

# Healthcare Services in the Great War Portuguese Soldiers

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**O**NE PORTUGUESE soldier out of three involved in the Battle of the Lys<sup>1</sup> died. Indeed, the First World War, known for the use of advanced weaponry, caused massive injuries and casualties. Portugal began fighting alongside the Allied forces as early as 1914, defending the African colonies of Angola and Mozambique. In 1917 troops were sent to fight in Flanders, in the English sector. Despite being unprepared, the Portuguese soldiers were placed on the battlefield, facing intense artillery fire and heavy offensives by the Germans.

What were the medical and healthcare services provided to the Portuguese troops fighting in the Great War, and their rehabilitation afterwards? This is the main question of this research project that aims to analyze the living and health conditions of the Portuguese soldiers fighting in Africa and in Europe, their diseases and injuries, as well as their recovery after the conflict. Who provided treatment, where, how and to whom? What were the health policies regarding the war-wounded and how did they contribute to their well-being?

In this article, we will start by reviewing the Portuguese literature on the Great War and particularly works on healthcare. Then the main aims of this research project will be presented, as well as the methodology we are using to reach our goals. Finally, we will present some clues for further research and a few preliminary results revealed by archival sources.

## The State of the Art

**D**ESPITE A recent growing interest in First World War historical studies, medical issues are often left aside, especially in the case of the Portuguese soldiers. Furthermore, recent European projects, such as Portugal 1914 and Europeana 1914–1918, brought to light a large number of records that should be put into context.

The number of scientific researches on the Great War has increased in the last decades and particularly in the last years. Portugal's participation in this conflict led to general essays, providing a synthesis of the subject.<sup>2</sup> Some focused on army history,<sup>3</sup> while others on the reasons that led Portugal to the war, as well as on political and diplomatic issues.<sup>4</sup> Scientific works also considered the importance of the First World War memory, built monuments and commemorative activities.<sup>5</sup> Others analyzed Portugal's dramatic economic situation as a result of its participation in the Great War.<sup>6</sup>

Many authors centered their work on the Portuguese participation in Europe, especially in the Battle of the Lys, due to the large number of wounded, casualties and prisoners.<sup>7</sup> Afonso and Arrifes chose to focus on the conflicts in Angola and Mozambique, although the former made few references to healthcare.<sup>8</sup> Arrifes briefly mentioned the living and health conditions of the Portuguese soldiers in Africa. Marques did an enormous work on living conditions in the trenches in Flanders, with sparse references to the Portuguese soldiers' healthcare in British base hospitals.<sup>9</sup>

British bibliography linked with the Great War and health is quite interesting but it makes no reference to the Portuguese presence in their base hospitals despite the presence of a large number of works, especially on nursing, on the history of pain or war traumas.<sup>10</sup>

Ferreira's thesis mentioned, in less than 30 pages, the organization of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps in France and the Military Hospital of Hendaye.<sup>11</sup> As for Pires,<sup>12</sup> she briefly refers to nurses' training and to the Crusade of Portuguese Women, not giving further information than what was already known<sup>13</sup> and not even mentioning any interesting works.<sup>14</sup> Fraga has done a master and a Ph.D. thesis on strategic and political issues of the First World

War. But in 2006 he published an article on healthcare and the Portuguese participation in France.<sup>15</sup> As for the Portuguese war-wounded, only Ribeiro started studying the question with the analysis of the Casa Pia institution (Institute of Mutilated of Saint Isabel), the Institute of Arroios and the French influences in the postwar healthcare services.<sup>16</sup> Correia also mentioned some interesting aspects concerning Portuguese war-disabled soldiers.

The existing works clearly did not study the medical and healthcare services during and after the Great War. There is still a gap to be filled by providing an overall image of the medical efforts linked with the Portuguese participation, including therapeutic and psychological trauma treatments. Over 8,000 war-wounded men returned to Portugal, mutilated and traumatized. Several institutions were established to receive them and their history is still to be discovered. It is necessary to study the situation in Europe (Flanders), as well as in Africa (Southern Angola and Northern Mozambique). Finally, this research should also make possible investigations at an international level, comparing healthcare services during and after the Great War, as Europe-wide studies are still missing.

## Research Aims

**T**HIS RESEARCH aims to carry out an in-depth analysis on the medical and healthcare services provided to the Portuguese soldiers fighting in the First World War in all fronts and their rehabilitation afterwards. Because of the violence of the military conflict, the deficient military preparation and the quick training of the Portuguese soldiers, many suffered from the lack of hygienic conditions and a poor diet, experiencing various health problems and diseases. Marques, Fraga and Arrifes mentioned these difficulties, as well as cases of rheumatism, scabies, pneumonia and influenza. We wish to examine in detail the living and medical conditions of the Portuguese troops in Europe and in Africa, and more precisely what diseases affected the Portuguese soldiers, what were the treatments, and how many were ill or died.

Furthermore, the Great War became especially known for the use of heavy artillery fire and poisonous gases causing severe injuries and traumas to soldiers. The number of injuries, mutilations and casualties suffered by the Portuguese soldiers on various military fronts, including in hospitals run by the British army, is also part of this project.

