

Portugal and the 1st World War

1914-1916-1918

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On March 9th 1916, the II German Reich declared war on Portugal. After a revolution in October 1910, Portugal became a Republic and underwent an intermittent civil war at home. For domestic political reasons, Portugal engineered joining the Allies in the First World War. Ever since 1914, public opinion in Portugal had been divided about entering the war, between pro-War and anti-European War partisans.



I. Portugal's heritage in the beginning of the 20th century

In order to understand Portugal's social and political inheritance at the beginning of the 20th century, we need to look back a hundred years

The Parliament and the Constitutional Monarchy

In the period between the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, European countries enjoyed relatively stable borders. Conflicts were largely internal, in an era of major political change, even violent civil war, with Liberal Constitutional Parliaments established in most of Europe.

Portugal had been destroyed socially and economically by the Napoleonic wars, with scars that were still present a hundred years later. The four hundred year old Portuguese colonial empire, with its global maritime reach, had lost its dominance of Asian trade, and with the emancipation of Brazil in 1826, the end of a rich trading monopoly. The liberal revolution in Lisbon in 1820, and the vote for a liberal constitution drawn up by a Constituent Congress in 1822, heralded a period of political instability, ending with the poisoning of King Dom João VI in 1826, followed by a bitter civil war that raged from 1828 to 1834 between the Absolutists headed by the Infant Dom Miguel, whom they crowned, and the Liberals led by his elder brother Dom Pedro, who abdicated as Emperor of Brazil to install his daughter Dona Maria as Queen. The war ended with a revolutionary victory, the collapse of the *Anciën Régime* in Portugal and the establishment of a parliamentary constitutional monarchy along the British model that endured until the revolution in October 1910 that would install a republic. This 1834 liberal model of society in no way resembled that of the Jacobin French Revolution which Portugal had fought against in the Napoleonic Peninsula War! The 1822 Constitution was indeed inspired by the 1791 French Constitution - the original French version with a generous vision that also inspired the Spanish Cadíz Constitution - but which was quickly superseded by the more radical Jacobin Constitution.

After the bitter Portuguese civil war, the liberal military implemented a new constitution and model for society in 1834, which was more socially pragmatic and politically balanced, reflecting the ideals of the very Allied Army that had fought the French Napoleonic invaders and their sympathisers. The Portuguese army's young and meritocratic officer corps was developed during the 1809-1814 Peninsula War from rural nobility and urban bourgeoisie background, per contrast with the traditional aristocracy recruitment, As such they were open to radical new social and professional criteria. Those proud patriotic soldiers were attracted by the democratic parliamentary societal model of their British allied army colleagues. They had been confronted with those political ideas and proposals, during six years of shared hard life and warfare.

After the twenty-six years of coups and counter-coups by moderate and radical Liberals that followed the 1834 Liberal Constitution, 1851 saw the start of a stable period of public works activity, social reforms and economic development. But in the last quarter of the 19th century, the country's political life sunk into a sterile political rotation of power between the moderate liberal centre party and more radical liberal governments. The old absolutist, conservative and rural population will remain largely absent from official political life, leaving the two liberal parties in control of parliament and government. This constant rotation between short term governments produced little economic growth and social improvements, and a steady increase in the national debt. The political class was consumed by heated theoretical and personal differences. In almost eight centuries of existence, Portugal had never lagged so far behind the Western European average in social and economic terms.

The Republican regime

At the beginning of the 20th century Portugal had a stagnant economy, a largely illiterate population and no significant middle class to help create a stable and more developed society. The Portuguese were embroiled in frustrating political and social conflicts, and the political

parties in parliamentary deadlock. The constitutional monarch, King Dom Carlos I, tried to intervene and extended the opportunity of government to João Franco, a reformist liberal politician who attempted to reform the country from above. The King and the Royal Prince were assassinated in 1908. Two years later, on October 5th 1910, a republican revolution took place in Lisbon, spearheaded by republican and Freemason militant organisations, and carried out by the Navy (the Army stayed largely immobile). The young King Dom Manuel II went into exile to England. Portugal became the third European republic, after Switzerland and France.

