subjected to a concerted attack, Haking said, the Portuguese would run.⁵⁶ As a result it was decided at this meeting to remove the Second Division from the front line as quickly as possible, replacing it in the trenches by brigades belonging to the 50th and 55th Divisions, the former being transferred to XI Corps. These brigades would take over from the Portuguese on the night of 9/10 April. On the evening of 8 April, Second Division was informed that it had only one more day left in the trenches. A history of the 55th Division published immediately after the war's end refers a visit by a Portuguese brigade commander to the headquarters of the 166th Brigade – at that moment the 55th Division's reserve force – for purposes of arranging the handover: 'everything was in order for the relief to take place the following day'.⁵⁷ It should be noted that, the 55th Division aside, the other large British formations in this sector, including the 40th Division, had recently arrived from the battlefields further to the south, in search of a quiet spell; they were trying to integrate a large number of replacement troops to make up for the recently suffered losses.

Had the German offensive been launched a day later, on 10 April, it would have met British forces in the trenches until then held by the Portuguese. It is impossible to say how exactly they would have been dispersed over the battlefield. Would they have been concentrated on the B Line, as the Portuguese were? Or would they leave only a covering force at the front, like the 55th Division to the south, holding a stronger line to the rear? This option seems unlikely, given the disposition of the Portuguese artillery behind the B Line, requiring adequate protection. In the meantime, in Lisbon, Sidónio Pais met again with Barnardiston to inform him that he was ready to send 5000 soldiers to France, but that the ships at his disposal could take no more than 700 per month, and no horses. There were also health-related restrictions preventing the arrival of Portuguese soldiers in France.⁵⁸

A work recently published in Portugal casts doubt on the British High Command's intentions. According to Antonio José Telo and Pedro Marquês de Sousa, whose important book is unfortunately marked by patchy notation, by 5 April the British were generally convinced that the coming German offensive would be delivered against the C.E.P. By 8 April, they were almost certain of this.⁵⁹ The two authors detail a meeting between Haig and Horne at which the former unequivocally stated that the following day a major offensive would be launched against XI Corps, as a result of which Haig passed this intelligence on to Foch, asking for available reserves to be sent to the Lys sector. Moreover, according to the same authors, orders were given to the British units destined to defend the river line to start moving towards their assigned positions, while the 40th and 55th Divisions were told to start their flanking operations, preparing Haking's pocket. The implication is clear: the Portuguese were the last to know what was really happening, and the forces they believed would relieve them on 10 April would never move beyond the real line of defence, well behind the C.E.P.'s own 'line of resistance'. On 6 April Haking called on Gomes da Costa at

the latter's H.Q., in Lestrem, in order to impress on Gomes da Costa what the CEP should do in case of attack: hold the B Line, while further back the Village Line would be manned by the British.⁶⁰ Gomes da Costa asked only for some of the First Division's officers to be transferred to the Second, Haking agreeing to put the request directly to Tamagnini.

Quoting from Tamagnini's diary entry for 7 April, Telo and Marquês de Sousa note that Haking, faced by Tamagnini's refusal to release the officers in question, replied that these 'were needed to resist the "Boche attack that is expected tomorrow or very soon"'.⁶¹ Tamagnini refused to release the officers, but the authors note that

This is the only reference we find regarding a British warning about 9 April. The warning was given by Haking during a heated argument with Fernando Tamagnini, at a moment when the latter no longer has any operational responsibility. The C.E.P.'s commander (he still held the role, despite the lack of operational responsibility) attributed no importance to what he heard, despite noting it in his diary. He must have considered it merely an imaginary argument to try to convince him to release the officers, as a result of which he did not pass it on to Gomes da Costa. The two Portuguese generals had severed all contact, so that Haking had to pass on one's requests to the other. This might seem a scene from an Italian opera, but it was the C.E.P.'s reality days before 9 April!⁶²

According to Vasco de Carvalho, on 7 April Gomes da Costa and his staff were once again visited by Haking, the latter praising their spirit of sacrifice and insisting on his previous orders: the C.E.P., it seemed, was going nowhere for the moment.⁶³ But what he heard at that meeting about the C.E.P.'s faltering morale must have impressed him, since, as we have seen, Haking met with his own superiors on 8 April, as a result of which the order was given to withdraw the Second Portuguese Division from the front line immediately.

