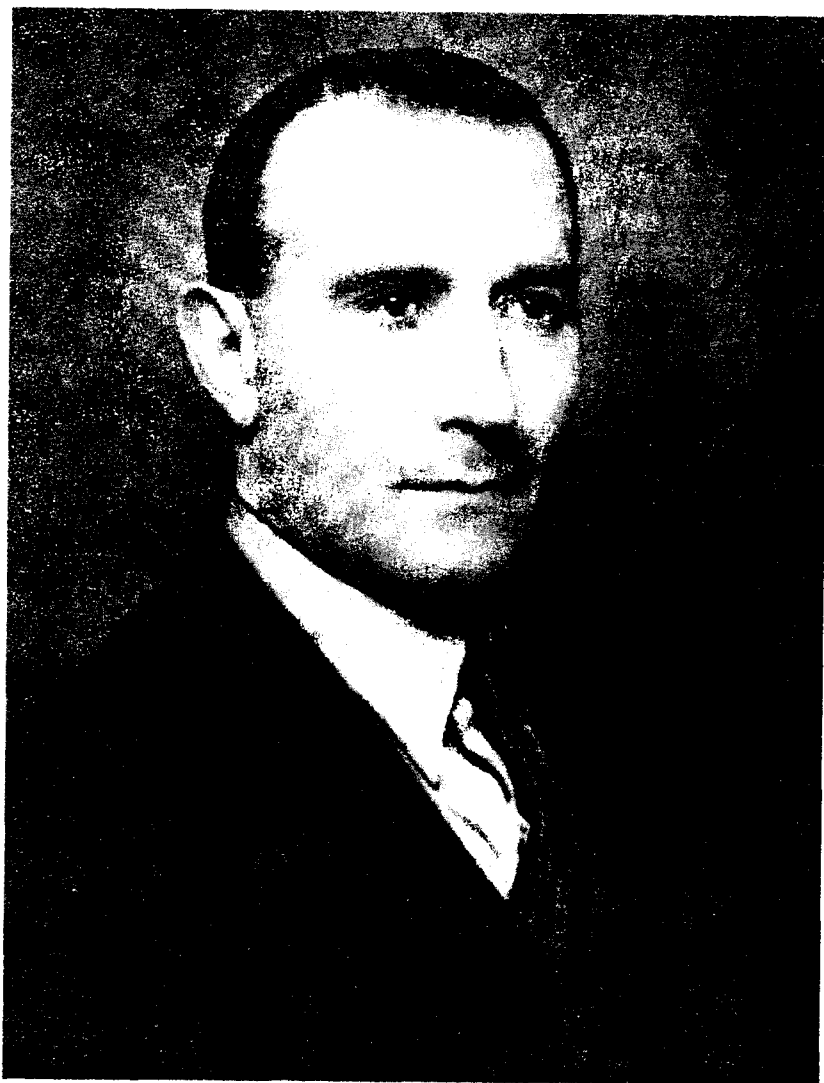


**THE BRITISH  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
OF PORTUGAL**

THIRTY FIRST ANNUAL REPORT  
AND REVIEW 2004

Quinta Nova  
Carcavelos  
2777-601 PAREDE



**Victor Reynolds**

## **VICTOR REYNOLDS OUR MAN IN ESTREMOZ**

He spent the frivolous Twenties like any well-off young man: travelling and socialising. The Spanish Civil War showed him the plight of refugees, and when the Allies confronted Hitler, he became a valued British agent. Half English, half Portuguese, Victor Reynolds, with the help of smugglers and undercover agents, saved hundreds of refugees fleeing from the Germans.

Martin Reynolds had the surprise of his life that day. He was ten years old, spending his holidays in the imposing house where his Uncle Victor lived the *Quinta do Carmo*, on the outskirts of Estremoz. The rest of the world was enduring the worst days of World War Two; in that little corner of the Alentejo all seemed peaceful. But in the small hours, the tranquility of the olive groves was broken by furtive shadows from far-away places. Entering the dining room that morning, Martin encountered two shabby and unshaven men, who were speaking to each other in French. His uncle explained the mystery. Insisting on a promise of total secrecy, he revealed that the strangers were escaped prisoners-of-war, who he was helping to reach England and join the forces of General de Gaulle. Martin made friends with one of these men, a French officer called Serge Seignol. After the war, I visited him in Paris on several occasions, and he came to Portugal to visit our family.

Serge Seignol was one of many foreign fugitives who passed through the *Quinta do Carmo* during the Second World War. The *Quinta*, as well known for the splendour of its Baroque architecture as for the quality of its wines, sheltered hundreds of English, Belgian, French and Polish combatants who had escaped from prisons in Nazi Germany or countries occupied by them. From the Alentejo, they continued their journey to Lisbon, and from there to England, where they joined the Allied Forces. The man who pulled the strings of these operations was Martin's uncle, Victor Hunter Reynolds, an Englishman born in Lisbon and administrator of the *Quinta*.