The Democratic Party controlled the new Parliament and was headed by Afonso Costa, an intelligent and dynamic lawyer who was determined to achieve radical political change. He started by trying to turn Portugal into a totally secular society. Religion and the Church were blamed for the country's decadence. Church institutions were separated from the State, religious orders banned, all Church property seized, services controlled and censored by the State, priests regulated in usage of the church's buildings and banned from walking in the street in religious dress, divorces were legalised, diplomatic ties with the Vatican were cut, inter alia. The State was divorced from its religious citizens.

The involvement of the very young and fragile Portuguese Republic in the First World War was a precipitate and traumatic undertaking. Portugal was already afflicted by social, financial, colonial, military and diplomatic constraints, by violent political struggles at home between the different factions of the republican movement, and by the stance of the conservative Army officer corps, particularly when goaded by the radical Democratic Party, which was determined to change Portugal's archaic society, quickly and by force. The republicans had drastically reduced the country's electoral base from how it was under the constitutional monarchy by preventing illiterate citizens from voting - some 70% of the mainly rural population, so giving greater influence to the more urban and literate lower middle

class. The republican movement had little roots or presence in the largely conservative countryside, which accounted for 80% of the population, but with this new electoral structure they had secured a position of electoral power. The leaders of the Democratic Party, although a minority opinion movement before the 1910 Revolution, were governing Portugal when Europe woke up to a world war.

On the eve of World War, the Democratic Government's objectives were:

- Accelerating implementation of their ideological reform.
Radical changes in society could not be achieved swiftly through elections, consultations or referenda. To do so quickly, revolutionary methods had to be invoked. They had to be enforced by clever manoeuvring in the Congress (parliament) and by decree, in order to bypass the hostility of a society that was mainly conservative and rural.
- Securing political control of the Congress and defence of the regime.
All means were used by the Democratic Party to keep political control, including violence and intimidation. Those were “violent revolutionary days”, a widespread social and political phenomenon in Europe at the time. The country's integrity was also threatened by the prevailing political instability. The Spanish King, Alphonse XIII, was publicly proclaiming his hostility to Portugal's “republican regime”, threatening intervention and annexation. To make things worse, Britain was considering an alliance with Spain!
- Obtaining international recognition of the Republican regime.
Most European countries were reluctant to recognise the new Portuguese republican regime. France did so in August, only ten months after the republican revolution of October 1910. Britain and most other countries did so only in September 1911. With the former King Dom Manuel II exiled in London, the republicans were nervous about the threat of monarchical coups. Monarchist militant revolts, and raids from neighbouring Spanish territory, were rife.
 - Guaranteeing Portugal's sovereignty over its colonies.

The Berlin Conference of 1878 carved up Africa amongst the major European Powers. The more industrialised Powers still had their eyes on the weak Portugal's African territories, with the pretext that Portugal was incapable of modern industrial development of its colonies. The "pink map" incident with the British Colonial Office humiliated Portugal. The perceived behaviour of Perfidious Albion mobilised a national revolt against the Old Ally. It had also become public that Britain had promised Germany access to Portuguese colonies. Britain however assured the Portuguese government in 1913 that she would protect its colonial rights. Indeed, it would do so during the First World War, when London's Colonial Office stopped the South Africa Union's army from invading and seizing the Portuguese colony of Mozambique.

II. Portugal and the 1st World War in Africa, 1914-1918

Since the third quarter of the 19th century Portugal had accelerated the expansion of its African territories into the hinterland, and many scientific expeditions were initiated. The Marquis Sá da Bandeira's Government gave the Governors of Angola and Mozambique specific instructions in 1858 to organise scientific expeditions to explore and draw up the geographic delimitations of those colonies. The first crossings of the African continent, between Angola and Mozambique, were made in 1798, 1802 and 1831. The most famous and scientifically organised expeditions were those that crossed Africa led by Major Alexandre Serpa Pinto in 1877-1879 and by the naval officers Roberto Capelo and Roberto Ivens in 1884-1885. Simultaneously, a new colonial organisation and important economic developments were undertaken, mainly in Angola and Mozambique, with the support of foreign investment.

