

2012

NATO and the reorganization Portuguese Army Staff Corps instruction in the 1950's

Daniel Marcos

FCSH and IPRI/UNL, dmmarcos@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

Recommended Citation

Marcos, Daniel (2012) "NATO and the reorganization Portuguese Army Staff Corps instruction in the 1950's," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol37/iss1/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact jesus@udel.edu.

NATO and the reorganization Portuguese Army Staff Corps instruction in the 1950's

Daniel marcos
FCSH and IPRI-University of Lisbon

In what concerned its defense policy, Portugal's participation in NATO as a founding member brought great consequences to the Portuguese authoritarian regime of *Estado Novo*. As one renowned Portuguese historian puts it, the first years of Portugal in NATO were a "quiet revolution" that changed the Portuguese Armed Forces since it allowed the incorporation of foreign techniques and methods, especially the ones used by the US Armed Forces.¹ Particularly to the Portuguese Army, this modernization had clear impacts on the instruction and training of the General Staff officers and, consequently, to the Portuguese Army Staff Corps (ASC). The aim of this article is to examine how NATO contributed to the evolution of the Portuguese Army in early 1950's, especially in what concerns the instruction of the General Staff officers. In other words, I wish to understand the consequences NATO had to the Portuguese Army particular characteristics, especially to the existence of the Portuguese Army Staff Corps. Actually, this is important if we bear in mind that this body was a completely independent elite within the Portuguese Army, distinguished from the rest of the various arms and services of the Armed Forces, something that did not exist in most of the Western world armies.

The Portuguese Army Staff Corps

¹ António José Telo, "Portugal e a OTAN: 1949-1976," in *Portugal e os 50 anos da Aliança Atlântica, 1949-1999* ed. Ministério da Defesa Nacional, (Lisboa: Ministério da Defesa Nacional, 1999), 71-105.

The Portuguese Army Staff Corps existed as an autonomous entity within the Portuguese Army between 1834 and 1974. Since its early days, ASC formed an elite of officers, which must not be mistaken with the concept of the General Staff. In the Portuguese Army, the idea of the General Staff goes back to the 1730s, when the term began to be used to describe the officers who served in the command bodies of the Portuguese Army regiments, in particular, those general officers who were in command. On the other hand, the Portuguese Army Staff Corps appeared for the first time as a part of the General Staff in the law of July 18, 1834. According to this piece of legislation, the ASC was an independent body of the General Staff, composed by eight superior officers, of which two had to be coronels, sixteen captains and sixteen lieutenants. These officers were prepared to serve on the General Staff of the Provinces, Divisions and Brigades, as well as adjutant and field adjutants to the General officers. In terms of origin, the Portuguese Army Staff Corps came from the various arms that formed the Army but had a different promotion system, when they enrolled in the Corps. Indeed, the members of the Portuguese Army Staff Corps officers were a true elite, especially protected, which had as major function to serve in either the General Command or the General Staff of the Divisions or Brigades.²

During the 19th century, the Portuguese Army Staff Corps suffered several reorganizations. From 1837 on, an innovative change occurred. In that year was created a specific instruction course for these officers, the General Staff Course, which was taught in the Army Academy, an advanced military studies center. To enroll on this training, the Army officers had to do a preparatory course at the Technical College in Lisbon, a higher education institution that awarded short-cycle degrees oriented to practical activities. Finally, by the end of the century there was the replacement of the Army Staff Corps by a Service of General Staff, a transformation that lasted until 1937.³ These changes reflected both the uncertain and unstable existence of the Portuguese Army Staff Corps and proved that its role went far beyond the traditional General Staff function. Receiving a superior technical education, the ASC officers enrolled in a closed and selective unit, which established the linkage between the Army in itself and the governmental sphere. Very quickly, as we shall see ahead, the Portuguese Army Staff Corps existence started to be mainly associated with political objectives rather than technical requirements of the Portuguese Army functions.

This becomes particularly clear if we analyze the first years of the authoritarian regime of the *Estado Novo*, in the 1930s. During this period we observe a long process of subordination of the Portuguese Armed Forces to the

² João Carlos de Sá Nogueira, "Breve Notícia Histórica acerca do Corpo de Estado-Maior," *Separata do Boletim do Estado Maior do Exército* 8 (1969): 14.