Victor was a descendent of Thomas Reynolds, an English merchant who arrived in Portugal in the eighteen twenties, drawn to Oporto by the wine trade. Some years later, the Reynolds business interests expanded to include cork, and they acquired extensive cork forests in the Alentejo and in southern Spain. The family never severed its links with its country of origin, but it put down deep roots among us Portuguese. Some of its members married into Portuguese families with money and influence. This was what Rafael - one of Thomas Reynolds' grandchildren - did on marrying Cristina Andrade Bastos, granddaughter of the banker António José d'Andrade. Four daughters and four sons were born of this marriage, amongst whom was Victor, born in Lisbon on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1901.

Keeping a family of eight children was not easy, even with a reasonable income. Rafael, Cristina and their numerous families left for England in search of easier living conditions. They settled in Hastings, in Sussex, where the boys attended University School. Victor did not adapt well to the iron discipline of the school; he left at the age of 15, setting his sights on an army career. He was an enthusiastic horseman, a great admirer of Wellington, and he dreamt of joining a Cavalry Regiment. However, in 1917 his hopes were dashed when the family returned to Lisbon.

On arriving in Portugal, Victor and his brother George went to work with an uncle, John Reynolds, who administered the family estates. Under their uncle's guidance, they familiarised themselves with the Alentejo and Spanish Extremadura, learning the management of the farms. Those who knew Victor then agree that he adapted without difficulty to life in the *montes* of the Alentejo. The Portuguese, which he spoke with an English accent, did not present an obstacle to his good relationship with the rural labourers on the farms and in the cork forests. This good understanding was an advantage when, on the death of his Uncle John, he took over the management of the *Quinta do Carmo*, which belonged to John's widow, his maternal aunt Isabel Bastos Reynolds, and of other properties which formed part of the vast family estates. Outside his work, Victor lived the life of a well-off young man of the swinging Twenties, travelling around Europe, taking trips on the river Tagus in the *Greylag*, a small family launch, riding, shooting, fishing, and

'flirting' here and there with pretty women.

The Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939 provided Victor's first real experience of life. The bombardment of the neighbouring town of Badajoz by Franco's air force in August 1936, and the slaughter which ensued, made a deep impression on him. The frontier was only a short distance from his estates, and as an Anglo-Portuguese Victor could not ignore the thousands of Spanish refugees who crossed the frontier in search of safety. In common with many Portuguese, Reynolds lent a hand to the Republican refugees escaping Franco's troops, hiding them temporarily on his estates. Many years later Roderick Reynolds, another of his nephews, discovered a living proof of Victor's humanitarian aid, in Naucalpan de Juarez, an industrial suburb of Mexico City. "To my surprise, I met a Mexican who spoke rusty Portuguese. He was of Spanish origin, once a refugee from the Spanish Civil War, who had passed through Aravia, one of our estates in *Casa Branca*, near Sousel, when he was a child. He remembered my uncle well."

The same year, which saw the fighting in Spain stop, saw the beginning of another conflict. The Second World War began. Victor volunteered to fight in the British Army, but he was asked by the British authorities to stay where he was. "When they realised that my uncle spoke good Portuguese, that he lived near the Spanish frontier and that he had an excellent knowledge of the terrain, they reminded him that there were other ways of helping England than on the field of battle. Victor soon understood the full meaning of those words," says Roderick. The British diplomats in Lisbon, who were very friendly with the Reynolds, were able to confirm the family's patriotism. At the shooting parties at the *Quinta do Carmo* and on other estates, there were always visitors from the British Embassy, from the Ambassador, Ronald Campbell, to the Military Attaché Jack Beevor, who was the representative in Portugal of the famous SOE (Special Operations Executive), an organization specialising in guerrilla activity and sabotage. Victor Reynolds became the right man in the right place at the right time, an agent to whom the British Secret Service could confide the delicate mission of welcoming and passing on to Lisbon escaped prisoners of war fleeing from enemy camps, RAF pilots who had been shot down, and undercover agents.

In some worn notebooks, amongst various entries of employees' salaries and farm accounts, Victor Reynolds noted the names of some of the refugees he had looked after: Lieutenants Rzepka and Osser, Thade, Korek, Stefan Ember, Pierre Heusch, Jerzy Lipinski, and Jacob Redlich.

In order to help Allied prisoners escaping from Germany, British Intelligence created a special organization: the M19, supported by the anti-Nazi resistance movements and by networks of highly paid smugglers. "Both the British and Germans used the services of the smuggling organizations which existed throughout Europe," observed the historian António José Telo. The British Secret Service controlled most of these networks, and perfected them to a high level, but they had to spend rivers of money to do so." This explains how many fugitives managed to cross the Pyrenees and Franco's Spain and to reach Lisbon, the gateway to England and other allied territories.