The creation of the Belgian Congo by King Leopold II of Belgium brought about the Berlin Conference of 1885 that decided the division of Africa's territories between the European powers. In January 1890,

Britain opposed Portugal's possession of the territories that stretched between Angola and Mozambique, which Portugal had claimed for three years. Famously "coloured in pink" on a British map of Africa, the claim conflicted with Cecil Rhodes's plan for a railway linking Cairo with Cape Town. Britain gave Portugal an ultimatum immediately to withdraw its recently established garrisons and administrative posts in those territories. British fleets were deployed off Mozambican waters and Gibraltar, as an intimidation to Lisbon. This ruthless act from Portugal's oldest ally is still alive in the memory of all Portuguese people. It also provided the pretext for the then small republican movement to lead an attack on the Monarchy, accusing it of diplomatic weakness in defending the colonial heritage, and the Royal Family of being guilty of intimacy with the British crown. Those political attacks contributed to the fall of the Portuguese monarchy. The Ultimatum was a national humiliation, and the popular reaction a brutal wake-up call to the reality of Portugal's weak economic and diplomatic situation.

During the previous three decades, in response to the widespread rebellion of various native tribes, suspiciously equipped with British arms in the south of Mozambique, and with German arms in the south of Angola, the Portuguese Army acted with impressive professionalism and bravery in the ensuing operations that established the current borders of both countries, and pacified Angola's and Mozambique's tribal population. A generation of high quality administrators, military and naval officers took on the task of constructing modern services and economic businesses in those colonial provinces. Many of those officers would become important actors in Portugal's political life over the ensuing fifty years. This attitude to the development of Portugal's African colonies did not change under the following republican governments in Lisbon. The defence of the colonies became a republican political platform following the popular protest against the Ultimatum, and would continue under all different governments until 1974, when the country was faced with implementing traumatic

decolonisation. Germany declared war on Portugal on March 9th 1916. But the Portuguese territories of Northern Mozambique and of Southern Angola had already been under attack by German raiding forces since 1914. Portugal had to dispatch over 50,000 troops to those territories, raise an additional 16,000 men locally, and mobilise thousands of civilians to cope with the huge logistical requirements, even though Portugal was not officially at war with Germany at the time.

In Angola, the first two military incidents took place in 1914, with German attacks in Naulila in August, and in Cougar in October. In Mozambique the Germans made their first raid into Maziua in December, in the territory just south of the Tanganyika border. London reacted on January 5th, stating that it “*would understand any Portuguese defence action, but a decision to declare War on Germany was a Portuguese responsibility, not an obligation of the Anglo- Portuguese Alliance*”. London did not want Portugal to join the allies - Britain, France and Belgium - in the war in Africa! The German aggression in the South of Angola, after some unfortunate surprises in the first months of 1914, was repulsed by the reinforced Portuguese army and confined until the end of the war to Angola’s Southern borders with Southwest Africa, with that German’s colony finally occupied by the South Africa Union’s army.

To the North of Mozambique, the Germans had an energetic and brilliant commander in General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, who was based in Tanganyika and ignored Portugal’s neutrality, raiding Northern Mozambique’s territory continuously. He was a precursor to other “subversive war” leaders of the late 20th century. Constantly active with raids, ambushes, surprise attacks and utilising concealment techniques, he always did what was unexpected, deploying few German soldiers and large contingents of well-trained African’s “*Askaris*” in deep inland incursions, trying always to subvert the loyalty of the local African population. Lettow-Vorbeck also made equally damaging attacks on British troops. He successfully raised African revolts in Kenya, Rhodesia,

Zambia and Nyasaland, as well as on Belgian troops in Burundi and Katanga. He was still active a month after the end of the war.

