

Portuguese Women Para-Troop Nurses (1961-1980)¹

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Against all odds, there is a *history* of the Portuguese Women Para-Troop Nurses. It's not a *story*, for it is not a product of human imagination, perhaps an outcome of some kind of ideological fabrication, even a myth. They, these women, existed. The group existed. Each one of these more than forty women existed, acted, suffered, triumphed, failed, i.e., left a personal and collective path, sometimes carved with «blood, toil, tears, and sweat».²

The coming into being of this military 'group' of very few, but formidable women, is in itself a succession of events that seem to be drawn out of a book of tales. Though real, the history of such a «band of sisters» (sisters who, sometimes, 'more than mothers' to many of the wounded and dying men in the various fields of battle), exceeds all that one would accept as conceivable within the framework of common Portuguese historical events in the 21st century, quite mediocre. But it happened in the twentieth.

Normally, when winds or, at least, breezes of war blow, the wise thing to do is to prepare oneself in order to face – or, to run away from it, if this is even possible – the

¹ 1980 is the year when the group was officially extinct (see TORRÃO Ana, *Anjos na guerra. A aventura das enfermeiras paraquedistas portuguesas*, Alfragide, Oficina do Livro, 2011, p. 13. Nevertheless, the year 2002, the year of retirement of the last Woman Para-Troop Nurse, is the date of the real demise of such experience; or was it really, a mere 'experiment', a disposable one, using disposable human beings?

² We use, as a form of homage, the famous expression uttered by the then newly appointed British Prime Minister, when addressing the House of Commons: a promise, the only he could *honestly* offer in the days when the West was being steam-rolled by the cunning forces of the Third Reich. It was with the invoked notions that resistance and resilience were put into act, and, ultimately, with the help of others, permitted a final victory, *the 'final victory'*. Of course, as is well known, there is and there can be no such thing as a 'final victory' against tyranny and tyrants. Their reiterated existence demands a perpetual attention and struggle, i.e., the constant use of «blood, toil, tears, and sweat»; see CHURCHILL Winston Spencer, *The Second World War. Volume II. Their Finest Hour*, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949, p. 24.

foreboding events that necessarily succeed when war comes, when war sets foot on the land. «Normally», of course, does not mean «usually» or «commonly»; it should mean «as a logic necessary response».

When such winds of war started to blow strongly in the European Empires of yore, such as the British and the French, as the most evident candidates – among others, among which, the Portuguese Empire was, had to be, under the light of the new sense of nationality of the colonized peoples –, lighting independence fires across the world, the Portuguese, and not just the Portuguese Government, generally – though not universally –, did nearly nothing to confront such menace, or, as another possibility, extreme but possible, to not confront it actively, for example, simply abandoning the colonies (which ultimately happened at the end of the Colonial War, as a very sad rotten cherry on top of a crumbled cake).

The history of the Portuguese Women Para-Troops, though a glorious one, is – it had to be, for it could not escape the global historic movement of which it was part – affected by the irrational action towards the existence and possible maintenance of the Empire. An aristocracy of thought and ethics does not float over the historic movement to which it necessarily belongs; not outside a mythic framework. Nursing in battle field conditions is not a matter of myth, but a matter of material, carnal, existence: the existence of *the ones who serve in order to mitigate the nefarious effects of carnage*.

Under rational conditions, one would think that, such winds of war blowing in multiple places in the world, a military force – big or small, but professional –, such as the Para-Rescuers, would be thought of and put into existence by the people responsible for the defence of the Empire, acting either in the Military or in the Political capacity.

