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*The role of the military in political transitions:  
from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day*

**XLIX International Congress of Military History**

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## Volume II





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# PORTUGUESE MILITARY ENGINEERS AND POLITICS

*José Paulo BERGER* (Portugal)

## Abstract

In Portugal, politics also tried military engineers. Many were attracted to it, finding in it a vast field suitable for the application of their intelligence, the use of their skills, the development of their creative activities, reforming or, simply, administrative.

Soon, after the creation of the *Real Corpo de Engenheiros*, we find military engineers in all turbulent phases of national politics: in the Provisional Government of 1820, in the bloody era of the civil war, after the consolidation of liberalism, in the advent of the colonialist regime, after the establishment of the Republic, during the Estado-Novo and colonial war, in the 25th of April and in the III Republic.

There are several eras – many men, all military engineers, who, faced with difficulties, we are certain that they fulfilled their duty, often with the sacrifice of their stability and their own career, so we have a duty to respect and remember their memory

**Keywords:** Portugal history, military engineers, politics

## Introduction

I will try to share with you a little bit of the military history of my country and about some military engineers, that since the beginning of the 19th century, until today, also distinguished themselves in national politics and contributed to raising Portugal's name in the world.

## Portugal in the World

Portugal, officially Portuguese Republic, is a State in Southern Europe, located on the Iberian Peninsula, independent since October 5th, 1143, by the Treaty of Zamora, and sovereign of its European continental territory – *«where the land ends and the sea begins»* – as the great Portuguese poet Luiz Vaz de Camões proclaimed.

Portugal's borders with Spain, the other peninsular State, have been defined since September 12th, 1297, by the Treaty of Alcañices, being the oldest stabilized borders in Europe.

Within the limits of Portugal's current political border over the centuries they inhabited different civilizations, since the pre-Roman Iberian peoples, then by Romans, Barbarians, Visigoths, and Muslims.

There are several traces of his presence, not only archaeological, such as Roman bridges and roads that facilitated connections between cities and villages, but also scientific – Muslim hydraulics, astronomy, cartography, medicine – that remain alive in the Portuguese culture and language of our days.

With the reconquest of the Peninsula and the consolidation of Portuguese territory defense needs multiplied along its borders.

Religious and military orders, and fortification experts, built formidable castles, notable engineering works, that still persist today in the Portuguese landscape.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, from Portugal the caravels left to link maritimately Europe to the rest of the world, establishing commercial and political relationships and alliances with distant peoples and territories, which today are testimonies of the great epic of the Portuguese Discoveries.

Between 1580 and 1640, the crowns of Portugal and Spain joined in a dynastic union which covered their respective overseas possessions in America, Asia and Africa, under the control of the Spanish monarchy, during the so-called Filipe's dynasty.

During the 17th century, the growing assault on Portuguese trading posts in India and Brazil and Spanish in America by the Dutch, English and French, led to an increase in Spanish naval military power and the reinforcement of the overseas fortification of those territories, in a period in which the evolution of artillery would lead to the birth of the bulwarked fortification in whose art and science the military engineer stood out.

In 1640, with the acclamation of a Portuguese king the dynastic union between Portugal and Spain was dissolved, which led to a long war between the two peninsular states, which only ended with the Treaty of Lisbon, on February 13th, 1668.

## The Corps of Military Engineers

During this period the defence and fortification of Portugal and Ultramar was reinforced, making it necessary to teach many new and Portuguese military engineers. For this purpose, it was created the *Aula de Fortificação de Lisboa* [*Lisbon fortification class*] that over time allowed to establish the scientific bases from the Portuguese school of fortification.

In Portugal, in the 18th century, military engineers were very active because the State sponsored the construction of large infrastructures, buildings, hydraulic works, roads, bridges, canals and ports, ordered the delimitation and lifting of Portugal's borders in South America and rebuild the city of Lisbon, after the great earthquake of 1755,

These engineers, who at the end of the Old Regime, were contemporaries of the industrial revolution, privileged for their scientific and cultural studies, being great men of science corresponded with their foreign counterparts all over Europe.

This is when the Royal Corps of Engineers and other similar institutions will be implemented and consolidated.

## Military Engineers and Politics

Due to its multidisciplinary training, skills, global vision, experience and technical-scientific knowledge many military engineers took over, casually or intentionally, political functions in more or less troubled and difficult periods in the History of Portugal.

In the last 224 years, since the transition from the 18th century to the 19th century, until today, Portugal has undergone several political transformations that can be grouped as follows:

Absolutism until 1820; Liberalism from 1820 onwards; Regeneration from 1851 until the implementation of the First Republic in 1910; Second Republic and Estado Novo, between 1926 and 1974; and finally the Third Republic, from the «*Carnation Revolution*», on April 25th, 1974, to the present.

Politics also tempted Military Engineers. Many were attracted to politics, finding a vast field suitable for the application of their intelligence and their creative activities and faculties, reforming or, simply, administrative skills.

It is about them, some less known, that this presentation is about. They were chosen because they are associated with significant political changes. They are:

**Matias José Dias Azedo**, military engineer, commander of the Royal Corps of Engineers, participated in the 1820 revolution as a member of the provisional government and later as secretary of the Supreme Provisional Junta of the Kingdom.

**Marino Miguel Franzini**, naval officer and later military engineer and man of science, was one of the most committed drafters of the 1822 constitution, having held several ministerial roles.