From Victor Reynolds' correspondence we learn that one of his first tasks was to prepare a welcome for fifteen hundred English nationals coming from Occupied France at the end of 1940. They never arrived, but Reynolds carried out his orders.

Refugees from Germany and occupied countries needed a visa, issued by the Portuguese Consulate in those countries, in order legally to enter Portugal, and a transit visa to cross Spain. In the first years of the war, with the scales weighted in Hitler's favour, Salazar made entry into Portugal difficult for the enemies of the Axis. Without the authorisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consuls could not issue visas to Poles, Russians, Jews, Czechs or stateless people, nor to Dutch, French and Belgians of military age. Of course, this limitation could be got round by the issue of forged documents, and many refugees travelled with these. In the absence of any papers whatever, the only solution was to enter Portugal clandestinely.

British Intelligence foresaw that the largest number of refugees would cross the frontier at Marvão, because it was the nearest to Madrid. To help them onwards to Lisbon, a reception centre was set up here, but Reynolds suggested that a second centre should be set up at the Elvas frontier. As well as accommodation

being easier to find, and the trains being more punctual, Reynolds counted on the assistance of smugglers in the area, and on the goodwill of the border police. According to Martin Reynolds, his nephew, "to make it easier for escaping prisoners to cross the Elvas frontier, my uncle ensured the tacit cooperation of the frontier police with gifts of game, whisky and other things."

The British Embassy made sure that Reynolds had the necessary means to carry out his missions. "England 'rented' one of my uncle's cars for the whole of the war," said Roderick jokingly. Avelino de Jesus, Victor Reynold's chauffeur and companion on innumerable exploits, drove the car, a Chevrolet that ran on producer gas so as to be able to travel without the strict limits imposed by the scarcity of petrol. The boss and the employee were like brothers: "Through many years of working together, they became very alike in their sense of humour, their passion for shooting and for an open-air life. They were even physically similar, with the same features and the same way of walking," remembers Teodora Rocha, Avelino's widow.

Crossing the frontier overland was not always possible, and refugees often had to cross one of the rivers along the frontier, the *Caia* or the *Guadiana*. "Crossing the Caia was achieved in a small flat-bottomed rowing boat, which my uncle kept at the Serra e Horta farm near Elvas," says Roderick. From there the escapers were taken to the *Quinta do Carmo*, or to the *monte* of Aravia, where the locals looked after them. "Avelino would arrive at one of these farms with three or four people, and announce that Mr. Victor wanted them looked after. And they were. If necessary, a pig or a chicken would be killed to feed them."

On some occasions, it became necessary to go to Spain to collect "parcels". Tempted by Victor Reynolds' presents, the police of the neighbouring country became as cooperative as their Portuguese counterparts. "Sometimes the Spanish guards would telephone my uncle to advise him that they had captured an Englishman." Reynolds "arrived and told the commander of the frontier post 'here's a kilo of coffee for you, and leave the Englishman to me.'"



Quinta do Carmo

At a given stage, the fugitives were summoned to Lisbon. If they had the correct papers, they could travel by train. If not, they had to travel discreetly in the Chevrolet or in the cars of diplomats who frequently visited the *Quinta do Carmo*. The British Embassy undertook the rest. "Some were flown to England or Gibraltar, others were put on yachts or sailing barges which, by a happy coincidence, happened to go alongside a ship that was about to weigh anchor. The maritime police contributed greatly to these escapes," says Roderick.

Reynolds' work benefited not only Englishmen but also Belgians, Poles and Frenchmen. It is estimated that over sixty Belgian military personnel were received at *Quinta do Carmo* between February and June 1941. In a letter dated 1979, Marc Jottard, former Belgian Consul in Barcelona, recalls that after the invasion of his country in May 1940 "Belgian patriots of all classes arrived in the Catalan capital after having secretly crossed the Pyrenees." Thanks to Reynolds, many Belgian military personnel - airmen, high-ranking officers and young volunteers - "were discreetly sent to Lisbon, thus avoiding the risk of being returned to Spain".

Max Poichet, an agent involved in the planning of escapes, points out that the Anglo-Portuguese Reynolds "spent large sums of money among the many smugglers of the Elvas frontier region, before finding a reliable and capable individual to serve as a transit officer." One of those who owed his freedom to Victor Reynolds was General Roger Dewandre, then a young cadet at the Royal Military Academy. Reynolds, rescued Dewandre together with five companions, after a difficult stage between Badajoz and the Portuguese frontier. "Without money, frozen stiff and starving, we risked being arrested by the Portuguese police." But Reynolds gave them food, accommodation and transport to Lisbon. Without this help, Dewandre admitted, "our chances of getting to Great Britain would have been very remote."