³ *Ibid.*, 16 and 22-23.

new political authorities. In fact, the transition from the I Republic to the *Estado Novo* was characterized by a strong military intervention in the Portuguese political life. The military coup of May 28, 1926 that established a military dictatorship, on the one hand, and the several military attempts to restore the parliamentary regime, on the other, are a reflection of this intervention. At the same time, many of the officers involved on the military coup of 1926 were not exactly against the parliamentary system but wished instead to put an end to the “degradation” of the republican regime.⁴ In this sense, it became clear that the major concerns regarding the Army and the Navy came from within these institutions. The important role played by the Armed Forces in the Portuguese political life soon became an obstacle when in 1932 Oliveira Salazar headed the first civilian government since 1926.⁵

Arriving to power by the hands of the military, Salazar devoted the most part of the regime’s first years to the political effort of sending the troops back to the barracks. In exchange of the modernization of the Armed Forces, the *Estado Novo* sought to convert the Army in an instrument of military efficiency and political loyalty. However, until 1935 this objective was delayed because of the constant military instability. Facing the need of expanding the military budget and having in mind the permanent coup attempts by the military, it became clear to Salazar that the Army had to become politically submissive, if the *Estado Novo* was to endure. From the mid-1930s, the conditions for this to happen were created. In the first place, there was the escalation of the international situation, with the growing instability in Europe, in particular in neighboring Spain. In second place, the financial recovery effort had given its results, creating conditions for the government to focus on substantive reforms. Finally, through a complex political process of putting aside the main military leaderships, Oliveira Salazar became Minister of War in May 1936.⁶

It was within this environment that, in 1937, profound legislative reforms were taken in the Army, under the new Minister of War and his Under-Secretary, Captain Santos Costa. The publication of the laws 1960 and 1961, of September 1, revising the general organization of the Portuguese Army and the basis of recruitment and military service, respectively, marked the beginning of a profound change in the regulatory framework that governed this institution, establishing concepts and provisions, which remained in force until the end of the

⁴ José Medeiros Ferreira, *O Comportamento Político dos Militares, Forças Armadas e Regimes Políticos em Portugal no Século XX* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 2001), 154.

⁵ Nuno Severiano Teixeira, “Política de Defesa,” in *Dicionário da História de Portugal* ed. António Barreto e Maria Filomena Mónica (Porto: Livraria Figueirinhas, 1999), 490-497.

⁶ Telmo Faria, *Debaixo de fogo! Salazar e as Forças Armadas (1935-1941)* (Lisboa: Edições Cosmos/Instituto de Defesa Nacional, 2000), 257-259.

Estado Novo.⁷ These general laws, as well as their regulatory decrees, created the conditions to provide a small Army of thirty thousand effectives, supported by a system of reserves that, in case of conflict, would allow the quick formation of up to four divisions. The purpose was to improve the Portuguese Army's efficiency, at the same time as the expenses were diminished, with an obvious reduction of the permanent effectives. In overall, these changes clearly weakened the weight and number of the military in the Portuguese society. Simultaneously, the regulation of the new laws had administrative implications which clashed with vested interests and acquired rights of the military institution.⁸ In reality, this was a long process of "political weakening" of the Army, covered by an honorable excuse of "military modernization."⁹

In what concerned specifically the General Staff, the 1937 reforms gave a new impulse to the idea of a closed officer's corps to serve in these functions. In fact, the law 1960 was clear when it stated that the Portuguese Army's territorial organization depended, in the first place, of a Generalship, immediately followed by the Army Staff Corps, even before the different arms and remaining general services which assured the structure of the institution. According to the article 41 of this law, the Portuguese Army Staff Corps aimed at "planning the Army's preparation for war", as well as to "support, directly and immediately, the commanders of the major units in their functions."¹⁰

In the end of this year, the Decree-Law 28401, which concerned specifically the reorganization of military officers and effectives, eventually materialized the idea of creating a closed and restricted officer's corps. Contrary to what some higher ranks of the Army sustained, in particular General Morais Sarmiento, Commander-in-Chief of the Army, who defended the existence of an open body so that it could be possible to choose the officers of each branch of the Army without any limitations, the government's choice was different. Salazar rather preferred to implement a closed body, despite enlarging it up to eighty-four officers, where only the most "appropriate" elements of the several branches of

⁷ Belchior Vieira, "Exército," in *Dicionário da História de Portugal* ed. António Barreto e Maria Filomena Mónica (Porto: Livraria Figueirinhas, 1999), 691-692.