Nevertheless, this rational enterprise did not occur. The rationality and the initiative came from another source, a civilian one, and, quite ahead of 'its' «Portuguese Times», from a woman, a very young girl, but one with an unquenchable passion for action and the unheard of, the not yet undertaken.³

³ One can find, in a large, 632 pages, book, this almost insignificant reference to the Women Para-Troop Nurses, as if their presence was, if not irrelevant, at least unimportant or unnoticed: «Em 1956, a primeira mulher pára-quedista portuguesa, Isabel Rilvas Mathias, lançou a ideia de

The lady in question, a member of the Portuguese traditional aristocracy, was Isabel Rilvas (Isabel Bandeira de Melo), the daughter of the Earl of Rilvas. The saga begun thus, as one can see in her own words:⁴

«I was, for a long period of my life, rather known within the aeronautical community because, since my youth, I have always been passionate with the ‘aerial things’. This passion of mine lead me to be, though being a woman and very young, a PPA pilot [PAP (Private Aeroplane Pilot)], bearing the number 945 / August the 24th / 1954, and, then, also a parachutist, having graduated in France. I was, indeed, the first woman in the Iberian Peninsula to jump under a deployed canopy.».

As a pioneer, this young lady, young *woman*, would have had a ‘place in history’, her place in history. Her action proved, beyond any and all rhetoric argument, that

formar um corpo de enfermeiras pára-quedistas e este alvitre conduziu à criação de um curso e, posteriormente, de um corpo dessa especialidade, as primeiras mulheres integradas como militares nas Forças Armadas Portuguesas. Estas enfermeiras dependiam dos comandos das unidades de pára-quedistas em que estavam integradas e realizaram inúmeras acções de apoio a evacuações de feridos nos teatros de operações e em situações de combate.» / «In 1956, the first Portuguese parachutist woman, Isabel Rilvas Mathias, launched the idea of forming a ‘corps’ of Para-Troop nurses, and this suggestion led to the creation of a course and, afterwards, of a ‘corps’ of that specialty, the first women integrated as military in the Portuguese Armed Forces. These women nurses were under the command of the Para-Troop units in which they were integrated and they performed innumerable actions in support of the evacuation of wounded personnel in the combat theatres and in combat situations.» in AFONSO Aniceto, GOMES Carlos de Matos, *Guerra colonial. Angola. Guiné. Moçambique*, [Lisboa], Diário de Notícias, s. d., p. 179. And that is all. One could also write about all of this same long war something like this: ‘It was a long war, with many people involved and many casualties.’ All true, but perhaps all too short. Not a word about the military value of these women and of their action. Were they and their action so unimportant? If not, why, then, this thunderous silence? Mere stupidity; envy?

⁴ SERRA Rosa (coord.), *Nós, Enfermeiras Paraquedistas*, «Prefácio» de Adriano Moreira, «Introdução» (coord.), «Mensagem» de Isabel Rilvas, s. l., Fronteira do Caos Editores, Lda., 2014, p. 23: «Fui, durante um longo período da minha vida, bastante conhecida nos meios aeronáuticos porque desde a minha juventude sempre fui uma apaixonada pelas coisas do ar. Esta minha paixão levou-me a que, apesar de ser mulher e muito jovem, tivesse sido piloto PPA (Piloto Particular de Avião) com o nº 945 de 24 / Agosto / 1954, e depois também paraquedista, com curso tirado em França. Fui mesmo a primeira mulher da Península Ibérica a saltar em paraquedas.».

women, i.e., Portuguese women were capable of being parachutists. This no longer was or could ever more be a matter for rhetoric, having been proven, as it was, through concrete action. All the necessary virtues needed to rationally jump from an aeroplane were present in the feminine gender.

Isabel Rilvas was not competing with anyone, man or woman, but herself. This is not an act of marking one's position relatively to another person's or persons', but an act of personal fulfilment of a desire, undertaken by sheer will power. She proved in Portugal and the Iberian Peninsula that women were able to be parachutists, beyond any reductive comparisons. These women were not inferior in relation to other women, per example, the French, with whom Rilvas trained and graduated. This is not only a feminine victory, but it is an *anthropological victory*, for it is humanity that is manifested as greater, because all of its components have not a defect that diminishes its greatness.