**Luís da Silva Mouzinho de Albuquerque**, military engineer, poet and scientist was a deputy in several sessions, assuming responsibility for some ministries from an early age.

**Bernardo de Sá Nogueira de Figueiredo**, Marquis de Sá da Bandeira, military engineer who completed his training in France and England. He was a politician for almost forty years and as prime minister he ended slavery in Portugal, in 1869.

**António Maria Fontes Pereira de Melo**, military engineer and a deputy. When he was in government, he modernized the army and navy, created the Ministry of Public Works, increased the number of roads, built the first section of the railways, set up the first telegraph line, started the revolution in transport and communications, inaugurating regular steamboat routes, postal services and telephone networks. He wanted to remove the country's backwardness.

**João de Andrade Corvo**, military engineer, deputy, professor and diplomat, deeply knowledgeable about the reality of the African continent, encouraged its discovery, knowledge and development. He participated in the Berlin Conference of 1884.

**Carlos Roma do Bocage**, military engineer who stood out as a member of the Defence Commission of Lisbon and its port. As a diplomat he also participated in the Berlin Conference. Later he was Minister of Foreign Affairs. With the establishment of the Republic, in 1910, as it was monarchical, it requested transfer to the reserve.

**Bernardo Pinheiro Correia de Melo**, Count de Arnoso, military engineer, diplomat and writer. He was a close friend of King D. Carlos I, and so he was appointed his private secretary, and retiring after the Regicide. Integrated into Lisbon's intellectual circles, he was part of the group known as the «*Vencidos da Vida*» [*Life Vanquishedes*], using the literary pseudonym, Bernardo Pindela.

**Alfredo Augusto Freire de Andrade**, military engineer, professor and Africanist. He was Director-General of the Colonies and Minister of Foreign Affairs, having participated in the Peace Conference in Versailles and being a Delegate of Portugal at the first assembly of the League of Nations in 1920.

**Raul Augusto Esteves**, military engineer, was the Commander of the Railway Sappers Battalion of the Portuguese expeditionary corps in France during the Great War and was deeply involved in the revolutions prior to the May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1926. He used the military means at his disposal to carry out circulate trains countering strikes and stoppages by railway workers.

**Afonso Pinto de Magalhães Galvão Mexia de Almeida Fernandes**, military engineer, was on several military missions abroad. He was part of the official mission with the French General Staff and NATO, in Paris. He was Undersecretary of State and Minister of the Army and in the “Abrilada” of April 11th, 1961, he assisted the Minister of Defence, Botelho Moniz, in the failed attempt to remove António de Oliveira Salazar.

**Nuno Manuel Guimarães Fisher Lopes Pires**, military engineer. On April 25th, 1974, during the military operation «*Viragem Histórica*» [*Historical Turn*], he was at the MFA – *Movimento das Forças Armadas* [*Armed Forces Movement*] *Command Post*, acting as deputy to the Operational Coordination and Control Command that directed the military movements. Wrote the MFA statements to be read on radio stations. He was a member of the *Junta de Salvação Nacional* and of the *Conselho da Revolução*.

**José Eduardo Fernandes de Sanches Osório**, military engineer and lawyer, was also a member of the MFA Coordinating Committee and was also at the Command Post where he was responsible for recording the diary of military operation events.

**Luís Ernesto de Albuquerque Ferreira de Macedo**, military engineer was also a member of the MFA Coordinating Committee and was also at the Command Post on April, 25th. He was the coordinator’s main support, participated in the preparation of the Operations Order and organized the space where the «*Carnation Revolution*» **Command Post was installed.**<sup>(1)</sup>

**Vasco Joaquim Rocha Vieira**, military engineer, was the last Portuguese governor responsible for administering the territory of the city of Santo Nome de Deus de Macau

## Conclusions

Today the participation in politics of military engineers in the effectiveness of service is non-existent. It is not due to a lack of qualifications, skills or desire, because the basic education of a Portuguese military engineer corresponds to a master’s degree of seven years of university studies which prepares him militarily for the dual role of engineer and sapper.

The applicable legislation, despite allowing it in some situations, it constitutionally imposes a distance between the military and political action to which is added the fact that military engineers in Portugal are few enough to fulfil the multiple tasks necessary for the normal functioning of the Portuguese Armed Forces.

Despite these constraints, Portuguese military engineers are always ready to carry out engineering missions anywhere in the world where they are needed.

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1. The military coup of April 25th, 1974, which has now passed fifty years, an operation codenamed «*Historical Turn*», was commanded from this Command post installed in the barracks of Engineering regiment number one and with the enthusiasm, support and eagerness to freedom of the population of the city of Lisbon, quickly turned into the «*Carnation Revolution*».

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### **Author's short CV**

José Paulo Ribeiro Berger, military engineer, Portuguese army colonel, head of the Military Engineering Archaeological Studies Office of the Army Infrastructure Directorate, professor of Fortification and Military Architecture, at the Portuguese Military Academy, with a postgraduate degree in Museology and Museography from the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Lisbon, corresponding member of the Scientific Council of the Portuguese Commission of Military History, senior member of the Portuguese Engineers Order, member of the Consultative Council of the Association for the Historical and Tourist Development of the Lines of Torres Vedras, member of the Lisbon Geography Society, member of the Association of Portuguese Archaeologists, member of the Portuguese Association of Friends of Castles, and member of the Association of Friends of the Portuguese Coast Artillery.

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