These wars were extremely cruel to the civilian population, not just due to the ravages imposed on native agriculture which resulted in serious food shortages, but also the enormous logistical demands on a fragile country, where everything from food to equipment had to be moved in by hundreds of thousands of mobilised porters.

The Portuguese troops sent to Africa were badly prepared and badly led, with inadequate logistics, but poor hygiene and health accounted for the majority of casualties, 51% in Mozambique! This is staggering, as the hygiene and health casualty ratio during the previous successful African campaigns at the end of the 19th century, referred to above, was only 5 to 10%! This colossal difference is a clear indicator of the bad conditions imposed on the Portuguese African army of 1914-1918. Political unrest at home and constant political interference with frequent changes in command, was a major factor in the poor military management of the war in Mozambique. The home government's view of the war was totally divorced from the reality on the ground, which required vast logistical support in desolate territories with little logistical capacity. The civilian population, mobilised in huge number to provide this necessary support to the fighting units, paid a heavy toll. For the Portuguese Army, the war in Africa had a higher mortality rate than the war in Flanders:

- In Europe, out of the 55,000 troops present in France, Portugal sustained 14,062 losses (dead, wounded and prisoners) of which about half was in the single one day battle of La Lys in April 1918.
- In Africa, out of the 50,000 European troops present, Portugal sustained 21,000 losses, mainly in Mozambique!

With the end of the First World War, however, Portugal had succeeded in keeping the integrity of its African territories. It will not obtain any territorial compensation for fighting the German aggression,

such as extending the borders of the Angolan and Mozambican colonies into neighbouring ex-German territories. The British and French colonial empires absorbed them instead.

III. Portugal in the 1st World War in Europe, 1916 to 1918

When WW1 started on the August 4th 1914, the Democratic Party's government argued in the Portuguese Congress (the parliament) that Portugal should declare war on Germany, due to the old Anglo-Portuguese Alliance. Almost immediately the British Government told the Portuguese Ambassador in London that Portugal should not declare War on Germany along with its ally, but should not declare its neutrality either! Britain, conscious of the state of the Portuguese economy, the precarious stability of its governments, the state of a divided and demoralised army, and informed of the unpopularity of the war, did not want to assume the odious role of pushing the Portuguese into a war that was not theirs. The British Army had sent a report to the government on the terrible state of the demoralised Portuguese officer corps and the lack of discipline in the army's ranks. The prospect of having to undertake the effort and cost of rearming and supporting a weak Portuguese army, of assuming its transport to France, and of the difficulty it would have in confronting the efficient German Army in France, was obviously not welcomed by the British Government and the Army.

In 1914 the Democratic Party, like most Portuguese republicans, but also extreme-right nationalist thinkers, had a poor opinion of Britain's historical behaviour towards Portugal despite the old Anglo-Portuguese Alliance. However, charged with the responsibility for the country's foreign policy, the Party was soon confronted with the politics of crucial access to foreign financial markets, i.e., London's City, as well as the need to protect its colonial heritage from voracious European Powers. It quickly learned that the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance was a major diplomatic tool: the logic of the old Alliance was evident again.

In international relations there are no friends or sympathies, just interests and alliances, which a diplomatic corps strengthens.

The Democratic Party government was convinced that the Allies, with whom they had an ideological sympathy, particularly Republican France, were poised to win the war. And as already mentioned, the government's main concerns were:

- Defence of the republican regime – from the monarchist militants' continuous threat of revolt at home, and their armed interventions from Spanish territory;
- Defence of the country against the Spanish monarchy's manoeuvres – Alphonse XIII loathed the Portuguese republicans and discussed with Britain the eventual integration of Portugal into an united Iberia;
- Defence of the Portuguese colonies – Germany, Britain and France often talked about seizing the Portuguese colonial territories;
- How to achieve national unity – a war is always a way to unify citizens against a foreign power, and in this case around the Republic.

