

Lisbon in World War II and Operation Lifebuoy

By Janet Hesketh



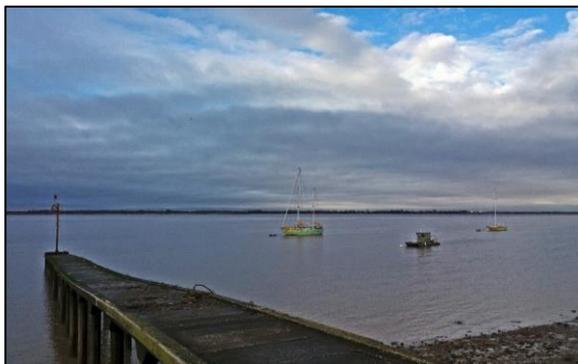
“The fountains of Lisbon cascaded day and night, but they could not be heard until the traffic stopped at four in the morning. The cool splashing in the square outside my window sent me to sleep; it was like the sound of eternity after the din of the city chasing time for twenty-two hours out of the twenty-four. In the Avenida scarlet flowers trumpeted colour, and the café tables beneath striped awnings were gay with laughing, chattering people. Sitting there in the shade after sundown one felt very remote from the war. But in the great square, brilliant with chromium cafes and neon signs, the propaganda windows were always surrounded by dark, silent crowds waiting for news. In bars frequented by the English, German agents sat and listened, amusing themselves, when there were no English present, by spreading rumours among the Portuguese; in the haunts of the Germans sat British agents with their ears unobtrusively pricked. They all seemed to be enjoying themselves over sea-fruit and sherry, with women to win when the day was over. It was the atmosphere popularized by William le Queux: every opinion was expressed in confidence, and the most humdrum business somehow made one seem mysterious. The neutrals could hardly have enjoyed their neutrality if they had missed all the excitement.”¹

¹ An excerpt from James Byrom’s book, “The Unfinished Man”.

Prelude

In December 2017 an old friend died in France. Sadly, I was unable to attend the funeral, which took place in Bordeaux, but in January 2018, I received an e-mail from her son, with two photographs. It read:

“I would like to know that I carried out Pat’s final wish this morning at 10.45 a.m. French time. I put her ashes into the Gironde at the Belle Etoile from where she said she would set off



The Gironde Estuary at the Belle Etoile, 14/01/2018

on a world voyage! I told her not to become a hazard to shipping and she said she would try her best! I took this photograph at the same time. As you can see, it was calm and peaceful – a good omen for her voyage.”

This world voyage seemed to me entirely appropriate. Pat had spent her last years in France with her son Duncan and his wife Elaine; I had known her in Yorkshire in the 1980’s and 1990’s as a Northern housewife, retired school secretary, police court interpreter and pillar of the Holme Valley W.R.V.S.; she had family connections in Canada; but she had been born Patricia de Mascarenhas in Lisbon in 1924. Her father, Sidney Philip de Mascarenhas worked in the family shipping business and her mother Lily (nee Coates) was an Englishwoman. The family name was obviously Portuguese as were its origins, but from 1814 the family regarded itself as English and, throughout her life Pat held dual nationality. She was also bi-lingual and from the age of 12 had been educated at a boarding school in the north west of England. In September 1939 she was fifteen and due to return for her School Certificate year, but not surprisingly her parents thought that this was not a good idea. For the first few months of the war she continued to

study French whilst working as a VAD in the British Hospital, Lisbon, but then took a commercial course and from 1940 to 1946 worked at the British Embassy, Lisbon. But I am getting ahead of myself.....

Portugal, the country where Pat grew up, had had a turbulent history during the first half of the twentieth century. In 1908 the king, Carlos I and his heir, Luis Filipe, were assassinated, and Carlos's second son Manuel II came to the throne at the tender age of 18. Two years later Manuel himself was forced to flee republican forces, and, assisted by a small group of loyal monarchists including Pat's father, made his way from the palace at Mafra to the coast before living out his life in exile in England. From then on Portugal was a



D. Manuel II, c. 1908

republic, a somewhat precarious one, until it came under the dictatorship of Dr. Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, to my mind one of the most interesting figures of World War II.

Salazar

To understand Portugal at this period, one must understand Salazar. Salazar was born in 1889 at Santa Combe Dao, in a rural area north east of Lisbon, the son of an estate manager. A bright child, he was originally destined for the Church and educated at the seminary at Viseu, but soon he turned to Academia. He graduated in Law from the University of Coimbra where he later became a professor specialising in Economics. He helped to found the Catholic Centre Party in 1921 and was elected to the Cortes, the Portuguese parliament, but returned to university life after serving only one term, perhaps the first sign that he was no team player. In 1926 after the military coup Salazar was offered the post of Finance Minister, but with strings attached, and he

refused. Two years later, the President, General Antonio Oscar de Fragosa Carmona upped the offer and offered Salazar the ministry again, but with full control over the government's income and expenditure – this time he accepted. Budgetary deficits were converted into surpluses and these surpluses were invested in a series of development plans.

His power increased and on 5 July 1932 Carmona named him Prime Minister. He re-wrote the constitution to create the Estado Novo - or the New State. The National Assembly consisted solely of government supporters and he appointed his own ministers whose work he supervised closely. In many cases this was not difficult as, in addition to being Prime Minister (or President of the Council as it is known in Portugal) he appointed himself Minister of Finance, Minister



António de Oliveira Salazar in 1940

of Foreign Affairs, Minister of the Interior and Minister of War. Delegation was not his strong point. He was undoubtedly a micro-manager (or even, from a more uncharitable viewpoint, a control freak) but the strength of his intellect was undeniable and he was also a workaholic with little time or inclination for luxuries or leisure.