⁸ As Medeiros Ferreira points out, this reforms have had on the reorganization of the officers *cadre* the most sensitive issue as it attempted to rationalize an institution characterized by a "great number of men", whose little hope of promotion and "poor preparation" fostered the creation a "strong corporate capacity to defend the interests" of their social group. See Ferreira, *O Comportamento Político dos Militares*, op. cit., 194.

⁹ Faria, *Debaixo de fogo!*, op. cit., 163-165.

¹⁰ Law 1960, September 1, 1937, accessed on November 24, 2011, <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1937/09/20400/09070914.pdf>

the Army could access, chosen by a commission composed by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, the Army Chief and under-Chief of Staff.¹¹

If we compare the total of officers in the Portuguese metropolitan army, which were around three thousand, it becomes evident that the Army Staff Corps turned into a restricted elite, for two main reasons. In the first place, because the final decision of which officers would join ASC was reserved to the Minister of War and to his Under-Secretary. These two men had the final call on the management of this restricted group of officers. In the second place, because the ASC's officers were privileged in terms of their income, when compared with same rank officers of the other army branches and services. Thus, an officer of the Army Staff Corps received circa 10 per cent more than other equivalent officers, which, in fact, contributed to reduce the conflicts of these military elite with the regime that, ultimately, favored them. In fact, it was expected that the extra income would be compensated with "a greater political loyalty towards the regime."¹²

The impact of the 1937 reforms in the ASC was only concluded in 1940, when the final legislation regarding the regulation of the recruitment and preparation of the General Staff officers was published. The preparation of the ASC officers was now done at the Institute for Higher Military Studies (IAEM), where the courses of Field Officers (Majors) or High Command Officers (Colonels) were taught. The legislative modification of the General Staff Course did not caused any major change to the regulations in force since 1928, as the political authorities considered that this system had "corresponded to the adequate preparation of the officers" to a particular service, which was seen as "fundamental" for the overall military organization. Thus, the new law sought to "define particular aspects" of the officers education, assuring the course's regular functioning to meet the Army needs.¹³

In terms of the general organization of the course, during three years students received training, in theory and practice, which could be divided into two groups: one dedicated to general tactics of the various branch and services, another for military organization and strategy. Regarding the first set of courses, the future officers of the General Staff were instructed on techniques and tactics of different weapons and communications service, services' operation and use, tactical and operation of large units and of the General Staff in general, as well as

¹¹ 12 colonels, 12 lieutenant-colonels, 20 majors and 40 captains. Decree-Law 28401, December 31, 1937, accessed on November 24, 2011, <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1937/12/30401/16951728.pdf>

¹² Faria, *Debaixo de fogo!*, op. cit., 170-171.

¹³ Decree-Law 30264, January 10, 1940, accessed on November 24, 2011, <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1940/01/00800/00500055.pdf>

headquarters' operations during war. In what concerned the second set of subjects, they focused on more general topics, with a strong prevalence of the social sciences and humanities. In this sense, they studied the military geography of Europe and Africa, with a focus on the political, economic and social problems of the European states. The program of studies devoted even more attention to issues of military history, with particular attention to strategy and analysis applied to the Iberian Peninsula and the Overseas Dominions. Finally, the officers had also training in "horsemanship and hipology fundamental for the General Staff's duties", as well as physical training. This education was taught by a body of twelve professors, all of them members of the Army Staff Corps, chosen by the Minister of War after a proposal by the Teaching Committee of the Course. Because they belonged to the ASC, the teachers did not work exclusively in the IAEM, performing simultaneously other General Staff duties.¹⁴

In what concerned the officers' admission for the course, we can say that the preparation was long and demanding. Students, in a total of 8 to 12 each year, should have less than 33 years of age, with the application open to lieutenants and captains with at least two years of service with troops. It was a prerogative that all officers had "good military behavior, moral character and proven good recommendation of their commander about their professional competence and devotion to service". In addition, it was requested that the applicants had done internships in the academies of the branches where they came from. It was also necessary that the young officers had attended university. This preparatory training for the General Staff course implied the completion of disciplines as varied as algebra, descriptive geometry, physics, chemistry, design, calculus and economics.¹⁵