Joining the Allies in the war was the best way to address these concerns!

Portugal being seated at the winner's table at the end of this European War was considered vital. This had been the case in 1815, when Portugal participated in the Vienna Congress after the Napoleonic wars. The eight countries with a deciding seat at the Congress had determined the borders of all European states! The bellicose Democratic Party government however, had to confront the hostility of the majority of the Portuguese nation and the Army – not to mention Britain – neither of which thought Portugal should be involved in a war in French Flanders that they did not view as “their war”. As a peripheral and Atlantic nation, Portugal throughout its history had never sent troops to a war in mainland Europe (as opposed to European waters ...).

Afonso Costa, the leader of the Democratic Party, believed that joining the war ‘*would discipline the country and would convert it to*

the republic’. He developed good relations with the French government, and together they devised a plan to force British approval of Portugal’s involvement in the war against Germany. In September 1914, Aristide Briand suggested Portugal should lend a significant number of artillery pieces to the French army, French guns that had been sold some years before to Portugal, on condition that they should be accompanied by Portuguese artillerymen. This was soon extended to a full Portuguese division of 20,000 men! Britain understood that this French liaison if left alone would be the end of the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance and recommended to Portugal that before declaring War on Germany Portugal should prepare, train and embark those forces, an expedient the British knew would take a long time to realise.

Under that pretext, the Government started the partial mobilisation of the Army. On the October 20th, monarchist sympathisers and anti-War militants staged a revolt against Portugal’s participation in the War, aided by the Army regiments in Mafra and Braganza. The government quashed the revolt, and on November 20th 1914, 56 heavy guns were dispatched to France and a full Army mobilisation started. The Congress authorised the Government to intervene militarily on the British side and to prepare a 20,000-strong division to be sent to France, “in agreement with the British Government”! There was no mention of a war with Germany. But on December 12th the government fell. Its new bellicose successor also collapsed on January 15th 1915, faced with the “Movement of the Swords”, when most officers publicly rendered their swords to the Defence Minister in protest at the government’s decision to go to war. On being mobilised for war, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment of Estremoz and other units mutinied.

An anti-War government was formed in January 1915, with the moderate republican Pimenta de Castro as prime minister. Acting like a true dictator, he tried to contain the radical policies of the Democratic Party by allying with the republican’s Unionists and other republican conservative and moderate parties, the monarchists and the Catholic

party, in order to create a conservative Republican government and to stop the growing schism between the Army and the Republic.

However Pimenta de Castro's dictatorial manoeuvres provoked the hard left. On the May 14th 1915, the *Carbonaria* (the secret revolutionary masonic organisation that had been responsible for the assassination of the King in 1908) started one of the most violent revolutions in Portugal, with over 200 deaths and 1,000 wounded. The military academy (Escola de Guerra) was stormed and the cadets taken prisoner, with two cadets and an officer coldly assassinated. Various foreign warships sailed up the Tagus to protect their own citizens. The "moderate" Republican government fell. The new government ordered the Spanish warships to leave. Fourteen days afterwards the new government also fell. The next one only lasted 33 days, followed by a bellicose Democratic Party government with Afonso Costa as prime minister on the November 29th 1915. An Army training camp was established in Tancos, near Abrantes, soon filled with 30,000 recruits and brought to public attention by the press. In February 1916, an army regiment in Tomar revolted against Portugal joining the war in France. During all these epic and tumultuous days, Portugal remained neutral, with no declaration of war from Portugal or Germany.