Telo and Marquês de Sousa argue that there is a contradiction between this withdrawal order and the absolute near certainty of a German attack on 9 April. They suggest two possible explanations for what happened next. The first is that the withdrawal order was just a way of moving British troops to the Lys and the Lawe, which they were to defend on 9 April, without arousing suspicion, the Portuguese being deliberately left unawares of what was happening. The second is that bad luck struck, Haking being unable to remove the Portuguese from the scene before the launch of the German offensive.⁶⁴ Although they suggest that the truth might fall somewhere in between, the general thrust of their work tends towards the first option, that of a cynical sacrifice. They write, 'there can be no doubt that there was a cold British calculation in the execution of what was, it should be said, their defensive plan, right from the start'. The order for the Second Division's withdrawal and substitution allowed the British to place their units in the ideal location to halt the German advance, while the Portuguese absorbed the fatal first blow.

The argument advanced by the two Portuguese historians stands or falls with the assessment that Haking and Horne knew beyond any doubt that the German attack would be delivered on 9 April. This is not as clear-cut as they suggest. According to General Brind, of XI Corps Staff, it was only on 8 April that aerial reconnaissance made it clear that an attack was imminent.⁶⁵ J.E. Edmonds states that the lack of German artillery activity that day worried Haking, who told his Artillery chief, Brigadier-General Metcalfe, that he feared that the Germans would attack precisely as the Portuguese withdrew.⁶⁶ And when the artillery barrage began on the morning of 9 April, there was considerable confusion among British and Portuguese alike over what precisely it heralded.⁶⁷ All of this suggests that it was only on the eve of battle that Haking realized an attack was definitely coming – but even then there

was no absolute certainty as to the day. The Portuguese spent the better part of the night of 8–9 April preparing their move out of the trenches. Officers updated archives and maps while soldiers stowed away arms and munitions – preparations which actually hindered them the following day. Spirits were high. Gomes da Costa was up until 3 am preparing for his departure.⁶⁸ Had Haking been sure that an attack was coming before the Portuguese left the trenches, he would surely have told them to prepare for it, instead of making them take steps that made their task even more difficult.

In a wider sense, however, the fate of the Portuguese at the Battle of the Lys had been sealed well before April 1918. It was sealed when the British Admiralty cut off their supply of reinforcements; when the C.E.P. was transformed into a full army corps, its divisions placed side by side in the trenches; when Sidónio Pais took power in Lisbon, casting out the interventionist leadership; when soldiers were denied the leave that their officers availed of; and when many of these officers did not return to France, having secured a safe administrative position at home. Recriminations would follow the Battle of the Lys, which effectively brought the C.E.P.'s existence as a fighting unit to an end. The Portuguese were scapegoated by the British High Command and subsequent historiography for the difficulties experienced early in the battle. However, their performance on the day cannot have come as a surprise to anyone acquainted with the difficulties experienced by them in France, not all of which were of their making.