Finally, candidates were subject to an admission exam on global history and general military knowledge, a typing test and a riding test. After completion of the General Staff course, where students were evaluated for their "strength of character, spirit of sacrifice, and other moral qualities" besides the technical and military aspects, the successful finalists performed one year apprenticeship, six months in various departments of the General Staff, the other six in other major headquarters units. The information collected during the course and the apprenticeship ended up having a fundamental weight for the proposed officers' entry of the in the ASC.¹⁶

¹⁴ Decree-Law 30264, January 10, 1940, accessed on November 24, 2011, <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1940/01/00800/00500055.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

Thus, this transformation closed a cycle of reforms in the organizational structure of the Portuguese Army, in order to make it more efficient but also more loyal to the new political regime of the *Estado Novo*. The evolution described above caused a significant reform in the Portuguese Army General Staff, as it strengthened the Army Staff Corps, a body with a century of tradition in the Portuguese military institutions. This legislative change led to the creation of what several authors consider a military elite, organized with the aim to serve and assist the Generalship, both in terms of General Staff and at the level of large units. This was a restricted group, particularly sensitive to political issues, morally loyal to the political regime it served, which in turn recognized the elements of the Army Staff Corps through economic compensation, when compared with same rank officers.

After a profound political subordination of the Portuguese military in the early years of the *Estado Novo*, of which the restructuring of the Army Staff Corps was a clear example, during the Second World War there was a period of organizational appeasement in the Portuguese Armed Forces. Only after the founding of NATO in 1949 new modifications took place.

NATO and the Portuguese Armed Forces

The participation of Portugal as part of the restrictive group of founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty on April 4, 1949 had determinant consequences for its defense and foreign policy. From the international point of view, the admission to NATO symbolized a fundamental step on the country's integration in the international system of Cold War, since Portugal was still one of the remaining two authoritarian states in Western Europe. It was at the military level that Portugal's integration in NATO had immediate consequences. As early as 1950, the first steps were given to implement a program of equipping the Portuguese Armed Forces, which involved the construction of new infrastructures and the receiving of a large amount of material that, in general, meant an enormous technological improvement of the Armed Forces. Additionally, it originated a process of recycling, training and developing the expertise of the Portuguese military, which extended throughout the 1950s. These changes clearly had two objectives. On the one hand, to favor a closer integration of the military structures and procedures of NATO members. On the other hand, to ensure that members of the Alliance fulfill their commitments to NATO to defend Western Europe against a possible Soviet threat. In the particular case of Portugal, these commitments included the constitution of an independent division that, in case of war, should be deployed to Central Europe, as well as the preparation of

Portuguese Navy and Air Force for anti-submarine warfare and patrol of the North Atlantic area.¹⁷

It was within this framework that profound changes were carried out in the Portuguese Armed Forces, initiating an undeniably “quiet revolution” in the military structures.¹⁸ With the direct support of the American and British military *attachés* in Lisbon and, in a later stage, with the supervision of the military structures of the Alliance, the cyclopean task of “effectively modernizing the Portuguese military structure” began. This process was focused at the level of the equipment, training and command structure, in order to transform the Portuguese Army into an efficient military force.¹⁹ This task was considered a true challenge, taking in account the preliminary assessment made by the military missions that came to Portugal between September 1950 and June 1951.

In the early 1950, the Portuguese Armed Forces were characterized by being a body full of idiosyncrasies, more political than military. For the military *attachés* in the British and American embassies in Lisbon, this was clear since the 1926 coup.²⁰ Moreover, the first contacts between the Portuguese authorities and the British and American military advisors after World War II proved that it was evident a lack of military and technical realism by the Portuguese military authorities, who demonstrated very vague ideas about the needs inherent to the development of a modern military force. For these reasons, in early 1950, the Portuguese Armed Forces were “completely lacking” in effectiveness, even in what concerned regular military operations. Despite being able to contribute to the homeland security, in case of external aggression, the Portuguese Armed Forces were fully unprepared to enroll on mission of modern warfare.²¹

When in 1950 the Atlantic Alliance intensified the formation of a joint defense system to counter the Soviet threat in Europe, it became clear to the leaders of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) that the preparation of the Portuguese Armed Forces would be a really challenging

¹⁷ See Nuno Severiano Teixeira, “Portugal e a NATO: 1949-1989” in *Análise Social* (Vol. XXX (133), 1994) 803-818.