Afonso Costa's Government secretly agreed a pretext with Britain and France to create a serious incident with Germany. In February 1916, British Prime Minister Asquith asked Portugal to confiscate all German merchant vessels in Portuguese ports. On February 23rd, Portugal impounded 72 German and 2 Austrian vessels in Portuguese harbours. After various tentative diplomatic negotiations by Berlin to avoid a conflict, Germany finally declared war on Portugal on March 9th 1916. Afonso Costa had finally succeeded in bringing Portugal into the war. He resigned six days later. Of the 74 confiscated ships, 28 German vessels were integrated into the Portuguese merchant navy and 44 were leased to British service with Portuguese crews. Britain finally agreed with the Portuguese government that Portugal should send an army corps to France, comprising two divisions of 20,000 men each, an

independent heavy artillery corps, Headquarters staff, various services and 30 airmen, in all another 15,000 men. The CEP (Portuguese Expeditionary Corps), which amounted to 55,000 soldiers, was placed directly under the orders of General Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the British Army in France. Between their arrival in the North of France and the winter of 1918, all CEP units underwent 114 days of hard training in operational camps integrated with British battalions, at times with temperatures of minus 22 degrees. The official Portuguese WW1 White Paper reports: “*The English officers and soldiers received the Portuguese very well and were good instructors in trench service*”. The British reports are unanimous in praising the physical and military quality of the Portuguese soldier but complain about the lack of motivation of many officers.

The first troops left Portugal for Brest in February 1917 and by October the CEP was finally assembled in France, commanded by General Tamagnini (replaced in July 1918 by General Rosado), the 1st Division under General Gomes da Costa (who will command the 2nd Division after the 8th of April and on the 9th in the Battle of La Lys), and the 2nd Division initially under General Simas Machado. The CEP was deployed on the Flanders front, in the area of Armentieres defended by the 1st British Army, the CEP itself defending a front of 11km, from April 1917 to April 1918. The British commander of the 1st Army, General Horn was the British officer directly overseeing the CEP, responsible for a front of 53 km.

At home the anti-belligerents were robbed of the argument that the British ally did not want Portugal in the war, but the reaction against the Democratic Party in power would engender a big revolt. Major Sidónio Pais, and the cadets of the military academy staged a political coup on the December 5th 1917. A dictatorship with the “President-King Sidónio”, a charismatic officer who had left the Army, was politically engaged, and had been the Republic’s ambassador in Berlin, was known for his anti-War ideas. In power he began to reverse the Democratic Party’s politics, re-introducing with greater popular charisma the

political ideas of the failed Government of Pimenta de Castro. The monarchists agreed to support his government but refused to identify themselves with his Caesarean regime.

On the April 28th, Sidónio was confirmed President in the national presidential and legislative elections. On May 10th, renowned conservative and monarchist military officers were readmitted into the armed forces. President Sidónio reopened diplomatic relations with the Vatican and started moderate and creative politics to reform the State economy and create a large political base for a coalition government, which generated national enthusiasm. The major Allied Powers recognised his Government in May 1918. Many believed that installing Sidónio was a manoeuvre by the traditional Army officer corps against the pro-War Democratic Party.

It was too late for the new government to withdraw the CEP from France, however reinforcements were halted. The CEP was “de facto” left alone in France. Many officers on leave refused to return to France, forcing the CEP to promote sergeants through local short courses to the rank of lieutenant. More than half of the officer corps with the CEP was now composed of militia officers. The Democratic Party did not remain passive, and many revolts, strikes and street incidents occurred. On the night of the October 16th the *Carbonária* attacked a protected column with 140 political prisoners. The incident became known as “*Leva da Morte*” with many famous people killed, including former republican politicians. In December 1918 a radical student assassinated President Sidónio in the St. Apolónia railway station, where he was being welcomed by the crowd. The First World War had ended the previous month.

Between August 1914 and December the 23rd 1918, Portugal:

- Had 5 pro-War governments, 4 anti-War governments and 2 coalitions! This is how Portugal had to manage its participation in the First World War.