Logically, if «women can jump», they can also do it both as pleasure and as service. Having had her triumph as jumper for pleasure, Isabel Rilvas had the intuition of the possibility of parachute jumping as a form of helping people who could only be helped by someone with the capacity of being transported to places otherwise inaccessible and act there in the benefit of the needed. Se knew there existed such a group in France. She began to wish such a group – or something similar to such group – also existed in Portugal, serving principles akin. Again, in her own words:⁵

«When, in France, I was graduating as a parachutist, it came to my knowledge the existence of a group of female Doctors [MDs] and female Nurses specialized in parachuting, destined to succour injured people at locations with very difficult access. They were specialized groups of the French Red Cross, denominated “air Medics”, having had action in the conflicts in Indochina and Algeria.».

⁵ *Ibidem*: «Quando em França tirava o curso de paraquedismo, tive conhecimento da existência de um grupo de médicas e enfermeiras com a especialização de paraquedismo, que se destinavam a socorrer feridos em locais de muito difícil acesso. Eram grupos especializados da Cruz Vermelha Francesa, denominados de “Socorristas do ar”, e tinham atuado nos conflitos da Indochina e da Argélia.».

Having had the notice of such an existence did not have to mean that Isabel Rilvas had to be interested. But she was. And not only was she interested in a theoretical/contemplative form, but she was practically interested. Would it not be possible to have such an enterprise in Portugal?

Again, this passionate woman's words:⁶

«After having taken my parachutist course, and after some practice in parachute jumping, I went, also in France, to an instructor's course, which enabled me to teach courses, thus forming other parachutists. From then on, I assumed as an objective to create a school in Portugal, and to form in it a group of female Doctors [MD] and female Nurses that could succour injured people or sick people in more isolated zones of our country, in the way of what existed in France.».

The goal of the action initiated by Isabel Rilvas was not, at the beginning, of a military character, or to that character restricted. The purpose was to enable Portugal to possess an effective institution that could, in reality, work as a means of rescue for people caught up in dire situations within the geographical framework of otherwise inaccessible territories. This great scope was the motor of Rilvas' enterprise.

The movement of what is usually called «history», i.e., the sum of all the acts put forward by Humanity along with the blind steps of Nature, inflected the direction of the young lady's path. It was war, its ever-growing sense of vicinity, that created the political conditions favourable to the realization of the lady pioneer's intent.

The grim possibility of war carried the bright possibility of a humane service, the more humane the grimmer the context, civilian – catastrophes, in various modes, natural or not – or military. That what was to become the Portuguese Colonial War

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23: «Depois de ter tirado o meu curso de paraquedismo, e após alguma prática de saltos em paraquedas, frequentei também em França um curso de instrutora, que me habilitava a ministrar cursos, formando outros paraquedistas. Desde logo tracei como objectivo criar em Portugal uma escola, e nela formar um grupo de médicas e enfermeiras que pudessem socorrer feridos ou doentes em zonas de maior isolamento no nosso país, no género do que existia em França.».

menaced coming to existence; within the ambiance of that menace, the possibility – remote it may have been thought to be at the time by not so intelligent leaders – of having a swift and effective means of rescue dedicated to wounded or sick military personnel glinted, in the minds of more intelligent people, as a good perspective.

It would be the military that would be the ones to welcome the idea, for no-one in the civilian world paid any proper attention. The words that follow are quite significant. In what concerns the civilians:⁷

«[...] I went about divulging my idea on the parachute school and, as a practical and useful deployment, I talked about the creation of a group of female parachutist Doctors and Nurses, giving France as an example. I partook that desire of mine in many places [...], including in Africa. [...] I contacted some Nursing Schools – Cruz Vermelha and Artur Ravara –, but none of them was interested in my project.»

The civilian world having failed, there was the possibility of the military having the intelligence or the need or both that would allow them to understand the virtue of the idea:⁸

«I perceived, then, that the Air Force, where I parachuted along the military parachutists, in Tancos, and where, meanwhile, I was enlarging my circle of friendships, was where my idea had the best possibility of being supported.»