Notes

1. For Haig's opening salvo in this campaign, see N.A., W.O. 158/119, telegram, G.H.Q. France O.B. 1864G, 19 April 1918, Secret.
2. N.A., W.O. 106/553, War Cabinet, 399, Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, held at 10 Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, 25 April 1918, at 11.30 AM.
3. Recent works that cover Sidónio Pais include Ribeiro de Meneses, *From the First World War to Military Dictatorship*, Chapter VI; Medina, *Morte e Transfiguração*; Ramalho, *Sidónio Pais*; Samara, *Verdes e Vermelhos*; and Silva, *Sidónio e Sidonismo*. Older works include Duarte, *Sidónio Pais*; Payne, "Fascism and Right Authoritarianism"; Valente, "Portugal e a Guerra"; Telo, *O Sidonismo*; Cabral, "A Grande Guerra"; and Antunes, *A Cadeira de Sidónio*.
4. See, for example, N.A., CAB, War Cabinet 294, 'Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Friday, 7 December 1917, at 5:30 pm' For the coup's effects on the Army in France, see the speech by C.E.P. veteran Velhinho Correia in *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados* (Lisbon), 12 June 1919. See also Augusto Casimiro, *Calvário da Flandres* (1918), 20.
5. L.H.C.M.A., K.C.L., N.W. Barnardiston papers, 3/1, Character-sketch of the Portuguese President Major Sidonio Paes, following his leadership of an uprising against the late Government.
6. N.A. W.O. 106/551, Barnardiston to Whigham, 15 December 1917.
7. N.A. W.O. 106/551, N. 681, Barnardiston to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff [C.I.G.S.], 19 December 1917.
8. N.A. W.O. 106/551, N. 702, Barnardiston to Whigham, 29 December 1917.
9. As was shown in Part I of this article, Gomes da Costa had for some time been arguing that only one Portuguese division should be at the front at any given time.
10. N.A., W.O. 106/553, From the C.I.G.S. to General Barnardiston, 5 January, 1918.
11. N.A., W.O. 106/553, N. 720, Barnardiston to the Minister of War, Lisbon, 6 January 1918.
12. *Portugal na Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)*, 222.
13. *Portugal na Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)*, 224, 225.

14. N.A., W.O. 106/553, N. 725, Barnardiston to the C.I.G.S., 8 January 1918. See also *Portugal na Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)*, 226.
15. N.A., W.O. 106/553, Arthur Lynden-Bell to Barnardiston, 11 January 1918.
16. W.O. 106/553, Barnardiston to Whigham, 11 January 1918.
17. Vasco de Carvalho suggests that talks could not begin until a new Chief of Staff to replace Roberto Baptista arrived – but nothing much seemed to change after the arrival in France of Colonel Sinel de Cordes on 1 March 1918. Carvalho, *A 2ª Divisão*, 39.
18. See *Portugal na Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)*, 228, 229. See also M.A.E., La Courneuve, Guerre 1914–1918, Portugal, Coopération militaire et matériel de guerre, 640, Emile Daeschner to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, (Pichon), 22 February 1918.
19. Marques (org.), *Memórias do General ...*, clxiv–clxv.
20. A.H.M., Box 1268, N. 120, F. Tamagnini to the Chief of the Cabinet Section of the Ministry of War, 16 January 1918.
21. Marques (org.), *Memórias do General ...*, xc.
22. N.A., W.O. 106/553, N. 776, 2 February, 1918.
23. Marques (org.), clxiii.
24. Farr, *The Silent General*, 177, 178.
25. N.A, W. O., 95/175/1 and 95/175/2.
26. *A Capital* (Lisbon), 22 January 1918.
27. *A Capital* (Lisbon), 21 February 1918.
28. ‘Resumo histórico dos serviços prestados pelo CEP em França’, *Revista Militar*, nos. 6 and 7 (June and July 1919), 408–26.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Almeida, *Memórias dum Expedicionário a França*, 123.
31. *Le Matin* (Paris), 11 March 1918.
32. N.A., W.O. 95/922/7, Diary of General Staff, XV Corps, 14 March 1918.
33. See Tenente-Coronel Mello e Athayde, ‘Um “Raid”’, in *Revista Militar*, Nos. 6 and 7 (June and July 1919), 444–449.
34. *Portugal na Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)*, 252, 253.
35. *Portugal na Primeira Guerra Mundial (1914–1918)*, 253. A vivid impression of the difficulties the Allies found themselves in over the question of shipping at this time is provided by Adam Tooze in his *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order*, 203.
36. N.A. W.O. 106/553, DMS, First Army, No. 1437/33, 14 March 1918.
37. This lack of hygiene was noted also by some Portuguese officers. See A.H.M., 1st Division, 35th Section, Box 1298, Lieutenant António Vaz Monteiro Gomes to Miss Sára Bedford, 25 September 1917.
38. N.A., Diary of Sir Douglas Haig, 1 March 1918.
39. A.H.M., 1st Division, 35th Section, Box 1268, N. 120, F. Tamagnini to the Chief of the Cabinet Section of the Ministry of War, 16 January 1918. For a wider discussion of the CEP’s morale as revealed through its soldier’s censored letters, see Meneses, ‘All of us are looking forward to leaving.’
40. B.N., Private papers of General Gomes da Costa, General N.W. Barnardiston to Gomes da Costa, 20 March 1918.
41. *A Capital* (Lisbon), 8 February 1918.
42. *A Capital* (Lisbon), 20 March 1918.
43. *A Capital* (Lisbon), 14 February 1918.
44. *A Capital* (Lisbon), 24 February 1918. Barnardiston summarized the articles in a memorandum to Sir Lancelot Carnegie dated 27 February. According to Barnardiston,