- Mobilised over 150,000 soldiers, an expensive decision for a population of five million, in a country with financial difficulties, an exhausted economy and a suffering society. Of these:
 - 55,100 were sent to France, with 14,100 casualties, half at the battle of La Lys.
 - 50,200 went to Africa, with 21,000 casualties. Civilian casualties topped 100,000. 12 400 were sent to the Azores, Madeira and the South Atlantic islands.

The German navy sank 117 Portuguese merchant vessels during the War.

IV. The battle of La Lys, April 9th 1918

On the April 9th 1918, the day before it was relieved by two British divisions, the 2nd Division of the CEP was deployed in the front line, next to the river La Lys. These troops had stayed over six months in the front line without relief, the longest period for any army unit on the Allied front. The CEP's 1st Division had already been sent to a reserve position for rest. Two weeks before, South Africa's General Smuts had inspected the CEP and had advised the commander of the 1st British Army that the CEP should be relieved urgently, as he was struck by its state of exhaustion and low morale. The British command decided to withdraw the two Portuguese divisions from the front line on the 6th and 10th of April respectively. The Allies also knew that a big German attack was eminent.

On the April 8th, with the 1st division retired to rest, the CEP's 2nd Division had two British divisions behind them in reserve. On the right and left of the 2nd Division there were also 3 British divisions on each side, deployed in depth and in three consecutive lines. The German High Command knew that the 11 km of the CEP's front was defended by a single division with a maximum of 20,000 men. (To the right and left of the Portuguese, similar positions were defended by 40,000 British soldiers. An equivalent stretch of 14 km was defended by 60,000 American soldiers). These facts explain why the German High

Command decided to concentrate a rapid attack on the CEP's front on April 9th.

After one of the most intense bombardments which started at 04.15 hours (1,700 German guns on a 17 km front, against 88 Portuguese guns on an 11km front), the CEP's 2nd division, their equipment already packed ready to leave the following day, was surprised by the German onslaught: a first wave of 4 divisions with 50,000 men, followed by two other waves comprising 3 divisions each. Two German divisions in the first wave attacked the 40th British Division to the left of the Portuguese, with other German divisions deployed in depth. On the right of the Portuguese, 3 German divisions in the first wave attacked the 55th British Division in the front line, with other German divisions behind. Overall, the Germans engaged 18 divisions with 350,000 troops against 7 Allied divisions with 90,000. The 20,000 Portuguese faced a direct attack by 100,000 troops. In addition to the artillery bombardment, the Germans used phosgene gas and 15,000 mustard gas shells.

The German infantry attacked in the morning, with many instances of bayonet combat. By the end of the day the 2nd Portuguese Division had been smashed, with a few pockets remaining and 7,400 losses (dead, wounded and prisoners) out of its 17,000-20,000 troops. The Germans had succeeded in penetrating 8 km deep over a 23 km front. But the remains of the 2nd Division and the allied British troops didn't allow them to pass the Lawe and Lys channels, frustrating the original German plan of attack. The following day the CEP was relieved, but on April 14th the reorganised Portuguese units were sent back to the front line, no longer as an Army Corps but in detached brigades operating with different allied divisions. The 1st Division was again given the defence of a front line on the June 16th.

Despite a courageous resistance that delayed the German attack, the 2nd Division was totally crushed. Out of its 20,000 troops, 300 officers and 7,000 soldiers were lost in one day, half the total losses of the CEP in France.

V. A final assessment of Portugal's involvement in WWI

Portuguese Portuguese belligerency in the First World War was mainly ideological. Democratic Party governments were obsessively committed to pushing Portugal into the War in France. The people, from anarchists to monarchists, moderate republicans, Catholics and other groups, which together represented the majority of the population, were against joining the War in Europe. It was not their War.

The Army was also against it. The officers were conscious of the lack of modern equipment, but above all their politically divided corps had destroyed all professionalism, discipline and moral authority in the Army, prerequisites for an army to face an organised and respected enemy in modern warfare, equipped with terrifying weapons. During the previous three decades, the Portuguese Army had successfully operated in Africa, with high spirits, courage and professional competence. But during WWI its performance fell short. Despite its operating in the same African theatres, the Portuguese Army had to contend with difficulties of command and discipline, with civil unrest at home, with economic and logistical disturbances, and with constant political interference.