During the First World War, the Portuguese state organized a healthcare service. However, the construction of field hospitals took longer than expected and the collaboration of different nations and charitable institutions was needed to care for wounded soldiers. The state, alone, could not promptly provide the necessary treatment due to the high number of sick and wounded. The British

hospitals, with better trained caregivers and nurses, probably admitted Portuguese ill and injured soldiers. How did this cooperation work? How were soldiers treated, considering that most of them did not speak English? Where were any Portuguese healthcare providers also involved? Moreover, the Portuguese Red Cross and the Crusade of Portuguese Women also collaborated, providing healthcare services to the Portuguese troops and even having their own hospitals. We intend to understand how these institutions worked and what their contacts with the Portuguese state were.

If thousands of Portuguese soldiers were injured during the conflict and suffered from severe traumas, what were the efforts made by the Portuguese state for their recovery? Portuguese military hospitals received soldiers and several charitable institutions were adapted or established to care for war-wounded men in Portugal and to help them reintegrate society. This was, for example, the case of the Institute of Mutilated of Saint Isabel, the Military Institute of Arroios for war mutilated and Telhal's Hospital. Maybe other institutions or associations worked alongside the Portuguese state in order to improve the well-being of the war-wounded. And, despite the economic difficulties felt in Portugal, was there any solidarity between the Portuguese people? Therefore, we will take into consideration the rehabilitation of war-wounded after the conflict. Who were the caregivers, where were the treatments provided, in what conditions? It would be interesting to learn more on the achieved results, to know if the well-being of war-wounded soldiers was somehow improved, if they managed to integrate back into society and adapt to civilian life.

Thus, with this research we will deepen the knowledge on the Portuguese participation in the First World War, its consequences over soldiers' health and the rehabilitation of war-wounded. It will provide an insight on the Portuguese war efforts, during and after the military conflict. The research results will allow a comparative analysis with the situation in other countries that also participated in the Great War; for instance, comparing state help, the contribution of charitable institutions, the treatments developed, but also the numbers of sick or wounded soldiers. This research should add the often forgotten Portuguese case to international works.

## Methodology

**W**E WILL perform an in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis of a large number of written, oral and iconographic primary and secondary sources. This includes research in the archives of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the League of Combatants, the Military History Ar-

chive and the Overseas History Archive. Various military hospitals and charity institutions that contributed to the rehabilitation of war-wounded will also be taken into account (for instance, the Red Cross archive). It would be interesting to carry out research on British and French archives, especially those with information linked to field ambulances, base hospitals, sick and wounded Portuguese soldiers.

A hermeneutic analysis will also be carried out on a series of journals, biographies and war memories written by those who experienced the war, such as the books by doctors Jaime Cortesão and Américo Pires de Lima. Despite the censorship, journals and magazines published during the war also provide us with information on hospitals, descriptions from the trenches and troops deployment to Portugal, with various images and illustrations. Not only Portuguese but also British and French periodicals will be analyzed.

The use of oral history is also important; by interviewing family members of war veterans it should be possible to have a description of the soldiers' integration in society and how they experienced their recovery. Finally, the historiography on healthcare services will be analyzed, works published in Portuguese but also in English and French.

## Preliminary Results

**T**HE FIRST investigations we have undertaken allow us to identify some preliminary facts and information. The cooperation between the Portuguese state and the Red Cross seems to be significant, particularly in the case of Africa. In Angola and Mozambique, the Portuguese Red Cross managed several medical institutions that had an important role in caring for First World War soldiers. In August 1916, the Military Hospital of Palma (Mozambique) was given to the Portuguese Red Cross, placed in the service of the military expedition and named "Red Cross Hospital." Also in Mozambique, the Red Cross used other hospitals, such as the one at Nacature.<sup>17</sup> The Portuguese army also had provisional hospitals, at Ponta Vermelha, Namoto, Chomba, Nampula and Palma. In this last one, there were over 230 deaths between 1 January 1917 and 8 May 1918.<sup>18</sup> In Mocimboa da Praia there was also a hospital for indigenous soldiers. Over 900 men entered this hospital in 1917 only; further analysis should give us information on the reasons that led them there.<sup>19</sup>

In the African theatre of war, most soldiers were affected by disease rather than by the military conflict. Reading the correspondence of the Portuguese army medical services, it is easy to understand the lack of hygienic conditions in army camps. For instance, some did not have toilets, as was the case at Mossuril

