

Ministry of National Defence
PORTUGUESE COMMISSION OF MILITARY HISTORY

ACTA 2024

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

XLIX International Congress of Military History

1 - 6 September 2024, Lisbon

Volume II





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Published by:

Portuguese Commission of Military History

Av. Ilha da Madeira, n.º 1, Room 332

1400-204 Lisboa - Portugal

Coordinator and editor: Jorge Silva Rocha, PhD

Cover Design: Jorge Silva Rocha

Book cover images: Alfredo Cunha (*front*) and Eduardo Gageiro (*back*)

ISBN: 978-989-8593-31-3

DOI for this volume: <https://doi.org/10.56092/VXIU5336>

Printed in Portugal by Rainho & Neves - Artes Gráficas

LIEUTENANT SUAREZ: A FEMALE WAR VETERAN IN THE PARTY POLITICS OF REDEMOCRATIZATION IN BRAZIL (1945-1947)

Daniel MATA ROQUE (Brazil)

Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze the biographical trajectory of the Brazilian military nurse Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger and her entry into political disputes from the 1940s. Suarez served as a lieutenant nurse during the Second World War, joining the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, in 1944 and 1945, in the first group of military women in the country. Back in Brazil, she ran in 1947 for the position of councilor in the city of Curitiba, capital of the state of Paraná, in the south of Brazil. That year, the first municipal elections took place in Brazil in almost two decades, after fifteen years of the authoritarian and centralizing government of Getúlio Vargas, and the first after the institution of female suffrage in the country, in 1932. With a micro-historical approach, we analyzed the motivations which culminated in the participation of a military woman and war veteran in the dispute supporter of that moment of transition policy and democratic restart, in a scenario until then almost exclusively male.

Keywords: Second World War; Brazilian Expeditionary Force; 1947 elections; Microhistory.

Introduction

In 1932, the new Brazilian Electoral Code was sanctioned, which created the Electoral Court to conduct voting processes and enshrined women's right to vote and be voted. The following year, the State of São Paulo elected the country's first federal deputy, doctor Carlota Queiróz, to the Constituent Assembly.⁽¹⁾

In 1944, with the sending of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force to fight in the Second World War (1939-1945), the volunteering process was opened to incorporate nurses, who became the first women legally admitted as military personnel in the Brazilian Armed Forces.⁽²⁾

In this period of social revolution and new patterns of behavior, in which "the seizure of power by the skirts seemed imminent"⁽³⁾, some biographies stand out and emerge as representative of groups, ideas and even eccentric rarities.

This article aims to discuss, analytically, the biographical trajectory^{(4),(5)} of military nurse Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger through her political performance in the 1947 municipal elections in Curitiba, capital of the State of Paraná, in the southern region of Brazil.

To this end, we use the historical method, in the dimension of Social History and in the domain of Women's History⁽⁶⁾, and we proceed with a micro-historical approach.^{(7),(8)} To construct the narrative we started from documentary sources and journalistic materials located in the Army Historical Archive, the National Library, the Expeditionary Museum and the Public Archive of Paraná, with the documentation selection criterion being adherence to the investigation in the time frame from 1945 to 1947. Using the data triangulation technique⁽⁹⁾, information was crossed, compared, validated or questioned, as a strategy to provide credibility and reliability to the results.

1. Paolo Ricci e Jaqueline Porto Zulini, *Almanaque de dados eleitorais: Primeira República (1889-1930)*, (Brasília: TSE, 2023).

2. Daniel Mata Roque, *A Veterana*, (Rio de Janeiro: AHIMTB, 2019).

3. Mary Del Priore, *Sobreviventes e guerreiras: uma breve história das mulheres no Brasil (1500-2000)*, (São Paulo: Planeta, 2020), 157.

4. Pierre Bourdieu, "A ilusão biográfica" in *Usos e abusos da história oral*, coord. Janáina Amado e Marieta de Moraes Ferreira, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1996).

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6. José D'Assunção Barros, *O campo da história*, (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2013).

7. Carlo Ginzburg, *A micro-história e outros ensaios*, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Bertrand Brasil, 1989).