There were reasons for this single-minded dedication. During the First World War, Portugal had at first been neutral, but in 1917 had entered the conflict in support of its old ally, Britain. This had resulted in heavy casualties and a country on the verge of bankruptcy. Salazar was determined this should not happen again. In 1939 Portugal, though more stable than it had been when Salazar came to power, was still a poor country, its capital beautiful but shabby, and largely cut off from

the rest of Europe. There were great divisions between rich and poor; international tourists neglected its resorts; and its old-fashioned café culture in Lisbon was largely male. Much of this was about to change.

Salazar had two objectives when he contemplated the coming war. The first was to keep his country neutral throughout; the second was to end the war with Portugal very much in profit. In achieving these ends he had two not inconsiderable weapons; his own brain and the plentiful supply of wolfram (or tungsten as it is now more generally known) in the Portuguese mines. This was in great demand by both the Allied and the Axis powers for use in armaments. He also had two powerful internal allies, the Portuguese bankers but especially Ricardo Espirito Santo, and the head of the Secret Police (the PVDE), the formidable Captain Agostinho Lourenco. All these factors will come into play as the story unfolds.....



Salazar & Ricardo Espirito Santo Captain Agostinho Lourenco

Portugal's story during the war falls into two halves: from 1939-42 Salazar concentrated on first of all establishing his country's neutrality and then on keeping it on an even keel whilst warding off the threat of invasion by the Axis powers; from 1943 onwards he was concerned with dealing with increasing Allied demands on Portugal, particularly with regard to the Azores. In 1939, however, little changed

for the first few months but then Lisbon was transformed from a sleepy backwater into a hive of refugees, spies, displaced royalty, journalists and smugglers. In the introduction to his excellent book ‘Lisbon; War in the Shadows of the City of Light 1939-45’ the historian Neill Lochery writes:

“At the end of the movie ‘Casablanca’, as Rick Blaine and Captain Louis Renault head off to start their ‘beautiful friendship’ by joining the Free French Legion at Brazzaville, the plane carrying Victor Laszlo and Ilsa Lund takes off into the fog. It is to ‘neutral’ Lisbon they are bound with their letters of transit. In real life, the city of Lisbon during World War II more than resembled the film set; to many people who worked in the city during the latter stages of the war, Lisbon became affectionately known as ‘Casablanca II’.”

The Axis powers were in control of most of mainland Europe beyond the Pyrenees with neutral but Fascist-leaning Spain between. Portugal and particularly the port of Lisbon were the way out from occupied Europe to the free world, but the traffic went both ways; it was also the way in for people who were not always what they seemed.

So who were these real life characters who inhabited this real life film set called Lisbon? Firstly, there were, of course, the Refugees.

The Refugees.

Among the most colourful were Royal refugees, including the ‘playboy prince’, Carol II of Romania, and his Jewish mistress, Magda Lupescu. In the early part of the war, having escaped his oil-rich homeland under Nazi gunfire, they held a rather dissolute court in Estoril.



Carol II of Romania and Magda Lupescu

And then there were the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the former Edward VIII and Mrs Wallis Simpson. They had been living in France since the abdication, but, with the outbreak of war, the Duke hoped for a posting that would reinstate him within the royal family. He had, however, long been a thorn in the side of both his family and the British Government. Apart from his abdication, seen by many as a complete dereliction of duty, the couple were suspected of Nazi sympathies. They had visited Germany and gossip had in the past linked Wallis romantically with von Ribbentrop. Edward was also suspected of anti-Semitism.



The Duke and Duchess of Windsor

In 1939 they moved from Paris, crossed the border from France into Spain, and, after spending some time in Madrid they went on to Portugal. Here they were entertained by the banker, Ricardo Espirito Santo, in his idyllic villa in Cascais. A recent Channel 4 programme suggested that Espirito Santo had Fascist leanings, but this was not a view held by Ronald Campbell, British Ambassador to Portugal, 1940-45, and is not substantiated by the facts. Santo's wife was Jewish and in the course of the war he gave financial help to the Rothschilds.

As I have already said, he was one of Salazar's right-hand men and Salazar's two wartime aims were neutrality and profit. Certainly Espirito Santo was very much at home with the German ambassador and German bankers and businessmen, but he also had dealings with the Allies. Like Shaw's Andrew Undershaft in "Major Barbara" he believed in "the true faith of an armourer....to give arms (or in Espirito

Santo's case, their vital ingredients) to all men who offer an honest price without respect of person or principles." It has often been said that God is on the side of the big battalions; the Holy Ghost, as Espirito Santo was known to the Allies, was definitely on the side of a big bank balance.



Duke of Windsor & R. E. Santo

But to return to his guests - whatever the Windsors' motives in accepting the banker's hospitality, during their stay all their movements were closely monitored, and not only by their host and Salazar's secret police; they were also under constant British surveillance. Their time in Cascais was not prolonged, and, much to their chagrin, they were

dispatched to the Bahamas, where Edward served as Governor throughout the rest of the war, well out of the way of crucial events in Europe and far away from the British Government and the royal family.

The "Expats"

Another wave of refugees were the "Expats", chiefly British and Americans who had been living in mainland Europe between the wars and now needed to return home. Some of these were also Jewish, which made their journey more urgent. These included an interesting menage-a-trois consisting of Peggy Guggenheim, the socialite and art collector, her ex-husband, Laurence Vail, and her lover, Max Ernst. Ms Guggenheim caused quite a sensation in traditional Lisbon with her slacks, her ear-rings and Bohemian lifestyle - including midnight skinny-dipping.



Peggy Guggenheim

Another interesting group, very different and this time British, was the Witherington family. Mrs Witherington was a widow with three daughters all of whom had been born in France and unlike their mother,



Pearl Witherington

were completely bilingual. Since the defection and subsequent death of their father, the de facto head of the family had been Pearl, the eldest daughter, who was in her middle twenties when war broke out. When the family had to flee Paris in 1941 she was leaving behind her childhood home, the city where she had lived all her life, an interesting and responsible job at the British Embassy and her French fiancé, Henri Cornioley.