in August 1918. As a result, there were cases of dysentery, which required rapid measures in order to avoid an epidemic. The scarcity of water and medicine, such as quinine, was also often mentioned. Several documents from different periods ask for doctors and nurses to be replaced because of illness. For example, in December 1918, the director of the medical services in Mozambique mentioned in a letter that “almost all the medical personnel on duty were admitted to the hospital because of the flu.”<sup>20</sup> The outbreak of the Influenza Pandemic in 1918 also hit the Portuguese troops that were already badly nourished and extremely tired. However, other diseases, like malaria, strongly affected the troops because no nets had been distributed to soldiers. Dr Álvaro Rosas recalled several times this situation in his memoirs of the Mozambique expedition, referring, for instance, to the use of nets with holes in them. Also according to him, even hospitals had no nets, apart from Ponta Vermelha. They had them only on the windows, which did not stop mosquitoes from passing through ventilation holes. He also mentioned that these nets for windows were installed after the visit of Lieutenant-General Jacob Van Deventer, from the South African Defense Force, who was extremely surprised not to see any in a hospital.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, it seems clear that there was an interaction between the Portuguese and the Allied forces concerning medical issues. This collaboration seems more evident in the European theatre of war, regarding hospitals, and it involves not only the British, but also the French and the Canadians. Although the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps had its own medical services in Flanders, it often sought in the Allied hospitals a place to care for the Portuguese troops. For example, Canadian Hospitals No. 3 and No. 7 received and treated Portuguese soldiers, and so did the French Hospitals in Boulogne, St-Lô, Estaires or Brest. Nevertheless, the cooperation was mostly with British General Hospitals, Stationary Hospitals and Field Ambulances. Several of them had a Portuguese section, for instance, No. 7 General Hospital or No. 39 Stationary Hospital. The latter admitted, between 1 May and 31 December 1919, 2,226 patients, of which 6 died, and 25 surgeries were performed.<sup>22</sup> On 1 September 1917, at least two Portuguese doctors worked in this hospital: Henrique António da Silva Roquette and José da Cunha Parede.<sup>23</sup> The number of patients varied from one hospital to another. For instance, at No. 39 General Hospital, only 92 Portuguese soldiers were admitted between February 1917 and February 1919, which is a relatively low figure, compared with the 49,297 other patients the hospital received during the same period. No. 26 General Hospital, based in Etaples, admitted 3,286 Portuguese for 38,209 British patients between February and December 1917, 19 of whom perished.<sup>24</sup> At the end of June 1917, this hospital counted at least six Portuguese doctors and one pharmacist; in November 1917 eleven other Portuguese were mentioned as part of the staff, including Dr. Ludovino Alves.<sup>25</sup>

According to a report written by Dr. Reynaldo dos Santos in September 1917, Portuguese doctors also treated British soldiers and the Portuguese staff was allotted to services such as disinfection and registration. He clearly mentioned that nursing was entirely the responsibility of British sisters and nurses, whose services he praised.<sup>26</sup> Further research should allow us to understand how the cooperation between Portugal and Britain took place in this respect.

The Portuguese also built their own hospitals in France, such as No. 1 and 2 Base Hospitals, both in Ambleuse. No. 1 Base Hospital had a maximum capacity of 2,000 beds, was built under British advice and opened only on 26 March 1918. Between this date and December 1918, 7,663 patients were admitted, 56 of whom died. 1,414 patients suffered from asthenia or weakness, revealing how exhausted the troops were. Over 800 patients suffered from the flu, almost 500 from tuberculosis and less than 300 from the use of gas.<sup>27</sup> The nursing staff working in this Portuguese hospital was also British. The hospital had an important surgery service, as it was to receive seriously injured soldiers. On the other hand, No. 2 Base Hospital with 500 beds was to admit mainly sick men, because it was not suitable for badly wounded soldiers. There were also two Blood Hospitals in Merville and St. Venant and one Military Hospital in Hendaye. The Portuguese Red Cross also built a hospital in Ambleuse and had its own nursing staff.<sup>28</sup>

On the European front, at the end of the war, around 7,126 Portuguese soldiers were disabled and discharged. Over 300 were admitted at the Institute of Arroios, created in Lisbon by the Portuguese state to receive mutilated soldiers, helping them reintegrate the society. An additional 30 were admitted at Telhal's Hospital, a psychiatric institution run by the Brothers Hospitaller of St. John of God.<sup>29</sup> More researches should give us detailed information on the role played by these institutions in the treatment of the war-wounded and their recovery.

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## Notes

1. The Battle of the Lys was a German offensive that started on 9 April 1918 in the Ypres sector (Flanders, France). It was one of the greatest defeats of the Portuguese army, on the day the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps was supposed to pull back and be replaced, due to the lack of motivation and tiredness of the troops.
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25. The mentioned doctors were Reynaldo dos Santos, Ângelo Barbedo Soares, Augusto da Cunha Lamas, Fernando David Martins Pereira, Luís Balmaseda Ayres, Alonso Vasques and the pharmacist Rodrigo Esteves Gusmão. PT AHM-DIV/1/35/679.
26. PT AHM-DIV/1/35/1416.
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### **Abstract**

#### Healthcare Services in the Great War: Portuguese Soldiers

Portugal fought alongside the Allied forces in Angola and Mozambique beginning in 1914 and three years later also in France. Poorly prepared, Portuguese troops suffered as a consequence of the military conflict and different diseases. The article presents the ongoing research project on healthcare services provided to Portuguese troops during and after the Great War. The paper reviews the state of the art on this subject and indicates the main aims of the project, as well as the methodology being used. Moreover, the first results of our analysis come to light, providing further clues and questions likely to deepen the knowledge on the Portuguese soldiers' healthcare during the Great War.

### **Keywords**

First World War, Portugal, campaign hospitals, care-givers, war-wounded