8. Carlo Ginzburg, *O fio e os rastros*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2007).

9. Alda Judith Alves-Mazzotti e Fernando Gewandsznajder, *Método nas ciências naturais e sociais: pesquisa quantitativa e qualitativa*, (São Paulo: Pioneira, 2001).

Woman and war

Maria da Conceição Suarez was born in Curitiba, capital of the State of Paraná, on February 2, 1909⁽¹⁰⁾, daughter of Bartolomeu Adolfo Vidal Suarez and Conceição Gonçalves Suarez, natives of Rio Grande do Sul. At twenty years of age, she was one meter and sixty and two centimeters tall, white, brown hair and eyes.⁽¹¹⁾

She graduated as a normalist teacher from the Institute of Education of the State of Paraná and began teaching primary classes in schools run by the Department of Education, from July 1932, with emphasis on Grupo Escolar Lisímaco Ferreira da Costa, in Curitiba.

She took the Brazilian Red Cross Samaritan Nurse course in Curitiba in 1940. Having volunteered to join the Brazilian Expeditionary Force (1944-1945) during the Second World War (1939-1945), Suarez was enrolled in the Emergency Army Reserve Nurses (CEERE), held at the headquarters of the 5th Military Region, to adapt techniques and practices of military culture, where she graduated with a final average of 9.66 and an “excellent” grade.⁽¹²⁾

In her volunteer form for the Army, she declared that she had six months of experience in hospital practice, was fluent in Portuguese and Spanish and did not know how to drive.

She went to Italy with the 14th group of nurses, leaving Rio de Janeiro by plane on October 19, 1944. The trip had several stops in Brazilian territory, particularly in Natal, capital of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte and then headquarters of an American air base, nicknamed the Trampoline of Victory in the connection between the American and African continents. Suarez stayed in Natal for ten days and continued with stops in the North African region, already controlled by the Allies. She arrived in Naples on November 3 of the same year.⁽¹³⁾

During the war she served in the surgical clinic sector of three North American hospitals: the 182nd Station Hospital, the 300th General Hospital and the 45th General Hospital, this one for most of the time.

Maria Suarez left Italy on June 5, 1945, one month after the end of the war, integrated into the 10th group of nurses. She set foot on Brazilian soil again on June 18, when she disembarked in Natal, having arrived in Rio de Janeiro three days later. Back in Brazil, she was released from active service in October 1945, returning to her hometown. She was awarded the Campaign Medal, the War Medal and the Brazilian Red Cross Medal (*gold*).

10. This is stated in Valadares, 1976, p. 83, and on her birth certificate, registered only in 1927, by herself. Her marriage certificate, however, states the year 1911. Both certificates are deposited in the Arquivo Histórico do Exército, Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

11. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

12. Elza Cansanção, *E foi assim que a cobra fumou*, (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1987).

13. Altamira Pereira Valadares, *Álbum biográfico das febianas*, (Batatais: Centro de Documentação Histórica do Brasil, 1976).

She received some praise, collective or individual, on her change sheets, the history of the military's professional life. We highlight one, signed by Medical Lieutenant Colonel Augusto Sette Ramalho, head of the Brazilian Hospitalization Section (SBH) of the 45th General Hospital:

[Nurse Maria da Conceição Suarez] worked from the beginning in a ward with great responsibility and knew how to respond to the effort required of her. She demonstrated her ability to work, correctness, good will and always maintained a commendable attitude. I thank you for everything you did, with which you maintained the high opinion I have always had of you.⁽¹⁴⁾

Maria da Conceição Suarez married on October 29, 1949, Major Gert Greger, a native of Västervik, Sweden, who during the Second World War joined the United Kingdom Air Force as a mechanic. We infer that the two met in Italy during the war, but it was not possible to confirm it documentarily. The marriage certificate states that the groom was six years younger than the bride, who started signing Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger, with his surname. Both declared to reside in Curitiba.⁽¹⁵⁾ The couple had no children.