as regards the scandals he mentions and the abuse he lavishes on Norton de Matos, I am inclined to attribute the defects in equipment and other details more to the general incapacity of the Portuguese for organization and administration, and to their want of discipline and general inefficiency than to any deficiencies on the part of the War Minister. I know the latter had the greatest difficulty in getting any of his orders (which were excellent) carried out.

45. A.H.M., 1st Division, 35th Section, Box 1298, N. 84F. Tamagnini to the Chief of the Cabinet Section of the Ministry of War, 28 February 1918.
46. N.A., W.O. 106/553, Memorandum n. 2, included in memorandum, Barnardiston to Sir Lancelot Carnegie, 27 February 1918.
47. *Diário da Câmara dos Deputados* (Lisbon), Session of 1 August 1918.
48. Farr, *The Silent General*, 181.
49. Quoted in Farr, *The Silent General*, 182.
50. Senior, *Haking*, 198.
51. Edmonds, *History of the Great War. Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1918. March April*, 147.
52. N.A., W.O. 95/883/1, XI Corps S.S. 6/2, Secret, Notes of Conference held at Corps H.Q., 10.30 am 25th March, 1918.
53. Gomes da Costa's after-action report on the Battle of La Lys suggests that there was actually a great deal of confusion over his division's mission. For an English translation of this report, see N.A., W.O. 158/75, 'Translation of Report by General Gomes da Costa, G.O.C. 2nd Division', 3 May 1918.
54. Senior, *Haking*, 200.
55. According to Gomes da Costa's post-battle report, his battalions numbered between thirteen and thirty officers instead of the full complement of thirty-seven and between 577 and 678 men, instead of the prescribed 1,083. See N.A., W.O. 158/75, 'Translation of Report by General Gomes da Costa, G.O.C. 2nd Division', 3 May 1918.
56. Senior, *Haking*, 200.
57. Coop, *The Story of the 55th Division*, 89.
58. N.A., W.O. 106/553, Barnardiston to the War Office, 5 April 1918.
59. Telo and Marquês de Sousa, *O CEP*, 363.
60. Telo and Marquês de Sousa, *O CEP*, 371.
61. Personal Diary of Fernando Tamagnini, A.H.M., 7 April 1918, quoted in Telo and Marquês de Sousa, *O CEP*, 371.
62. Telo and Marquês de Sousa, *O CEP*, 371.
63. Carvalho, *A 2ª Divisão Portuguesa*, 149.
64. Telo and Marquês de Sousa, *O CEP*, 374.
65. N.A., CAB 45/122, Letter, J.E.S. Brind to J.E. Edmonds, 3 January 1932.
66. Edmonds, *History of the Great War*, 164.
67. This was the case in relation to the 40th Division. See Baker, *The Battle for Flanders*, 31. Some hours later, the War Cabinet's briefing on ongoing operations suggested that this was a limited operation, not an all-out assault. N.A., CAB, Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W., on Tuesday April 9, 1918, at 11:30 am.
68. Carvalho, *A 2ª Divisão Portuguesa*, 187.

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