Isabel Rilvas, though a civilian and very young, manifested, unlike the civilian and military leaderships, an acute sense of duty, social engagement, and even strategic military intelligence. Her ideas proved themselves far more advanced and intelligent than the ones – or total absence of them – present – or absent – in the minds of the

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 24: «[...] eu ia difundindo a minha ideia da escola de paraquedismo e, como aplicação prática e útil, falava na criação de um grupo de médicas e enfermeiras paraquedistas, dando o exemplo da França. Fui dando a conhecer esse meu desejo em muitos locais [...], incluindo em África. [...] contactei algumas escolas de enfermagem – Cruz Vermelha e Artur Ravara –, mas nenhuma delas se interessou pelo meu projeto.»

⁸ *Ibidem*.

people the Nation nurtured and paid for, in order to receive back that which is known as «government» at its differentiated levels.

Intelligence wise and strategy wise, it was Rilvas who dwelt in governmental heights, not the people to whom the care of common good of Portugal, including its then Colonies, was committed. Fortunately, due to the persistence of the young parachutist lady and the strategic intelligence of one of the members of Cabinet, Rilvas' persistence brought about the birth of the movement that had as its blossoming the group of Portuguese Women Para-Troop Nurses.

The memory of the indefatigable lady kept:⁹

«I talked about my project to everyone who wanted to hear me. One of the persons with whom I insisted the most, for I thought he was the one who could help me the most, was the then Under Secretary of State for the Aeronautics, Lieutenant-Colonel Kaúlza de Arriaga, who, most sympathetically, went on hearing what I had to say. I explained to him several times the advantage of the specialization in parachuting both of women Doctors [MD] and Nurses, who could swiftly rush to isolated places or ones of difficult access, in order to assist ill people, accident or catastrophe victims, and I even furnished him the French legislation that created the group of women jumpers in France. He smiled, listened to me in a very attentive and nice way, but proceeded not.».

Being not passive, Rilvas decided to marry in herself the two skills which virtuous combination she persistently announced: she decided to become, already being a parachutist, a Nurse, thus becoming some sort of a 'one woman rescue regiment'. It is worthwhile to read:¹⁰

«[...] Nevertheless, I did not remain idle! I enrolled myself, then, in a Nursing School, for, at least, I would be a Woman Para-Troop Nurse!».

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

She did enrol herself and started studying, though she never finished the course, having opted for another life project. It was during the period within which she studied Nursing that her 'parachute-Nursing gospel' was poured enthusiastically upon all the colleagues who wanted to pay attention to such a novelty, in fact, a great good-news in terms of humane personal interaction: *humane politics*.

The old 'jumping-Nursing prophet', remembering the reaction of her Nursing school friends when the 'gospel' was announced: ¹¹

«[...] triggering in them a great will to experiment the exertion of that profession in a very different form from what was the usual common practice.».

The historical times were ripening and the unfortunate winds of war brought about the evidence of the necessity for what the until then seemingly absurd Rilvas 'gospel' meant and could bring in the form of a help in warfare that no other means of action could. The dream was about to be fulfilled, though in nightmarish times. Reality always has the last word, light or heavy. This time, both weighs pondered.

This is the way Rilvas recollects the events that finally permitted her dream to become true, in concrete woman flesh: ¹²

«The future proved that my talks with the Under-Secretary of State, Lieutenant-Colonel Kaúlza de Arriaga had not been useless... The 'seed' –, the idea of the creation of Women Parachute Nurses – had been cast and went on 'germinating' in his head. He did not forget about it, and, when the fear about the eruption of conflicts in our Overseas Provinces came about, he presented it [the idea] to the President of the Ministry Council [the Prime Minister], Dr Oliveira Salazar. The latter agreed to the forming of the first group of women ever to enter the military ranks, as Nurses.».

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*.

Lieutenant-Colonel Káulza's own recollection is slightly different, but concurs generally with the lady pioneer:¹³

«President Salazar, a ultra-conservative man, who, nevertheless and simultaneously, foresaw the future, after two not easy work sessions, ended up accepting the existence of women in the Armed Forces, especially in the Air Force, at least as Nurses, and, foremost, being parachutists”, Káulza de Arriaga recalls.».