After the war, Suarez resumed her primary teaching career at the Department of Education of the State of Paraná, where, as a nurse, she also worked as a health educator.⁽¹⁶⁾ In May 1955, nurse Suarez participated in the celebrations for the ten years since

the end of the war, promoted by the Legião Paranaense do Expedicionario in Curitiba. On that occasion, she was interviewed for an article in the newspaper *Diário do Paraná*, in which she recalls the context of Victory Day, May 8, 1945, when she was on duty and worked at the 45th General Hospital, in the city of Livorno: "It was one of the great days of humanity. We cried and laughed, we and the Italian people. I like to remember that."⁽¹⁷⁾

Nurse, military and politician

In 1947, the first municipal elections took place in Brazil in almost fifteen years. It was the third electoral cycle since the end of the Estado Novo (1937-1945), marked by the federal election of December 1945, and the first municipal electoral process since the creation of the Electoral Court and the female vote legislation in Brazil, both achievements of 1932.⁽¹⁸⁾

14. Altamira Pereira Valadares, *Álbum biográfico das febianas*, (Batatais: Centro de Documentação Histórica do Brasil, 1976), 83.

15. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

16. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

17. "Comemoram os expedicionários paranaenses o Dia da Vitória", *Diário do Paraná*, 08 mai 08, 1955, 21.

18. Paolo Ricci e Jaqueline Porto Zulini, *Almanaque de dados eleitorais: Primeira República (1889-1930)*, (Brasília: TSE, 2023).

On January 19, 1947, senators, federal deputies, governors, state/district deputies and councilors were elected (these only in the then Federal District, city of Rio de Janeiro)⁽¹⁹⁾. Between September 1947 and March 1948, municipal elections for mayors, vice-mayors and councilors took place, with the majority of elections across the country taking place in November.⁽²⁰⁾ For the first time, municipal elections would take place in a coordinated manner across the country, although not yet on a synchronized date. Brazil then had 1,677 municipalities.⁽²¹⁾

In the State of Paraná, then with 79 cities, municipal elections took place synchronously on November 16, 1947, with 267,977 registered voters and the turnout of 181,416.⁽²²⁾ The city of Curitiba then had just over forty-five thousand voters, in a population of around one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants.⁽²³⁾

In this context, military nurse Maria da Conceição Suarez ran as a candidate for the Curitiba City Council, in a campaign marked by five female candidates for the Curitiba municipal legislature: Juvellaine Ferreira Paredes (for the Brazilian Socialist Party – PSB), Maria da Conceição Suarez (for the Social Labor Party – PST), Maria Olympia Carneiro (for the Social Labor Party – PST), Olga da Silva Balster (for the Brazilian Labor Party – PTB) and Porcia Guimarães Alves (for the National Democratic Union – UDN).⁽²⁴⁾

Suarez is running for the Social Labor Party (*PST*), a small party founded that year and allied to the Brazilian Labor Party (*PTB*) created by former president and former dictator Getúlio Vargas in 1945, at the end of his authoritarian regime, presenting a center- left line.

Historian Angela de Castro Gomes maintains that Brazilian laborism, inspired by the British labor model, is a specific and complex ideology, created in the Vargas Era (1930-1945) under the leadership of the president/dictator himself and his main Minister of Labor, Industry and Commerce, Alexandre Marcondes Filho. It is this ideology, with its parties derived at the end of the Estado Novo (1937-1945), that will allow the²⁴ participation of the working class and urban workers in general, in a collective and organized way, as relevant actors in the Brazilian political-electoral scenario.⁽²⁵⁾

19. “Cronologia das eleições”, [acesso em 26 mai 2024], <https://www.tse.jus.br/eleicoes/historia/cronologia-das-eleicoes>

20. In 1947, only the positions of president and vice-president of the Republic, then held by Eurico Gaspar Dutra and Nereu Ramos, respectively, sworn in the previous year, would not be changed.

21. Tribunal Superior Eleitoral do Brasil, *Dados estatísticos: eleições federal, estadual e municipal, realizadas no Brasil a partir de 1945*, (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Imprensa Nacional, 1950).

22. Tribunal Superior Eleitoral do Brasil, *Dados estatísticos: eleições federal, estadual e municipal realizadas no Brasil a partir de 1945*, (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Imprensa Nacional, 1950), 138.