¹⁸ António José Telo (1996), *Portugal e a NATO. O reencontro da tradição Atlântica* (Lisboa, Edições Cosmos, 1996), 201-288.

¹⁹ Letter from the Ambassador of the United States in Lisbon to William Dunham, February 28, 1951. NARA – RG59, Lot 59D108, Bx. 1. General Frank Camn proved to be the right man in the right place since he quickly established “excellent relations with Santos Costa”. Letter from the Ambassador of the United States in Lisbon to William Dunham, April 14, 1951. NARA – RG59, Lot 59D108, Bx. 1.

²⁰ Memo about the Portuguese Defense effort, September 9, 1950. NARA, RG59, Lot 59D108, Bx. 10.

²¹ Memo about the Portuguese Defense effort, June 5, 1951. NARA, RG59, CF 753.5MAP (1950-1955).

project, considering the necessity to implement new techniques and having in mind their particular political and military characteristics.²² We must not forget that in the first years of the 1950's the Atlantic Pact started a large-scale rearmament that transformed NATO in a major military commitment. The purpose of this peacetime military build-up was to establish a 'forwarded defense' of Europe, i.e. to prepare that the confrontation with the Red Army would occur in the heart of Germany.²³

As soon as 1954 the results of this transformation were evident. Since 1951, the Army had progressed from "a group of small independent units, equipped with obsolete equipment" to the creation of a "modern infantry division" destined to SHAPE in case of war. From the point of view of training and logistics, the developments since then had been "excellent", allowing the Army to be in condition to "receive, store, use and maintain" all the equipment planned in the Alliance's framework.²⁴

In what concerned the Navy, the situation was slightly different. Because the National Defense Ministry was more sensitive to the Army's wishes, the first years of the modernization of the Portuguese Armed Forces had more direct and visible consequences to the Army. However, during the first half of the 1950s, the Navy was steady developing from a fleet of all kind of small vessels, "most of them in need of modernization" towards a modern naval force, able to contribute for the assuring of the communication in Portuguese territorial waters. In 1954, nineteen vessels, mostly frigates and minesweepers, were at the Portuguese Navy's disposition, whereas additional five were being updated with the support of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program (MDAP).²⁵

Finally, in regard to the Air Force, its modernization was less evident, as this branch of the Portuguese Armed Forces was only created in May 1952. More than any other branch, the establishment of the Air Force was a direct consequence of Portugal's international commitment with NATO, highly benefiting of the "techniques, training and equipment" that were received in the framework of MDAP. Between 1951 and 1954, this new branch of the Armed

²² António José Telo, *Portugal e a NATO. O reencontro da tradição Atlântica* (Lisboa: Edições Cosmos, 1996) e António Paulo Duarte, *A Política de Defesa Nacional, 1919-1958* (Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2010). On the same subject also see Estado-Maior do Exército, *Subsídios para o estudo do esforço militar português na década de 50. Os compromissos com a OTAN*, Volume I e II, (Lisboa: Estado-Maior do Exército, 1988).

²³ Tony Judt, *Postwar*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 150-152.

²⁴ Briefing Paper on the military assistance to Portugal, March 15, 1954. NARA – RG59, Lot File 59D108, Cx. 2.

²⁵ Briefing Paper on the military assistance to Portugal, March 15, 1954. NARA – RG59, Lot File 59D108, Cx. 2.

Forces had grown from just a group of officers who flew British planes into a “modern force” with fighter units for the defense of the Portuguese metropolitan area and bombers in support of the Portuguese Navy for the defense of the Euro-Atlantic communication lines.²⁶

In conclusion, the Portuguese Armed Forces had made a long journey, becoming a force with a smaller military power, adjusted to its economic and military-technical possibilities, but “balanced, stable and efficient”. In this, NATO and the U.S technical assistance had a leading role, capable of transmitting on to the Portuguese Armed Forces the sense of joint action, “giving them a logical aggregator.”²⁷ In fact, the development of political and military cooperation between the United States and its NATO partners was extremely relevant to the deepening of the Portuguese participation in the Alliance, which ultimately, had a strong impact on the Portuguese Armed Forces. Being the ASC a very important body of the Portuguese Army, it was, as we shall see ahead, clearly affected by this process of modernization.