First she took her family south, and then without any of the requisite papers but with the help of a horse smuggler, she managed to cross the border into Spain and thence to Lisbon. Here at the embassy she met Patricia de Mascarhenas and despite the age difference they struck up a friendship. As a result of this when Pearl managed to get her family on to a ship bound for England she and Henri were able to keep in touch with one another through Pat and to them, for fairly obvious reasons, she was known as Cupid. Pearl and Henri were reunited when Pearl was parachuted into France as an SOE agent, one of the bravest and the best of Churchill's secret army. They were married in London in 1944 and many years later Pat's son told me how he took his mother to visit the elderly widowed Pearl in her retirement home in the Loire district. Apparently they chatted away very happily for a whole afternoon and Pat was able to record an interview, but sadly we do not know what became of the tape.



Henri & Pearl Cornioley

The largest and saddest group of refugees, however, as the Nazis advanced, were the Jews – not expats, but people forced to flee across Europe from countries they had for generations regarded as their homes. Some only had the luggage they could carry and with money and jewellery sewn into their clothing to finance their escape, they made their way to the waiting room for the free world. Others were better provided. All, however, faced long waits to secure the paper work and funds for their onward journeys to Britain, Palestine or the United States.

During the thirties Portugal, like most non-democratic European countries, discouraged Jews from settling within its borders, and because Portugal was such a poor country at the time the policy was dictated as much by economics as political ideology. With the outbreak of war, however, the necessity of walking the neutrality tightrope tended to tighten this control and in November 1939 Circular 14 was issued. Under this directive all applications from stateless individuals or Jews had to be referred directly to the Portuguese Foreign Office.

In the long, hot summer of 1940 this posed a considerable problem for the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, by now a key town of “free” or



Aristides de Sousa Mendes

Vichy France. He was Aristides de Sousa Mendes, and he and his twin brother Cesar were, like Salazar, graduates of the University of Coimbra. Though of a higher social standing than Salazar, Aristides, unlike his brother never rose above the middle ranks of the diplomatic service. That summer queues of refugees grew outside his office in Bordeaux seeking letters of transit into Portugal via Spain, and the military had to be called in to

control them. Progress was slow and the consul was aware that applicants who were not granted onward passage would be sent to

concentration camps. He was also aware that few Jewish applicants which were referred to the Foreign Office were approved. Exhausted and ill, he made a unilateral decision to grant visas to all the applicants without seeking higher authority. Although the number involved was definitely below the 30,000 sometimes quoted there is no doubt he saved a large number of desperate people by his action, and to this day by many he is regarded as a national hero.

This was not, however, a view shared at the Portuguese Foreign Office in 1940 - you will recall that Foreign Affairs was one portfolio held by Salazar himself – and Sousa Mendes was recalled. Disciplinary procedures were started against him led by two senior diplomats, the Count of Tovar and Paulo Brito. The hearing was complex but, in the end the chairman ruled that, taking into account the extreme circumstances in Bordeaux at the time, Sousa Mendes should be suspended from the diplomatic service for between 30 and 180 days with loss of pay. The Count of Torvar also suggested demotion. Brito, however, decided to send the final judgement on the case to Salazar. On 30 October 1940 he gave his final ruling. “I sentence consul First Class, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, to a penalty of one year’s inactivity with the right of fifty per cent of his rank’s pay and after that he is required to subsequently retire from the service.” Sousa Mendes appealed the sentence pleading personal poverty as he had a wife and fourteen children to support. He also pointed out the international support for his humanitarian action which put his country in a good light. Salazar was not impressed. He had no further contact with the family until after the death of the former consul, when his letter of sympathy consisted of two words: “My condolences”.

This incident I believe throws an interesting light on Salazar’s policy with regard to Spain and also on his character. Although the Allies might applaud Sousa Mendes’ action, Spain’s General Franco undoubtedly would not. Salazar needed to keep Portugal neutral. For this to happen it was necessary for Spain, Portugal’s larger and more powerful neighbour, with all its fascist leanings, to remain officially

neutral too, a buffer state between Portugal and France. This was not likely to happen if Portugal annoyed the Axis powers by giving open access to Jews fleeing Nazi forces, particularly if they were to be turned loose on their way into Franco's domain. The Consul had established a dangerous precedent; it must not be repeated. Salazar's decision was a decision of the head not the heart. As I have already said, it was a very good quality head, but the decisions it made were clinical. Sentiment towards the plight of the refugees had no part in the process.

There was perhaps something less clinical there too. If Salazar did have a human weakness, it was his ability to bear a grudge, particularly with regard to his humble beginnings. Sousa Mendes came from a more aristocratic family than Salazar and he had crossed him and disobeyed his orders. Perhaps this weakness goes back to a disappointment in Salazar's early days when the family of the young love of his life opposed their marriage on the grounds of his simple origins. Later in life, when he returned to his home village as dictator, he allegedly spoke to the woman but cut her family dead. This trait resurfaced on another occasion towards the end of the war when the aristocratic Portuguese ambassador to London displayed a little too much initiative – and was immediately replaced by an envoy just as charming and aristocratic, and therefore acceptable to the British - but more amenable to discipline.

The spies, the agents, the counter-agents, the intelligence services

We next need to turn our attention to another group of people in Casablanca II - the spies, the agents, the counter-agents, the intelligence services - all spying on one another and all under the surveillance of Salazar's own Secret Police, the Policia de Vigilancia e Defesa do Estado (PVDE). Both British and German services were busy, working side by side in the hotels and restaurants of the city centre and along the coast in Estoril and Cascais. Both sides were anxious to recruit locals and according to Lochery: "At times it appeared that almost everyone in Lisbon was a spy or pretending to be one..... nothing remained secret as a result in Lisbon for very long, unless Salazar wanted it that way."



The Hotel Palacio at Estoril

The Hotel Palacio on the coast at Estoril was a hotbed of intrigue and the nearby Casino had much in common with Rick's Bar in 'Casablanca'.