Portugal's participation in the War did not bring unity and social harmony at home, nor did it yield the Democratic Party the domestic political control it anticipated. Portugal continued to live in an intermittent state of civil war from 1908 to 1928. The Army was not interested in supporting either the Monarchy or the Democratic Party. With Portugal's involvement in the First World War, both Portuguese citizens and the Army were used for self-seeking political aims, in a mission that neither could deliver. The country and the Army were not prepared to face the intensity of a war between European industrial powers. The CEP was a victim of the civil war at home, which its role in France also fed. After the end of the war, the Democrat Party blamed the Army's officers for not achieving better-recognised results. The Army complained that they neither had the tools nor a clear national mandate.

With the political violence continuing after the war, and with the economic crisis increasing, the Army lost respect for the political parties' capacity to govern the country. On May 28th 1926, the Army staged a coup that dissolved the First Republic. After two years of military dictatorship, the country held elections in 1928. In 1932 the Coimbra University Finance Professor António Salazar, having worked successfully for three years as Finance Minister, was made Prime Minister. One wonders if the ensuing 42 years of the non-democratic "Estado Novo" was not a consequence of Portugal's struggles over the First World War?

The participation of Portugal in WW1 in Europe was a terrible historical mistake, with heavy human and economic cost, and little compensation for the nation's huge sacrifices. Portugal had indeed "other battles to fight" to improve its archaic society. The exercise of democratic rule was not possible under the conditions prevailing under the First Republic, nor under Salazar. Portugal would have to wait until 1976 to become a functioning democracy.

Addendum

A word on Intermittent Civil War

Professor António José Telo, the incumbent Professor of History at the Portuguese Military Academy, wrote a study on Portugal's involvement in the First World War entitled "*Erros e Ilusões sobre a Beligerância Portuguesa*", published in 2016 in the book "*A Grande Guerra: Um Século Depois*" (The Great War: A Century Later). In this study he defined Intermittent Civil War as: "*When society uses military and systematically organised violence to solve its internal problems, resulting in violent clashes followed by moments of peace, punctuated by the partial use of organised violence*". This was the political situation experienced in Portugal during the First World War.

From 1910 to 1926, the following political events took place in Portugal:

- 8 violent “civil revolutions”, all involving criminal acts.
- Numerous “military coups” and “military pronouncements”.
- Numerous strikes, violent manifestations, sabotage, shootings, assassinations, hundreds of bomb attacks, frequent street confrontations with dead and wounded victims.
- Attacks on private homes, offices of political parties, churches and convents, and the existence of frequent violence in public forums and places of assembly, including the National Assembly, theatres, the universities, and in the street and various other public places.
- Portugal had 47 governments, with an average life of 4 months each.
- 1 head of state was assassinated, President Sidónio Pais. (In 1908 the King Dom Carlos I, as well as the Prince Royal D. Luis Filipe were also assassinated).
- 5 heads of state (Presidents of the Republic) were overthrown by revolutions.

Most important however, was the existence of organisations of armed civilians, with branches in military establishments, infiltrating military units and subverting their discipline. The most famous armed organisations were the *Carbonária*, *Formiga Branca*, *Batalhões de Voluntarios*, *Grupos Civis*, *Grupos de Defesa da República*, and *Centro Eleitoral*. In most cases they were linked to and obeyed the Democrat Party.

However, there were also many groups of armed civilians in the universities, worker’s unions, catholic student organisations and from the monarchist and anarchist movements. During the First World War most political parties had their own clandestine armed groups, most of them with parallel groups in the armed forces.

To sum-up, it is important to realise that during Portugal’s involvement in the First World War an intermittent civil war was taking place at home, and that the majority of the population did not consider Portugal’s participation in the war to be desirable or justified.

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