Impacts of NATO’s modernization in the Army Staff Corps

Since the earliest moments of the Portuguese Armed Forces preparation for the European defense effort, it became clear to the SHAPE officers working in connection to the Portuguese authorities that one of the main problems of the Portuguese Army was the inadequacy of the General Staff officers’ training. According to the British Embassy in Lisbon, the military institution responsible for this instruction, the Institute for Advanced Military Studies, took three years to train an officer of the General Staff, in fully inadequate facilities (Caxias) and with methods and techniques completely out of date. Therefore, it did not took much time to the external observers to conclude that the Portuguese General Staff officers were not prepared to serve in modern warfare missions, including the ASC members.²⁸

In fact, by the end of 1952, the curricula structure of the General Staff course followed directives and methods established in early 1940, thus, not reflecting the ideas and strategies developed and implemented during World War II. Even though if in 1947 had occurred some minor curricula update, it had not been the Portuguese Army purpose to operate a complete revision of the strategic

²⁶ Briefing Paper on the military assistance to Portugal, March 15, 1954. NARA – RG59, Lot File 59D108, Cx. 2.

²⁷ Duarte, *A Política de Defesa Nacional*, op. cit., 271-272.

²⁸ Report on the Portuguese Army in the year 1952. National Archives, United Kingdom – FO/371/107646.

paradigms that were the cornerstone of the General Staff instruction.²⁹ In reality, the official education of the General Staff officers was mainly focused on preparing these soldiers to carry out missions in general headquarters or in connection with government authorities, all located in Lisbon.³⁰

But with the entry of Portugal in NATO, this paradigm needed a change. According to the North Atlantic military planning the new great mission attributed to the Portuguese Army was to develop the ability to prepare soldiers to be deployed in France, in order to help against the common NATO enemy, the Soviet Union. In this sense, the Portuguese General Staff officers had to be able to perform tasks in the general staffs at a division level, rather than to be able to fulfill its duties within general headquarters or governmental positions.³¹

For this reason, the Portuguese government had to reshape the curricula and the organization of the General Staff course, in order to prepare the Army for its new objective. The former General Staff course was divided into two, a general course, with two years length, and a higher-level advance course (Curso complementar) of one year. After these three years, the General Staff officers were able to enter into the restrict Army Staff Corps, where they could perform all general staff duties, both in the higher and the lower levels of command. However, the officers who had completed the general course were immediately authorize to perform General Staff duties at the divisional levels, in order to support the increasing necessity of General Staff officers created by the constitution of a Portuguese Army division to be deployed in France in case of war against the Soviet Union.³²

Despite this change, the main problem of the General Staff officers' instruction remained. According to reports made by SHAPE officers in Portugal, the curricula and structure still remained very theoretical, giving little consideration to the technical aspects of the military career. In other words, there was too much focus at social sciences and humanities, especially subjects like

²⁹ See Decree-Law 30264, January 10, 1940 and Decree-Law 36238, April 21, 1947, accessed on November 24, 2011, <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1940/01/00800/00500055.pdf>

³⁰ Mission report from SHAPE in Portugal, August 11, 1953. Arquivo da Defesa Nacional – Sr. 01.500.01.

³¹ Report on the Portuguese Army in the year 1952. National Archives, United Kingdom – FO/371/107646.

³² See Decree-Law 39053, December 26, 1952 and Decree-Law 39054, December 26, 1952, accessed on November 24, 2011, <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1952/12/28900/13491352.pdf> and <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1952/12/28900/13521354.pdf>

history, geography, political economy, and sociology, and little attention to subjects like military tactics and General Staff duties.³³

It became clear that the governmental changes made in 1952 were not enough to modernize the Portuguese General Staff system. Basically, because the fate of most of the officers who completed the General Staff course was, still, the integration into the Army Staff Corps, a restricted and protected group within the Army. And, to the foreign observers, this was its major weakness. Thus, what began as essentially a problem of training and instruction quickly evolved into a political issue concerning the Portuguese Army structure and organization.