The German Secret Service or Abwehr was largely concerned with the wolfram trade - both deals with the bankers and the government and also smuggling. They were also anxious to disrupt Anglo-Portuguese relations as a large proportion of the local population were definitely pro- British. They were also anxious to learn as much as possible about Allied troop deployment. One operation designed to discover Allied shipping movements involved the recruitment of prostitutes in the waterfront brothels. The break-up of this network was one of the early Allied successes, but the Germans felt distinctly cheated when they discovered that British seamen, even when supposedly befuddled with sex and alcohol, fed them singularly misleading information.

And then there were the British Intelligence Services. The SIS or Secret Intelligence Service (later MI6) during the early part of the war in Lisbon was under the command of Richman Stopford. His brief was to recruit agents and gather information and his cover, suitably for a former banker, was as the Financial Attaché at the British Embassy. He had brought with him his own secretary, Mary Grepe, one of the original MI5 girls trained at Wormwood Scrubs before MI5 moved to Blenheim Palace. She later became the second wife of Jack Beevor, the then Lisbon head of SOE or the Special Operation Executive.

The SOE was formed to sow discord, assist the Resistance in occupied countries, and conduct acts of sabotage behind enemy lines. In neutral countries such as Portugal, its role was to make detailed plans for sabotage to be carried out in the event of enemy invasion. The oil refineries on the Tagus were reckoned to be of considerable importance in this respect. Beevor's eighteen months in Lisbon were busy and complex, but came to an end when Salazar discovered that SOE's plans for Portugal in the event of an invasion were more destructive and far-reaching than his own. Beevor was recalled. One point he made I found particularly interesting - he said he had three weeks' training for this very demanding role, but reckoned if one were legally trained - he had been a solicitor in civilian life - one could turn one's hand to most things.



Lisbon heads of staff: Left, Jack Beevor, SOE; Right, David Eccles, MEW

Then there was another service in operation, which was among other things SOE's paymaster, and that was MEW, the Ministry of Economic Warfare, set up to oversee and contain trade between neutral countries and enemy powers. In Lisbon its chief concern was the wolfram business and its representative was David Eccles, later Viscount Eccles of Chute. Eccles in his book "By Safe Hand", a collection of letters between himself and his wife Sybil, paints a vivid picture of a wartime marriage against the contrasting backdrops of

1940's Lisbon and Chute in Wiltshire, as well as insights into the wolfram trade, the Windsors, and the character of Salazar, whilst incidentally revealing quite a lot about himself. In July 1940 he wrote:

“Salazar is a wonder: so quiet, so efficient, so romantic and, I can't help adding, so extraordinarily fond of me. Make no mistake in what way. He lives in seclusion with an old housekeeper, and a small girl (I believe aged seven) whom he has adopted. No one has ever detected a sexual impulse in him either to right or left. Therefore his affection must be considered pure.”

I must point out at this juncture that Eccles had obviously not heard the story of Salazar's loss of his childhood sweetheart, but during the war certainly no gossip or scandal was associated with his name. He goes on, however, in a different vein....

“We had a long talk about Spain and the probable duration of the war, which he puts at two to three years. I wonder if he is right.... His outstanding gift is his capacity to see every problem in the round, he knows how it has arisen, what is its importance in the general picture of Portuguese policy, how it will develop if various alternatives occur, who are the men handling it, what they are capable of and what they are not, and what is the contribution to its solution HMG could make if they chose to. He is like a man who has to transport heavy material across a frail bridge, he knows just what the bridge will bear and loads his cart accordingly; there is an absence of guessing that is quite astonishing and quite unlike MEW for example..... When he and the housekeeper have put the adopted child to bed, and he has had his one-course dinner, he must read a great deal. Otherwise he could not possibly know all that he does. He never dines out. He said quite simply, ‘Some people use the stimulus of social life, I don't.’ It is just like a teetotaler saying, ‘I prefer a cup of coffee.’ I told you, I think, that he is ravishingly good-looking.”

These were some of the relatively long-term intelligence officers in Lisbon in the early days of the war. Others came and went.

There was for a time a dashing young fellow with a sports car named Donald Darling. According to Pat the general view of “the girls at the Embassy” was that he was a disgrace swanning around allegedly doing “something with Red Cross parcels” when he should be in the forces. It was only later they discovered, probably after he had moved on to Gibraltar, that he was a member of SOE helping prisoners of war who had escaped from camps in Vichy France. And so, through Darling and others like him, escaped POW’s and later allied airmen who had come down over occupied territory became yet another group of passing strangers in the Portuguese capital.

Added to these were the survivors of ships that had been torpedoed off the Atlantic coast and rescued by fishermen. They were often in a bad way and as there was no medication to hand in the fishing villages and certainly no strong pain killers they were usually put in a van with a small barrel of Portuguese rough red and driven down to Lisbon. For some reason I can’t recall on one occasion an injured Irish seaman who had been brought down over night had to be dumped in a hurry, and was placed for safekeeping in the store room of the local WVS office. The following morning when Pat’s mother who was the district organiser opened up she was more than a little surprised – particularly as I was told she could not bear to have anyone around her who was the least bit what she termed as “squiffy”. There on the floor was an Irish seaman, sodden in more ways than one, who looked up and greeted her with the immortal words, “Sure, missus, you’re a lovely lady and if I hadn’t lost my teeth when the ship went down I’d kiss you!”

Another dashing young fellow who passed through with intent is Ian Fleming of Naval Intelligence and later of James Bond fame. In 1941 he was in Lisbon on two occasions on his way to the United States and on his way back, accompanied for part of the time by his boss Admiral John Godfrey,



Ian Fleming of James Bond fame

considered by some to be the inspiration for ‘M’ in the James Bond sagas. Fleming’s mission was to implement detailed plans for Operation Goldeneye, which was to be the Allied response to any invasion of Spain by enemy powers - and to iron out any inter-departmental squabbles between the different intelligence agencies as to their roles in these plans. On his return journey, Fleming and Godfrey played the table in the Casino at Estoril for modest amounts of money - and lost. Allegedly Fleming turned to Godfrey and said: “Suppose those men had been German agents and we had cleaned them out of all their funds!” - a plot later used in “Casino Royale”!.

