

**The Portuguese
Connection by Air
Commodore Roland
Eugene Vintras. Book
review by Lt. Gen Vernon
A. Walters**

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THE PORTUGUESE CONNECTION. By *Air Commodore Roland Eugene Vintras, CBE*. Bachman & Turner, London, 1974.

The Portuguese Connection is an interesting anecdotal book that serves admirably to illustrate the unique 600-year treaty relationship between Great Britain and Portugal and the good use made of that relationship in 1943 to obtain essential base rights for Allied Naval and Air Forces in the Azores.

A 70-page appendix sets forth the original 1373 Treaty of Alliance and Friendship and the changes wrought in a half-dozen revisions by 1703. It is interesting, however, that the British in 1943 maintained that their request was still based on the principles set forth in 1373.

That treaty stipulated that if one signatory should find itself at war, the other should furnish such aid as was requested "in as far as is compatible with the danger threatening himself or his Kingdom." The Portuguese government, in fact, offered in 1941 to declare war on Germany in accordance with the treaty, but the United Kingdom at that time would have been hard-pressed to offer any reciprocal aid, and asked the Portuguese to stay neutral. As one byproduct, the Portuguese were to upgrade Azores air facilities to handle heavy aircraft such as Fortresses and Liberators, but the British would afford only long-range advice and send no personnel to the Azores.

The Battle of the Atlantic made the difference. In less than two years, the British came to realize that Azores bases were essential to extend air cover over the mid-Atlantic "gaps" where U-boat wolfpacks could tear at the convoys without interference.

The rest of the book concerns primarily the pulling and hauling within the British government over the proper approach: what guarantees could be offered to Lisbon and when? Was President Salazar pro-Nazi? And should it be a request, or an ultimatum, and should it be followed up by armed seizure if necessary?

Ironically, the documents show that on June 18^{*} the British Ambassador handed Salazar a mild communication asking for the desired collaboration, and Salazar replied warmly on June 23 agreeing in

principle, with details to be hammered out. A British force disembarked in the Azores on Oct. 8 to complete the preparations, and by Nov. 9 the aircraft had their first U-boat kill.

Except for a few scattered paragraphs, the intelligence reader has to dig for intelligence value in this book. It has to do primarily with the successful effort to conceal the negotiations from the Germans, who had a pervasive espionage system in Lisbon at the time.

Vintras, of course, is not the disinterested reporter here. A career RAF officer, he was a member of the joint Planning Staff of the British Chiefs of Staff, subordinate to the War Cabinet, from 1940 through most of 1943, and played a major role in the negotiations with Portugal. He finished the war as Director of Intelligence in the Air Ministry, and then served three years in the joint Intelligence Bureau of the Ministry of Defense before retiring.

In Vintras' book there is little, if any, mention of U.S. activities to help convince the Portuguese to make the Azores available to the Allies. In April 1943 I accompanied Lt. Colonel Craveiro Lopes and Major Costa Macedo on a two-month trip around the United States, showing them U.S. military installations and industrial power. (The U.S. entry into the war was, of course, the single greatest element in the ultimate Portuguese decision.) When initially I saw the schedule for the Portuguese visitors, I asked whether we were really going to show them all this — Lockheed at Fort Worth, building four-engine bombers on a visibly moving assembly line; Higgins, building landing craft at New Orleans; Kaiser, launching ships in California at an incredible rate; and Chrysler, building tanks in Detroit. I was told that we had reached the point where we no longer wanted to hide; we wanted to show.

When Craveiro Lopes and Costa Macedo arrived, they had recently visited the Eastern Front and were enormously impressed by the effectiveness of the German Armed Forces. Craveiro Lopes told me early in his visit that we could not invade Europe through the Atlantic wall. Before the end of his visit, standing in the Curtiss-Wright factory in Buffalo and looking at the long line of C-46 aircraft under construction, all of which had hooks on the tail to tow gliders, he looked at me, startled, and said, "Now I see you are going over the Atlantic wall." "Over and through," I replied. These hooks greatly impressed him, and he never again challenged the fact that we would land in Europe. Costa Macedo was staggered by the aircraft factories and tank production lines.

Diplomatically, the State Department was pressing the Portuguese Minister to the U.S., Joao de Bianchi, in support of the British efforts to get base rights. I recall one conversation with Bianchi in which he told me confidentially that he was in favor of granting the Allies the bases, but Lisbon feared a German attack in the islands. I pointed out to him that the Azores were beyond the range of almost every aircraft in the German Air Force. The Germans could strike at metropolitan Portugal only through Spain, and they would not want to get into an additional war at this stage.

Contrary to what Vintras says, the U.S. did recognize the importance of the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty relationship and it was made clear to me in 1943 that this was the umbrella under which we intended to slide into the Azores as subtenants of the British.

There are minor inconsistencies. Vintras says that English was the lingua franca in Portugal in 1943, not French. That is nonsense. To this day far more people in Portugal speak French than English. It is just much easier for them than English.

The book is an interesting account of the British efforts to obtain base rights from the Portuguese. It simply omits any reference to the significant part played by the U.S. and even Brazil which was prepared to conduct the Azores takeover if it became necessary.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL VERNON A. WALTERS

Footnotes

*Apparently the request was conveyed to Salazar on June 16, followed by the AideMemoire two days later. Vintras with obvious carelessness refers to a request on June 16 and an answer "the next day — 17th August." Vintras also has the British Military Mission to implement the agreement arriving at Lisbon on June 10.

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