Belgium recognized these services and made Reynolds a Chevalier of the Order of Leopold II in 1954. The Belgian network of support to escaping prisoners "was headed by Father Victor de Moutier" stated Martin Reynolds. "The English Victor, who was a fervent Anglican and who professed to be hostile to the "papists" was very surprised when he discovered that de Moutier was a Catholic priest." This surprise quickly gave way to a mutual affection. "A great friendship and respect developed between them", which stood the test of time. At the end of the war, Father de Moutier was "invited by my unde to visit him, and to spend his holidays at the *Quinta do Caçador*."

The officer who became most familiar with Reynolds' hospitality was a Pole, Potoski by name. Roderick tells the story: "In the 60s,

when I was an RAF pilot, I gave instruction to a Polish airman who, on hearing my name, asked whether I was a relation of Victor Reynolds. When I said yes, he told me that he had been sheltered nine times in various homes of the family. He knew the *Quinta do Carmo, Aravia, Mouchão* and *Troca-Leite* well". Potoski's case was one of the more surprising of the Second World War. "Shot down 12 times by the Nazis, he always managed to escape. At his base, the conviction that Potoski would return was so strong that a place was always kept for him in the Mess," says Roderick. Grateful for these and other rescues, the Polish Government distinguished Victor Reynolds with the medal of the Order of Free Poland.

Help for the Allies took various forms. Reynolds sent food, tobacco and other items to English prisoners in Germany through the British Prisoners of War Parcels Fund, or through Carioca, a well-known grocer's shop in Lisbon. The proof of this is some postcards sent by prisoners of war from *Stammlager 111A, Stalag XB, Mariag und Milag Nord*. Close-written messages in pencil, to fit into the small space allowed on the postcard, brought news and thanks from soldiers.

British propaganda in the Alto Alentejo was another front on which he carried on the struggle. Reynolds coordinated propaganda agents spread through towns and villages of the region and tried to win over to his cause influential people in the region. "I take the liberty of sending....some pamphlets, maps, photographs and other forms of literature which spread the truth about England," reads a letter sent to a Lieutenant-Colonel in Elvas. He would supply his contacts with books, magazines, Union Jacks, RAF badges, framed photographs of the royal family and of the Prime Minister, Churchill, asking that they should be distributed in cafés, recreation centers, clubs, fire stations and parish halls.

A few months before the end of the war, Victor Reynolds married Natalie Cooper, who was working for the British Embassy. In the hour of triumph, its Portuguese agents confronted England. Showers of letters reached the Reynolds household requesting jobs and other compensation for services rendered. "At a time when it was dangerous to be an Anglophile in Portugal, there were a good handful of patriots who remained true to their convictions" writes an

agent in Marvão by the name of Jeremias Dias, who was imprisoned for 96 days on the orders of the PVDE (Secret Police). Jeremias lamented that up to that date nobody had contacted him to repay his expenses. Reynolds repaid many such people out of his own pocket, others he referred to representatives of the Allied nations. But people who knew little of Victor's valuable services had replaced the diplomats serving at the beginning of the war. Even Avelino had reason to complain. "The British who frequented Mr. Victor's house promised my husband many things: money, a good gun, and even a house in Estremoz....but in the end he received nothing," complained Teodora Rocha.

Up to his death in 1985 Victor Reynolds continued the life of a 'gentleman farmer', distancing himself from the semi-feudal practices of certain Alentejo landowners. "He fully understood the hard life of many of his employees, and was responsible for many acts of generosity," recalls Martin. "I remember when a married couple he employed had twin boys, he gave them a milking cow to help with the feeding of the infants. His reputation as a good man and a just employer turned to his advantage during the Agrarian Reform. His properties were not occupied, although he had certain difficulties, as might be expected."

Reynolds' popularity manifested itself in unexpected places. "When he first went to Africa, his plane landed at Accra in Ghana," related Roderick. "My uncle alighted from the plane, and soon realized he was being followed by someone in Arab dress. This person approached and asked: 'Excuse me, aren't you Mr. Victor? I'm the son of António Branco, the garage man in Estremoz, and I am a TAP mechanic.'"

Although an Anglican, Reynolds got on well with 'papists'. One evening, he chanced to run over a sheep. After compensating the shepherd, Victor went to the Convent in Estremoz to give the animal to the nuns. He knocked on the door and from within came a voice: "Who's there?" "It's the Devil," he replied. "Oh, Mr. Victor, come in!"

JANET REYNOLD'S TRANSLATION AN ARTICLE BY ALBERTO FRANCO  
PUBLISHED IN THE "PUBLICO" 1/2/2004