And then there is the actor Leslie Howard, mysteriously shot down in a clearly marked civilian aircraft flying out of Lisbon on a daytime flight on 1 June 1943. Who was the target of this attack? Howard had just completed a British Council lecture tour with readings from Shakespeare at venues in Spain and Portugal. Was this a cover story? Was he a secret agent or wasn’t he? Was his cigar-smoking agent mistaken for Churchill? Was some other passenger a spy? Who knows?



Leslie Howard with his Winston Churchill look-alike agent (right)

If Leslie Howard were leading a double life, as many (including his children) believed, then life was imitating art. In 1934 he had starred as the eighteenth century society fop Sir Percy Blakeney, who rescued French aristocrats from the guillotine as the swashbuckling Scarlet Pimpernel. In 1941 he produced, directed and starred in an updated version called “Pimpernel Smith” in which an archaeology professor rescues Jews from the Gestapo. Howard himself was born in London into a family of Hungarian Jewish immigrants - there can be little doubt as to where his sympathies lay. But the full truth about Flight BOAC 777 still remains one of the unsolved mysteries of World War Two.

So this was the world in which the young Patricia operated at the Embassy in the early days of the war. The Embassy in the 1940’s was not where it is now. The Ambassador’s Residence with its reception rooms and offices quickly became inadequate and the British authorities acquired the Palácio de Porto Corvo to accommodate the growing staff. The Old Residence with its beautiful gardens is now the private home of Sr. and Sra. Cottinelli, who divide their time between Portugal and Chile.



The former British Embassy Chancery, Rua Sacramento à Lapa

The Old Chancery now houses the offices of the insurance firm Lusitania and it is here that I believe Pat worked. From being a clerk dealing largely with propaganda material she progressed, still in her teens, to the section of the diplomatic bag and to being secretary to the Assistant Press Attaché, Gerald Reynold Sharpe and, was mentioned by Pat in her interview in Yorkshire in 2001.



The Author in the garden of the Old Chancery (middle) in 2019



An “anonymous secretary”, photographed at the British Embassy by Cecil Beaton in 1942

meant...we knew what time this person was due and I had to unplug the telephones from the wall. Close the wooden shutters....Close the windows and then I would sort of vanish but not too far out of sight....When this visitor arrived Gerald would lock the door and I would sort of stand in the passage way outside...”

She said, “He was there until 1943... and then moved on and went back to the UK, where he applied to be an established civil servant and was turned down, which was a joke, because they took Burgess and Maclean and turned Gerald down.” She also describes how he would say, “I have got a visitor coming this morning. Usual,’ and

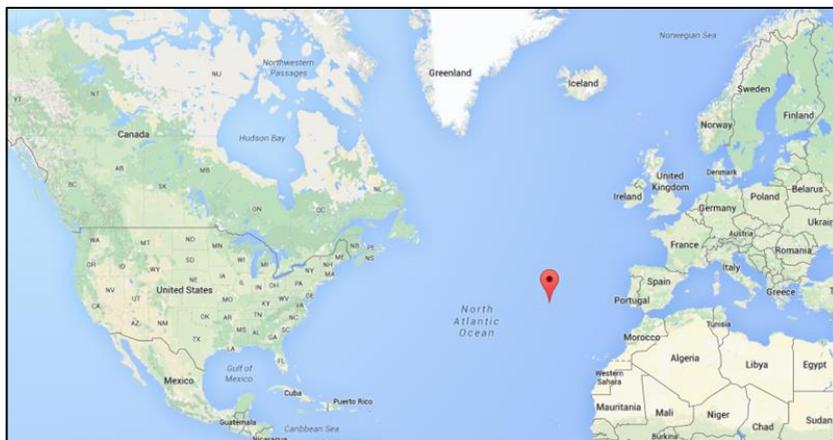
I knew exactly what he



I think from this we can surmise that Gerald and his successor Freddie Wise were not just your average Assistant Press Secretaries. Pat also speaks in this interview of being followed home by a member of the Gestapo – no uniform just a great heavy leather coat – and escaping through a sweet shop whose owner had known her since she was a toddler. And then there was her relationship with the staff of other embassies, enemy and neutral. When asked whether she had any social contact with them, her reply was unequivocal: there was none. They might be present in the same cinema or restaurant, travel on the same tram, but “you just looked through them . . . and they looked through us.”

And that is a taste of what life in Lisbon was like in the early days of the war, but the balance of power was changing.

1943 was a pivotal year for Portugal and for the wider world. I have already strayed into its territory with the Leslie Howard story, but in Lisbon 1943 was basically the year of the Azores.



The Azores – located in the mid-Atlantic

These Portuguese islands stranded in mid-Atlantic had always been important. When war broke out they were the designated location for a Portuguese government in exile should this be necessary in the case of a German invasion. They would also obviously be useful to the Allies as a base which would help them protect the Atlantic convoys.

In 1941 Churchill tried to secure Portugal's agreement to this, but anxious to walk the delicate tightrope of neutrality, Salazar refused. By 1943, however, the tide had turned in the Allies' favour. The most likely outcome now was either an Allied victory or a settlement between Germany and the Allies. For Salazar the latter was the preferred option. In the case of an Allied victory he feared the growth of Communist influence in Europe, but an Allied victory was now a real possibility for which he had to prepare. Importantly, he would need the victors' goodwill if Portugal was to keep its Nazi gold from the wolfram trade.

The United States were particularly impatient to secure the Azores - by force if necessary. When in November 1942 Salazar received a phone call from the British Ambassador requesting an immediate audience he feared the worst. However this time Ronald Campbell merely wished to inform him of the Allied landings in North Africa - codename Operation Torch. Salazar was well aware that this would increase the importance of the Azores to the Allies. Men and equipment would need to be brought in in support of the landings.