23. Tribunal Superior Eleitoral do Brasil, *Dados estatísticos: eleições federal, estadual e municipal, realizadas no Brasil a partir de 1945*, (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Imprensa Nacional, 1950), 200.

24. Arquivo Público do Paraná. Fundo do Tribunal Regional Eleitoral do Paraná. Eleições de 1947.

25. Angela de Castro Gomes, *A invenção do trabalhismo*, (Rio de Janeiro, Editora FGV, 2005).

In the same 1947 election in Curitiba other veterans of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force participated, notably Agostinho José Rodrigues⁽²⁶⁾ and Felipe Aristides Simão⁽²⁷⁾, who would later have a long political career in the state of Paraná, although neither of them was elected on this occasion. Maria Suarez was the only military woman to run in that election, and the only veteran nurse from the Brazilian Expeditionary Force to try to enter politics at some point.

As a candidate, Suarez presented herself as a teacher and military nurse, displaying her uniform, medals and professional history as indications of courage and capacity for work. The war was, in this case, a process in search of voice, autonomy and the capacity for self-representation.

According to Michelle Perrot, of all the borders imposed over time to prevent women from acting in society, the most difficult to overcome was that in the political area, as voters and candidates. Since politics represents the center of decisions about the community, it was “naturally” destined for male action.⁽²⁸⁾

Suarez had only twenty-two votes⁽²⁹⁾ and was not elected⁽³⁰⁾, but Curitiba had its first councilwoman on this occasion: Maria Olympia Carneiro Mochel (her husband's surname that she adopted after the election), a primary school teacher and communist activist. Maria Olympia was a candidate for the Social Labor Party (PST), the same party as Suarez, since the registration of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCB) had been revoked. She received 436 votes and, at the age of 21, she became the first woman to serve a term in the Curitiba City Council, which ended in 1951.⁽³¹⁾ In the same year, her sister-in-law Arcelina Mochel, also a communist activist, was elected councilor in the Federal District (city of Rio de Janeiro).⁽³²⁾

Despite not being able to be elected and not contesting other elections in her life, the then Lieutenant Suarez inscribed her name in Brazilian political history by participating in an important electoral process in the slow redemocratization movement that Brazil

26. State Deputy in Paraná (1954-1964), Interim Governor of the State of Paraná (1963), Federal Deputy (1966-1979), Secretary of Public Security of the State of Paraná (1968-1969).

27. Councilor of Curitiba (1951-1963), Interim Mayor of Curitiba, capital of the State of Paraná (1957-1958).

28. Michelle Perrot, *Minha história das mulheres*, (São Paulo: Contexto, 2019), 151.

29. Arquivo Público do Paraná. Fundo do Tribunal Regional Eleitoral do Paraná. Eleições de 1947.

30. The votes cast by the five women candidates were as follows, in descending order: Maria Olympia Carneiro (436 votes, the only one elected), Porcia Guimarães Alves (73 votes), Olga da Silva Balster (52 votes), Juvellaine Ferreira Paredes (41 votes) and Maria da Conceição Suarez (22 votes).

31. João Cândido Martins, “Maria Olympia Carneiro Mochel, a primeira vereadora de Curitiba”, Câmara Municipal de Curitiba, [acesso em 26 mai 2024], <https://www.curitiba.pr.leg.br/informacao/nossa-memoria/galeria-de-vereadoras/noticias-da-galeria-de-vereadoras-1/maria-olimpia-carneiro-mochel-a-primeira-vereadora-de-curitiba>.

32. João Cândido Martins, “Maria Olympia Carneiro Mochel, a primeira vereadora de Curitiba”, Câmara Municipal de Curitiba, [acesso em 26 mai 2024], <https://www.curitiba.pr.leg.br/informacao/nossa-memoria/galeria-de-vereadoras/noticias-da-galeria-de-vereadoras-1/maria-olimpia-carneiro-mochel-a-primeira-vereadora-de-curitiba>.

experienced at the end of the 1940s, with the pioneering spirit of women as candidates and voters, contributing to their political and social emancipation.