In fact, for the Portuguese military authorities the changes implemented due to NATO pressures were putting in risk the characteristics of the General Staff course and of the ASC. General Álvaro Teles Ferreira de Passos, director of the Institute for Advanced Military Studies, was one of the main critics of these transformations. Even though he did not agree with the existence of a closed ASC, he was against the conversion of the General Staff course in a simple General Staff techniques training program. According to him, the general staff instruction tradition in Portugal followed the French school of the *École Supérieure de Guerre*, which meant that the main objective of the officers who enrolled the General Staff Course was to prepare themselves, in the beginning of their career, to be the future generals of the Portuguese Army.³⁴ In this sense, the “Americanization” of the Portuguese methods and military doctrines could become a future problem due to the risk of an exclusivist approach to the US methods, caused by simple fascination by the modern proceedings. To him, this was the first step to acknowledge the United States “supremacy” in the international politics, which, according to him, was still to be decided.³⁵ In other words, it is clear that in a conservative organization such as the Portuguese Army, the sudden changes forced by the country’s accession to NATO were received with suspicion caused by the American overwhelming power in Western Europe.

These differences between Portuguese military authorities and SHAPE officials were evident in the aftermath of the first military exercises of the Portuguese Division carried out in Santa Margarida. During these exercises, the

³³ Mission report from SHAPE in Portugal, August 11, 1953. Arquivo da Defesa Nacional – Sr. 01.500.01.

³⁴ “Opening Lecture of the Academic Year 1951-1952 by General Álvaro Teles Ferreira de Passos” In Instituto de Altos Estudos Militares, *Conferências Realizadas no IAEM nas Sessões Solenes de Abertura dos Anos Escolares de 1950 a 1955 pelo Exmo. Senhor General Álvaro Teles Ferreira de Passos*, (Caxias: IAEM),12-13.

³⁵ “Opening Lecture of the Academic Year 1952-1953 by General Álvaro Teles Ferreira de Passos” In Instituto de Altos Estudos Militares, *Conferências Realizadas no IAEM nas Sessões Solenes de Abertura dos Anos Escolares de 1950 a 1955 pelo Exmo. Senhor General Álvaro Teles Ferreira de Passos*, (Caxias: IAEM),11-12.

British Major-General Napier White, SHAPE's Deputy Chief of Staff, visited Portugal in order to assess the developments made by the Portuguese Army. Privately, he made some considerations to the Portuguese Minister of Defense, Santos Costa, about the instruction of the General Staff officers. Realizing that it was a "delicate" Portuguese problem, the British general considered that the characteristics of the Portuguese General Staff put into question the goal of "creating an authentic and worthy modern combat division". In his opinion, the Portuguese General Staff system consisted "by few" officers who attended the three years course, enrolling immediately at the highest levels of general headquarters. This situation tended to take the "best officers and keep them away from combat troops during most of their service," which would certainly end up by creating a true "military *trade union* or an *upper caste* within the Army". To him, it was something that could never bring good result to the normal operation of a modern Army.³⁶

Even though the changes made in late 1952 were "a step in the right direction", they were not enough since they did not find a solution to the major system error, based on a wrong idea of what were the duties of a General Staff officer. In fact, the new legislation demanded that the General Staff officer should fulfill a year of service in lower level headquarters, in order to improve the officers' command experience.

But through the contacts with the Portuguese officials, it was clear that they still believed the duties of the General Staff officers within divisional and regimental levels were missions with little importance. According to White, this was a false idea and, just to give an example, he assured the Portuguese Minister of Defense that in the British, the French and the U.S. Armed Forces, the most important functions of the General Staff officers were those carried out within lower-level units. That is to say: the military missions in which these officers were in contact with the troops providing a bi-directional flow of information between a commanding officer and the subordinate military units.³⁷

SHAPE's remarks caused a new revision of General Staffs officers' training, just two years after the last change. This time the goal was to ensure a "quick preparation" of officers to perform duties on small units. Basically, it meant a true paradigm shift in relation to the typical functions of staff officers in

³⁶ Note from SHAPE's Officer, General Napier White to the Portuguese Minister of Defense, May 11, 1954. Arquivo Histórico Militar – Repartição do Gabinete, PAN, F6G/34/12/258/137, 1953.