Amb. Ronald Campbell

Salazar knew that it was only a matter of time before the British and Americans would establish bases in the Azores, and when the formal request came from the British Government in June 1943 he agreed and an accord was signed on 17 August 1943. Less than two months later Churchill announced to the Commons that under the 1373 Treaty of Windsor "His Majesty's Government have now requested the Portuguese Government to accord them certain facilities in the Azores which will enable better protection to be provided for merchant shipping in the Atlantic. The Portuguese Government have agreed to this request and arrangements which enter into force immediately."

Pat now takes up her own story, speaking of herself in the 3rd person. It is her story, published in "Britain at War" magazine of March 2010.

Operation Lifebuoy

“What the House did not know,” she writes, “is that in return for granting access to the Azores, Portugal received British assurances to protect the country if the agreement provoked a Spanish or Axis response, along with funds of \$30 million, the promise of modern fighter planes and a supply of modern anti-aircraft guns. Even less well known was the fact that Britain also offered to supply the Portuguese Army with examples of the Tank, Infantry, Mk. III, Valentine tank, as well as send men from the Royal Armoured Corps (RAC) to Portugal as trainers – in complete violation of the latter’s neutral stance”.



The British-made Mk. III, Valentine tank

Under the codename Operation Lifebuoy Lieutenant Bertram H. Banks and Sergeants 7903941 L.T. Hughes and 7912859 S.C. Andrews flew to Lisbon in late 1943. The two sergeants were highly experienced members of the RAC. Both had been due to embark on officer training when they were called before their commanding officer and offered the opportunity to volunteer for a “secret mission” of which no details could be given. After some hesitation Sergeant Hughes asked the CO if he himself would have accepted the task. When the officer said he would have “jumped at the chance”, the two NCOs exchanged nods and the agreement was sealed.

After a couple of postponements the two sergeants took off from Bristol airport. Lieutenant Banks, who would lead the mission, had travelled on an earlier flight. All three men, of course, were in civilian

clothing. The aircraft was a Douglas C-47 Dakota which landed very late at night at Lisbon airport. When they disembarked they found that there was no-one to greet them and no messages had been left advising them who to contact – their mission was after all top secret.

With the two soldiers on the flight was a Dutch politician (a Mr Van der Mewr) en route for Africa. Seeing the men's predicament he took them with him by taxi to his hotel where they stayed the night. This was the Avenida Palace, one of the most expensive hotels in town!



The Avenida Palace hotel, situated in downtown Lisbon

The following morning the two tank men telephoned the British Embassy, where the Military Attaché's office was in a state of utter panic – lost, two British serving soldiers on the loose in neutral Portugal!

Patricia Cookson Andrews worked in the Press section of the British Embassy in Lisbon from 1940-46, being responsible for the Diplomatic Bag's freight department. She was also secretary to the Assistant Press Attaché and was able to witness the pandemonium. The sergeants managed to telephone the Embassy and report their arrival and whereabouts, all of which was followed by an out-sized rocket, firstly for going missing, then for staying in the most expensive hotel in Lisbon and finally for having eaten breakfast there!

Under Lifebuoy the agreement was that Britain would mechanise the Portuguese 7th Cavalry regiment with Valentine tanks and the three British soldiers were taken to the regiment's training quarters at

Amadora in the north-west of the Lisbon municipality. The Portuguese cavalry had fought alongside their British counterparts under the Duke of Wellington in the Peninsular War against Napoleon. Indeed the 7th Regiment was involved with the British in the Battle of Albuera which was, for the numbers engaged, the bloodiest encounter of the entire war. Yet despite this close history the tank men found that some of the Portuguese soldiers they were expected to train were very pro-German.



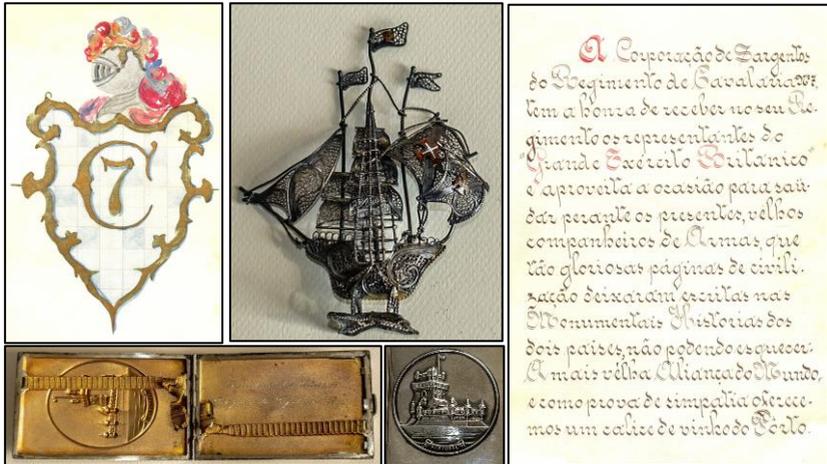
Lt. Banks and Sgts. Hughes and Andrews with the 7th Cavalry regiment

The atmosphere in the training camp changed markedly when the British soldiers complained to “Higher Authority” about how poor the food was and were given beef to replace the usual mushy macaroni.”

Pat also described the RAC men’s escapades with the official car and driver. The British style of driving in Central Lisbon did little for Portuguese nerves!

On a more serious note she continued: “Under Operation Lifebuoy the British Government supplied the Portuguese with a total of 24 Valentines and 16 Humber armoured cars.

The training, was completed on 31 December 1943, after which Hughes and Andrews were given a grand dinner in the regiment's Sergeants' Mess before flying back to the UK." They were given an illuminated address signed by all the soldiers they had trained. In addition, Sergeant Andrews (and presumably also Sergeant Hughes) was presented with a silver filigree caravela and a cigarette case inscribed in Portuguese: "Presented by the officers of B Company-X-43."



The illuminated letter and gifts given by the 7th Reg. Sergeants' Mess

The same day that the RAC trainers completed their work, the Commandante of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment sent a letter of appreciation to the British Embassy.