Her work during the war and afterwards was also decisive in making a military career a possibility for women, as she returned to active service in 1957. The military nurse also dedicated herself to the memory of the war and helping fellow ex-combatants with difficulties. financial and health issues, being part of the board of directors of Paranaense Expeditionary Legion, an association dedicated to the history and mutual aid of veterans.⁽³³⁾

Return to active duty and retirement with consequences

In 1957, through Law No. 3,160, of June 1, 1957, which allowed the return of veteran nurses from the Brazilian Expeditionary Force to active service in the Army in times of peace, Lieutenant Suarez requested her recall. She was effectively reinstated on September 16th, in the position of 2nd lieutenant, and on October 25th she was appointed in charge of the Dietary Hygiene service at the General Hospital of Curitiba, where she started working. She worked in various roles at the hospital and as an attaché to the Health Service of the 5th Military Region, including traveling to Rio de Janeiro to accompany seriously ill patients removed to the Army Central Hospital for treatment.⁽³⁴⁾

In July 1962, she underwent a health inspection and was judged “fit for Army service”, being promoted to the rank of 1st lieutenant on September 13 of the same year, at the proposal of her boss and upon completing five years of military service in regulation time.⁽³⁵⁾

The extreme experience of war took its toll and left marks, physical and psychological, generated or aggravated, at different levels and durations, on all veterans who experienced its horrors, suffering and sacrifice. In July 1963, Lieutenant Suarez was, in military terminology for the patient, taken to the hospital in Curitiba. Due to the apparent seriousness of the case, she was transferred to the Army Central Hospital, where she remained hospitalized for months. Evaluated by the Health Board on November 20 of the same year, it received the categorical opinion: “Invalid. Totally and permanently unable to do any work”.⁽³⁶⁾ She was 54 years old and had 34 years of public service, civil and military, teaching and assistance.

By presidential decree of June 8, 1964, Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger was transferred to the reserve and promoted to the rank of captain, in accordance with article 1 of Law No. 288, of June 8, 1948, which provided for the right to promotion one

33. Museu do Expedicionário. Livros de atas das décadas de 1940 a 1970.

34. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

35. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

36. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

rank higher to every veteran of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force when he/she became inactive. In the same act, she was promoted to the rank of major and retired. This second promotion resulted from the combination with Law No. 2,370, of December 9, 1954, which provided in its article 33 that the soldier judged definitively incapable of any work due to health problems, regardless of whether these have a cause-and-effect relationship with her service, would be entitled to a promotion when permanently retired.⁽³⁷⁾

Suarez's case was covered by letter "d" of article 30 of the same law, which lists possible diseases as "active tuberculosis, mental alienation, malignant neoplasm, blindness, leprosy, paralysis, cancer or severe heart disease". The evaluation form signed by three doctors speaks of "considerable paralysis" and lists, in the field of diagnosis, the disease codes 420.0, 434.2, 420.1 and 454, which we were unable to reveal with the documentation at the time.⁽³⁸⁾

Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger died on November 14, 1970, at the age of 61, in the city of Curitiba. Her legacy lives on.

Final considerations

In this way, we fulfilled the objective of discussing, analytically, the biographical trajectory of the military nurse Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger through her political performance in the 1947 municipal elections in Curitiba, capital of the State of Paraná, in the southern region of Brazil.

We wanted to highlight her brief, but remarkable political career not only because of the pioneering nature of the situation, but as evidence that volunteering for the war attracted women with very different profiles and stories, with various objectives mixed with patriotism, and one of them was to achieve rights and independence. in that still almost exclusively male public world. By fighting in a war and contesting an election, Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger helped build Brazil and the world we know today.

This article is part of a broader context of ongoing research on nurses from the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, their biographical profile and their post-war trajectories. We believe that it has contributed to shining a light on one of these characters, highlighting research possibilities and paths to follow for interdisciplinary studies on the Second World War and its effects.

We point out as gaps in this text the limited access to sources and the impossibility of researching Maria Suarez's personal collection, currently in the custody of her nephews. New research and new documents would allow us to delve deeper into the political

37. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

38. Arquivo Histórico do Exército. Pasta da Major Maria da Conceição Suarez Greger.

campaign she undertook and provide greater details about her family and professional life in the post-war period.

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DOI for this text: <https://doi.org/10.56092/HVLF3437>