

# **THE LINES OF TORRES VEDRAS**

## **A Remarkable Restoration Project**

Clive Gilbert

The important and strategic role played by the Lines of Torres Vedras in Napoleon's defeat is an acknowledged fact. This, I feel sure, is reason enough for their restoration and protection. But another no less important consideration is that it should be a tribute to Wellington's strategic planning as well as to the Royal Engineers, led by Lieut. Colonel Richard Fletcher and aided by Major Neves Costa of the Portuguese Army. D. Miguel Pereira Forjaz, Secretary of State for War and Foreign Affairs and a member of the Regency Council in the absence of the Court in Brazil, also played an important role. He was indispensable to Wellington in sorting out the political and administrative problems of the Anglo-Portuguese Army. He was the vital link. Last, but certainly not least, to the militia and the rural workers who, with basic tools, constructed the Lines in a miraculously short space of time.

With the approach of the bicentenary of the Lines of Torres Vedras in 2010, the six municipalities that make up the Lines (Torres Vedras, Mafra, Sobral de Monte Agraço, Arruda dos Vinhos, Loures and Vila Franca de Xira), the DGEMN, *Direcção Geral dos Monumentos e Edifícios Nacionais*, (Directorate General of National Buildings and Monuments), IPPAR, *Instituto Português do Património Arquitectónico* (Portuguese Institute for Architectural Heritage, equivalent of English Heritage) and the DSE, *Direcção de Serviços de Engenharia* (Directorate of Military Engineering) of the Portuguese army signed a protocol in 2001 to develop a strategic plan for the protection, restoration and sustainment of the Lines.

To all intents and purposes, the Lines had been totally abandoned following the end of the Peninsular War. The exception to this situation was a limited restoration project undertaken in the 60's by Colonel Eduardo Baptista, a Portuguese

military engineer, on Fort St. Vincent at Torres Vedras. In turn, the *Escola Prática de Infantaria* (Infantry Training School) at Mafra carried out a cleaning-up process over selected redoubts or forts over many years. Sadly, this practice ended with the elimination of national service in Portugal.

With the signing of the protocol, the municipalities duly drew up the Plan that involved a survey of the Lines and proposals for their restoration, preservation, sustainment and promotion. This Plan was presented to IPPAR in 2001, but various difficulties, including inadequate finance for the Plan, meant that IPPAR essentially put the project on hold. The Plan involved the following activities:

To survey the whole of the Lines and subsequently propose the following measures:

- removal of excess vegetation
- creation or restoration of access routes
- archaeological excavation and rehabilitation of redoubts
- archaeological studies of mortar and wood used originally
- restoration of a selection of military works
- setting up of information panels and replica telegraph masts, including the Portuguese portable Ciera system
- creation of visitor centres with guide books and leaflets
- establishment of walking routes along the Lines
- promotion of the Lines, both nationally and internationally

To set up Visitor Centres at each municipality with the following themes:

- scorched earth policy at Arruda dos Vinhos
- community efforts in building the Lines at Loures
- transfer of the Royal Family to Brazil and presence of the enemy at Mafra
- headquarters and military strategy at Sobral de Monte Agraço
- military architecture and building techniques at Torres Vedras

- defence of the Tagus and naval history at Vila Franca de Xira

With the approach of the bicentenary and no apparent solution available, the IDN, *Instituto de Defesa Nacional* (National Defence Institute), the Municipality of Vila Franca de Xira, and The British Historical Society of Portugal arranged a series of meetings to discuss ways of overcoming the stalemate. As a result of these meetings, the Municipality of Vila Franca de Xira organized a one-day seminar in September 2005 under the title '*As Linhas de Torres Hoje - História e Memória*' (The Lines of Torres Vedras Today – History and Memories). At this seminar, the importance of the Lines as a significant military heritage and the advisability of their classification as a national monument were highlighted. Consequently, their preservation and restoration were considered essential. In terms of finance for all this work, the British Historical Society (BHS) pointed out during its presentation at the seminar that it would be advisable for the six municipalities to jointly create an institution that in this way would more easily acquire funding for the project rather than as individual municipalities.

Subsequent to this seminar the municipalities set up PILT – *Plataforma Intermunicipal das Linhas de Torres* (Intermunicipal Platform of the Lines of Torres Vedras) in 2006. This was an informal institution whose aim was to provide a single point of contact and thus to more easily secure funding for the restoration and preservation of the Lines. Curiously, and by a fortunate coincidence, a seminar on financial support for heritage projects was announced at this time. PILT took part and decided to apply for a grant through the EEA Financial Grants Mechanism (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein). The complex application procedure was led by the Torres Vedras Municipality with the indispensable cooperation of the DGEMN (Directorate General of Buildings and National Monuments). Regular meetings took place under the auspices of DGEMN and with the participation of both PILT members, the Portuguese Army (owner of several redoubts) and with the regular attendance of the British Historical Society, who gave opinions from a British viewpoint. One of the objects of these

meetings was to decide which military works were to be restored and preserved. At the end, the list each group drew up (PILT, Army and BHS) were very similar.