"Possessing the best working qualities," he wrote, "their work during the two courses which have been done at this unit can be classified as very remarkable." He concluded by adding that "in consequence of these facts. I think it's of good justice that the High Officials show their gratitude...lauding them for their work in benefit of our unit tank instruction...."

Along with a similar report from the Military Attaché in Lisbon, the Commandante's letter reached the desk of Major-General Evelyn Fanshawe, The Commander of the Training Establishment RAC.

“I am extremely impressed with which the manner in which this Mission was conducted,” Fanshawe informed his superiors on 2 March 1944. “It is my opinion that they not only gave the Portuguese Armoured Force a very sound grounding in tanks, but, incidentally, they strengthened the feeling of comradeship between the two nations which has existed for centuries.”

46049-6

Tel: Whitehall 4466 Ext.172. SECRET.

Subject: Congratulatory 1/2/5/2567

Commandant,
A.F.V.School.

Lieut. B.H.Banks, RAC. }
7903941 Sgt. Hughes. } D & M.
7912839 Sgt. Andrews. }

I have recently read a report by Lt. B.H. Banks giving an outline of the work which he and his N.C.Os. carried out during their Mission in Portugal.

I have also read other reports on the work of this Mission, including one from the Military Attache' Lisbon who speaks very highly of the results obtained and the high regard in which Lt. Banks and his N.C.Os. were held by the Portuguese Army.

I am extremely impressed with the manner in which this Mission was conducted and it is my opinion that they not only gave the Portuguese Armoured Force a very sound grounding in tanks, but incidentally they strengthened the feeling of comradeship between the two Nations which has existed for centuries.

I wish you to convey my congratulations to Lt. Banks, Sgt. Hughes and Sgt. Andrews upon their achievements and upon the success of their mission.

signed... Evelyn Fanshawe.
Armd. Wing.

Major-General,
Commander,
Headquarters,
Training Establishments, R.A.C.

Horse Guards,
Whitehall, London S.W.1.

2 March, 1944.

Letter from Major-General Evelyn Fanshawe praising the training team

Pat echoed this sentiment in her 2010 article which reads:

“Operation Lifebuoy remained a highly classified secret as Portugal still wished to preserve a veneer of neutrality. Though Britain and Portugal now abide in far different times, their alliance, the oldest in history, remains as strong as ever.”

Romance blossoms

This, however, as you have doubtless guessed, was not the end of the story – there was a personal element too. This was mentioned by Pat only as a footnote in her article, but she mentioned it in her Yorkshire interview. In late 1943, a young Anglo-Portuguese officer was made the interpreter to the RAC team. He was doing his national service at the time; his name was John de Mascarenhas and he was also Pat's cousin. Soon after the Brits arrived John suggested that Pat should get together some of the girls from the Embassy and organise a picnic for the tank men far from home. At first she was not too keen on the idea, but her father told her she was being a misery so she reluctantly agreed.²

This photograph which recently came into my possession shows that she quickly overcame any misgivings she might have had, and by the time the training team left Lisbon in early January 1944 she was engaged to Sergeant Andrews. On his return to the UK Andy (as Sydney Cookson Andrews was known) was posted to Egypt and Pat continued to work at the British Embassy until 1946 when she left to get married later that year in June, in Formby in Lancashire.



On board the Silver Queen, Pat's father's yacht, Lisbon, 1943

² The story of Patricia's meeting with Sergeant Andrews was written in an article published in the Portuguese magazine, 'Casa Decoração', in July, 1995.



Wedding day, 15 June, 1946, Fornby, Lancashire

— ooOOoo —

Epilogue: Lifebuoy, an Elusive Operation

Pat Andrews and I enjoyed a friendship spanning some thirty years, but it was a middle to old age friendship; what we knew of one another's youth was based on chat and reminiscence – and hers was far more interesting than mine! We met when, after taking early retirement from teaching, I joined the Holme Valley W.R.V.S. in Yorkshire. I knew Andy too, and it was not difficult to see in the older genial host and raconteur the young RAC sergeant who had volunteered for Operation Lifebuoy. I knew Pat better and for longer. Andy died in 1993, but Pat and I remained in touch for the rest of her life, even after I moved to Hampshire in 1999 and she moved to France two years later. I visited her and her son, Duncan and his wife Elaine in her new home in St Androny twice and enjoyed her company and hospitality at Les Caillards.

In 2010 Pat sent me my first piece of written evidence relating to Lifebuoy – a copy of the March 2010 edition of the magazine, “Britain at War”, which I read with interest, not realising at the time it was the first clue in a fascinating historical treasure hunt.

In 2017, after I received Duncan’s e-mail telling me of her death, I re-read the article and then idly googled “Operation Lifebuoy”. There was no result; Lifebuoy does not feature on the internet. I then scoured the index of every book I could find on Lisbon in WWII and on reading I became fascinated by this world of intrigue and espionage, but Lifebuoy still did not figure in any account. One snippet I did find reassuring. The historian, Antony Beevor, whose father, John, had been the SOE representative in Lisbon 1940-42, told the Lusa News Agency in 2009 that there was still much to tell about Portugal’s role during World War II. “It was a very complicated era...” he said. “I’ve heard one or two stories and I’d love to know if they happened or not.” It was good to know I shared something with such a distinguished historian!

After obtaining Duncan’s blessing for my project, I contacted friends and acquaintances with a military background, one of whom suggested I contact the Tank Museum at Bovington. The staff in the Archives Department there were very helpful, but knew nothing of Operation Lifebuoy. However they had the service records of Sergeants Andrews and Hughes and sent me copies of their tracer cards. One entry, identical on both cards, read: ‘Posted “Individual” Draft 11.7.43’. I was informed that, as I had suspected, the use of inverted commas was probably significant, as Pat said the RAC men arrived in Lisbon in “late 1943”. Pat wrote of one or two “postponements”. There could have been several reasons for these, not least the fate of BOAC Flight 777 in June of that year. It would have been prudent to alter timetables for commercial flights at the last minute, and this too could have accounted for the fact there was no one to meet the sergeants when they arrived.