³⁷ Note from SHAPE's Officer, General Napier White to the Portuguese Minister of Defense, May 11, 1954. Arquivo Histórico Militar – Repartição do Gabinete, PAN, F6G/34/12/258/137, 1953.

Portugal, usually carried out within the Ministry of Defense as well as in the general headquarters.³⁸

Thus, the general course was meant to last only for one year, with the main instruction focusing on military tactics and General Staff duties, preparing the officers to assume General Staff's duties in small units and independent groups at a divisional level. All graduates with the general course were required to do two years of service with troops, whether they were chosen or not to continue their training for the Advanced Course. This course now had the duration of two years during which they would get a "much broader education, including non-military matters, in order to prepare selected officers for the General Staff work at a higher level". Only those officers who had successfully completed the advanced course would be admitted to the Army Staff Corps, a situation that, ultimately, ended up reinforcing the uniqueness of this group.³⁹ In terms of curriculum, we can say that this legislation had an important role in strengthening the technical instruction of General Staff officers and the reduction of disciplines related to humanities and social sciences, which remained compulsory only to students of the advanced course.⁴⁰

Consequently, we can see that the Portuguese military authorities, under the pressure of NATO, finally adapted the training of general staff officers to the necessities of preparing the Portuguese Army for the defense commitments assumed by Portugal. According to the British Embassy "after two years of gentle persuasion" the Portuguese government "accepted all recommendations" from SHAPE, assuring a "steady flow of young officers able to take their place in command of small division units". However, the only advice that the Portuguese did not follow was the call to the extinction of the Army Staff Corps, whose "evil" continued to affect the Portuguese Army, creating a separation between General Staff officers. That is, despite accepting the revision at the training level, Portuguese military authorities refused to extinguish the PASC, thus protecting the existence of what SHAPE considered to be an *upper caste* within the Army.⁴¹

Conclusion: the limited impact of NATO in ASC

³⁸ Decree-Law 39941, November 25, 1954, accessed on November 24, 2011, <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1954/11/26400/14121414.pdf>

³⁹ Report #6 from lieutenant-colonel Jennings, January 8, 1955. Arquivo Histórico Militar – Repartição do Gabinete, PAN, F6G/34/12/258/135.

⁴⁰ Report #6 from lieutenant-colonel Jennings, January 8, 1955. Arquivo Histórico Militar – Repartição do Gabinete, PAN, F6G/34/12/258/135.

⁴¹ Report on the Portuguese Army in the year 1954. National Archives, Reino Unido – FO/371/117766.

The ASC clearly suffered the consequences of Portuguese adhesion to NATO. The modernization developed in the Western European Armed Forces in early Cold War proved to be a challenge to an idiosyncratic Portuguese Army, highly submissive to the political power of Salazar's authoritarian regime. As we have seen, in the first years of its consolidation, the *Estado Novo* sought to bind the ASC officers to a political compromise. In exchange of a higher income, a prestigious career in high command headquarters and a wide-ranging instruction that went from the military subjects to history, politics and mathematics, the ASC officers were expected to give to the new regime their political loyalty, based on the idea of military efficiency.

After the World War II, Portugal's accession to NATO originated a process of modernization of the country's Armed Forces. The necessity of building up an efficient and effective modern Army division affected the balance within the Portuguese Army, with clear impacts on the ASC. The need for General Staff officers, especially in lower ranks, forced the regime to implement reforms in the General Staff instruction. However, what started as a training requirement quickly became a call for the extinction of the Army Staff Corps, an idiosyncrasy of the Portuguese Army that fostered the existence of sub-groups within a military organization with a traditionally strong political activity.

Nevertheless, the adjustments demanded by SHAPE's officials working in Lisbon were implemented only until a certain point. Even though the Portuguese authorities accepted to change the duration of the General Staff course in order to increase the number of officers able to perform General Staff duties, the ASC maintained its closed character. Therefore, it is clear that NATO was vital for the modernization of the Portuguese Armed Forces but, in what concerns the ASC, we can say that it was not able to reverse the elitist nature of this particular body of the Portuguese Army.