<i>Rota Histórica das Linhas de Torres</i>		
<b>Number of Redoubts</b>		
<b>Ownership</b>		
Public		38
Private		57
Unknown		6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>101</b>
<b>Municipality</b>		
	Built 1809 to 1812	Existing
Arruda	3	2
Loures	18	18
Mafra	43	28
Sobral	8	7
Torres Vedras	37	31
Vila Franca Xira	31	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>111</b>

The project was accepted by EEA Grants in 2007 and discussions followed over the value of the finance. The following are the final figures agreed upon:

Total projects planned: 250

- Projects financed by the EEA Grants: 110, value €2,016K
- Projects financed by the municipalities: 140, value €3,770K
- Overall value of the projects: €5,786K
- Financing structure: EEA Grants 74.11% Municipalities: 24.89%

What has to be realized, however, was that PILT financed far more than their official share, since many of the activities were not included in the original proposal. These included items such as the costs of the technical staff that prepared and carried out the project, the building and or restoring of the visitor centres, etc. Since the 2 million Euros is insufficient, a request for further finance is being prepared in order to apply for a Cultural Heritage Europa Nostra Award.

Returning to the matter of the list of selected redoubts for restoration, one of the few exceptions was redoubt n° 120 on the BHS list that was not proposed by the two other groups. This was a great pity because the warning shot fired at Massena from here marked, to a certain extent, the beginning of the end for Napoleon. The reason was that the area of the Lines around the eastern end of the First Line belongs to CIMPOR, an important cement company, which extracts its limestone here. So far, however, there doesn't seem to have been any intrusion by CIMPOR apart from the destruction of part of the military road along the top of the ridge some 50 years ago. This holding back may well be because the process for the classification of the Lines as a national monument is finally going ahead.

One reason for the delay has been that existing legislation only allowed for cover of specific individual sites, not an area as a whole. It is intended that all sites embraced by the new legislation will initially be restricted for development up to a surrounding 50 metre perimeter. Local authorities will then be given a year in which to confirm or amend the detail of each site. It is intended that all the Lines' sites, some one hundred in all, and not only those that have been selected for restoration under the recently completed project, will be covered by this legislation.

Looking back, we may well wonder why Portugal has only now undertaken the restoration of this unique military defensive system. Essentially it was for the following three reasons:

- the struggle that took place on Portuguese soil was between the two great powers of the day, Britain and France
- Portugal, of all the European nations, suffered the most, losing almost 10% of its population
- an absolutist regime ruled Portugal when the Peninsular War took place. Following the 1820 coup the new liberal governments that followed naturally did not wish to highlight the successes of the previous regime

Although one may feel that the Lines bear no relevance to current military strategies, there are aspects that have changed little in over two hundred years and these are applicable to Afghanistan today:

#### *Isolated forts*

These exist both on the Lines and in Afghanistan (for example, Camp Bastion in Helmand Province and the Great Redoubt at Sobral de Monte Agraço)

#### *Unity of Command*

Wellington spent most of the Peninsular War with his army and was thus able to coordinate closely with his generals. On

the other hand, Napoleon was absent and thus gave little support to his marshals, creating rivalry between them

### *Hearts and Minds*

The French showed a complete lack of understanding in this area. This helped to create an effective guerrilla warfare that played an important role in the defeat of the French army.

Anyone who has visited the Lines recently will have seen what a wonderful success PILT have made of restoring them. They are now in the process of turning them into a sustainable project. The considerable responsibility for maintenance lies with the municipalities and the future may be difficult. However, they have in their hands an area not only of important historical interest but also of astonishing intrinsic beauty and opportunity for recreation. Glorious countryside and a warm welcome embrace the visitor. The economic benefits that tourism can bring to the area will be fundamental to success. As for PILT itself, it is in the process of becoming an official institution, something that requires much thought and study. The idea of six municipalities working together successfully is unusual. In fact, at a seminar on cultural heritage held in 2007 at Arruda dos Vinhos, the representative of the Polish Ministry of Culture said in her talk that this situation would have been unthinkable in her country.

A delegation from two Parliamentary All Party Groups in July 2009 was struck by the fact that there had been no British input into the restoration project. They have set up the Friends of the Lines of Torres Vedras in the UK to promote interest and establish links between the two parliaments. I feel sure they will play a constructive role both in the promotion of the Lines and backing the search for future finance.



The above painting, 'Allegory on the Return to Portugal by D. João VI', by Maximino Reis (1816) hangs in Mafra Palace. It represents the handing over of Portugal to D. João by Wellington. D. João is in the centre, with his wife D. Carlota Joaquina on his right, and Wellington, centre right, hands over 'Portugal', who is on his left.

*Clive Gilbert is Chairman of The British Historical Society of Portugal. He has lived in Portugal all his life and was CEO of*

*Fábrica de Loiça de Sacavém. Currently he leads battlefield tours for BHS Tours and is representative in Portugal for the Ministry of Information of the Sultanate of Oman.*