An enquiry to the British Embassy in Lisbon was more fruitful. Fortunately it reached the desk of Manuela Romano de Castro, the longest-serving member of the Press Office. She could not offer

anything in the form of documents from the 1940s, as she explained that all records after an appropriate interval were transferred to the FCO in London. She did, however, put me in contact with The FCO's Historians' Department and with the British Historical Society of Portugal. The Historians, unfortunately, were unable to locate any relevant documents, but the British Historical Society were extremely helpful when I visited Lisbon with my nephew and his wife in September this year. So indeed was Manuela ... but more of this later.

I was still, however, at this stage in need of external verification and so I turned once more to Duncan Andrews and asked whether he knew where his mother had deposited any of her WWII papers. He directed me to the Second World War Experience Centre in Yorkshire, which told me that Pat had donated her wartime typewriter and had also given two long interviews about her time at the Embassy and her meeting with Andy. The transcript of these two pieces of oral history confirmed much of what I knew and added further details. The source, however, was still Pat herself; there was no independent evidence.

And then I struck gold. In the course of a telephone conversation with Jane Plummer, an old friend, I happened to mention my obsession. After a minute she said: "Talk to Brian, he's good at things like this." And so it proved. A retired soldier with a keen interest in military history, Brian was at first sceptical, thinking "Lifebuoy" had been confused with "Lifebelt" - the original name for the plan to occupy the Azores and later subsumed in Operation Alacrity. However, after reading Pat's magazine article, he went to work and came up with a number of leads, including a reference to a collection of papers in the National Army Museum on "Operation Lifebuoy". Following this lead I went up to London and there in the Templer Study Centre I was handed all the missing pieces of the jigsaw in two plain A4 envelopes, lodged there by Pat in 1995, shortly after Andy's death. One interesting point was that in the official papers the only occasion when the "military mission" was referred to as "Operation Lifebuoy" was in Pat's own letter to The Commandant of the 7th Regiment. Was "Lifebuoy" an unofficial nickname concocted by the tank men themselves?

I now had independent evidence of the RAC mission to Lisbon, part of the price Salazar exacted for the Allies' use of the Azores.

There was to be one final chapter in the research story. In 2019, my nephew Hugh volunteered the services of his wife, Mary, and himself as “minders” to take me out to Portugal to conclude my research. They made the travel arrangements and during our stay Hugh juggled my appointments whilst Mary took dozens of photographs, some of which appear in this article. I shall always be eternally grateful. We stayed at the Hotel Avenida Palace, where the RAC sergeants had spent their first night. Although I was given a one-page history of this beautiful old place, it did not answer my questions. The concierge told me that no records existed from the wartime days, as the previous owners took all the paperwork with them when it was sold in the sixties.

My Lisbon contacts, however, excelled themselves. As the British Embassy has moved, I was anxious to see the original Residence and the Old Chancery. Thanks to Manuela, we saw both and not just the exterior. Ines Cottinelli very kindly welcomed us into her home, the Old Residence, and the insurance firm Lusitania gave us a tour of the Old Chancery. It was good to travel in the footsteps of Pat herself and of the many other fascinating people who passed through these buildings.

Through my contacts at the British Historical Society of Portugal we also spent a fascinating afternoon at the Military Academy in Bemposta, where Colonel Francisco Rodrigues and his staff showed us round their beautiful library, although sadly their archives held no reference to Operation Lifebuoy. They offered to show us more than one Valentine tank, but we simply ran out of time. One final snippet was gathered over a drink with Edward Godfrey and Mark Crathorne from the British Historical Society. I told them of Pat's account of the reprimand the sergeants received for going missing and staying at one of the most expensive hotels in town and Mark told me that during the war, the Avenida Palace was regarded as a “German” hotel. This raises questions about the identity of the Dutch politician, Mr van der Mewr... and even whether Len and Andy had a specific Intelligence role too?

Acknowledgements

I have received an enormous amount of over the past two years. First of all I must thank Pat and Andy's son, Duncan and his wife Elaine, who gave the project his blessing, supplying information, advice and photos.

Institutions in the UK and Portugal which have been very helpful include:

- Anton U3A Andover (particularly Erica Tinsley and Derek Armitage)
- Tank Museum, Bovington (Katie Thompson)
- Second World War Experience, Otley (Anne Wickes)
- National Army Museum, Chelsea (Robert Fleming, Jenny Lelkes)
- Historians' Department, FCO
- British Embassy, Lisbon (Manuela Romano de Castro)
- British Historical Society of Portugal (Mark Crathorne & Edward Godfrey)
- Lusitania Companhia des Seguros (Paula Moreira)
- Academia Militar de Lisboa (Col. Francisco Rodrigues and his staff)

Nor must I forget Sra. Ines Cottinelli, who kindly welcomed us into her home at the Old Residence and thanks also go to my friends Brian and Jane Plummer, especially for Brian pointing me in the direction of the National Army Museum and for his external verification of Pat's story.

My thanks also go to my long-suffering family: David for the epigraph and other background material; William for his scrutiny of official documents; Sue for being a patient sounding-board throughout my research, and; Hugh and Mary who made the Lisbon trip possible.

Finally, I mustn't forget Andy and Pat, whose story it is, and particularly Pat, who laid such a meticulous trail of breadcrumbs for me to follow.

— ooOOoo —

Janet was born and brought up in Lancashire. After a teaching career in Hong Kong and the UK she took early retirement in the 1980's and joined the Holme Valley WRVS in Yorkshire where she met Pat Andrews. After Pat's death the mystery of "Operation Lifebuoy", led to almost two years' research for a paper to be presented to the Anton U3A History Group in Andover. This took place in October 2019, a month after a memorable trip to Lisbon. Janet still lives in Hampshire and is at present working - once more for Anton U3A - on a cultural history of her home county of Lancashire.