The old dictator could have said *no* and could have maintained that *no* indefinitely. He did not. Somehow, he was able to understand the usefulness of the employment of women in the actions conducive to the evacuation, rescue and care of the sick and wounded service men. Implicitly, he believed in the due respect these women would need (and would raise). On the other hand, his authorization and the iron authority that went with it were a mark that would make many people think twice before doing something that would go against that authority. This perhaps unexpected step climbed by Salazar is one of the few capable of being considered really in harmony with the world ambiance post WWII.

Of course, it was not Salazar's personal task to build such a military edifice, such a new 'corps'. The work had to be done, and very competent people were set in motion in order to create something from almost nothing. The teachers were available and were, if not many, at least of good quality. Nevertheless, there were no pupils, for there were no other 'Rilvas' about. They had to be sought and brought.

It was also through the work of Rilvas that the crop started. Her words, still provide an important information: of the first group of six graduate «Para-Nurses», out of eleven initial candidates, five came from the Nursing School Isabel belonged to, the

¹³ TORRÃO Susana, *Anjos na guerra. A aventura das enfermeiras paraquedistas portuguesas*, Alfragide, Oficina do Livro, 2011, pp. 23-24: «“O presidente Salazar, homem ultraconservador mas que, simultaneamente, previa o futuro, após duas não fáceis sessões de trabalho, acabou por aceitar a existência de mulheres nas Forças Armadas, no caso vertente na Força Aérea, pelo menos como enfermeiras, e com o cúmulo de serem paraquedistas”, recorda Káulza de Arriaga.».

«Franciscanas Missionárias de Maria» («Franciscan Missionary of Mary); the sixth belonged to a School called «S. Vicente de Paulo» (Saint Vincent of Paulo).¹⁴

Isabel Rilvas had spent some of her time and effort catechising the girls who studied Nursing about the merits of para-jumping and para-Nursing. The effort was duly rewarded.

A testimony, that can be found in the book *Nós, Enfermeiras Paraquedistas*, reads: «We, nurses, were very fortunate, for we were part of a minority that had the possibility of studying beyond the obligatory minimum of time».¹⁵ This is quite true. Non the less, the 'fortune' cannot be accepted as a privilege, though its mention reflects the greatness of soul of the writer, thus diminishing the grandeur of the accomplishments the people who created the 'fortune' made. What it does not do is emphasize the greatness involved in many cases, when and where many people had to make extraordinary sacrifices to endow their children or relatives with the possibility of further education, for which they worked, which they deserved, and that the country urgently and existentially needed, without officially helping or helping much.

This privilege of fortune should have never existed. It should have been a goal of the Portuguese and of the Portuguese Governments – or the people who occupied the positions that should be of and for governing – to promote that which is evidently the greatest richness of any group of persons, i.e., themselves. Education never was a privilege – the point is not historical, for in History one can find almost anything, any gold or any trash –, but the utmost effective and promising tool of self-enriching humanity possesses.

The same dictator who was intelligent enough to permit the creation of the Women Para-Nurses, was never intelligent enough to perceive that a country with low education levels is a country of general human low level, destined to poverty, possibly misery, and, through these, to annihilation.

¹⁴ Cfr., SERRA Rosa (coord.), *Nós, Enfermeiras Paraquedistas*, «Prefácio» de Adriano Moreira, «Introdução» (coord.), «Mensagem» de Isabel Rilvas, s. l., Fronteira do Caos Editores, Lda., 2014, p. 25.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

It was amidst this country of low education level and the people that it generated, that the women who not only managed to get a rare education beyond the strict minimum level, but had the courage to become Nurses, had to have the supplementary courage to suffer what was then considered by many as a kind of metamorphosis, becoming parachutists, and committing the 'folly' of «jumping out of a perfectly good aeroplane», as the saying goes.

Let us not allow the inversion of justice: it is not a privilege for the Para-Nurses having been how and who they were in the service of Portugal: *it is the privilege of Portugal to have had these young women serving it.*

The honour along with the sacrifice and suffering goes to the ones who acted, not to the recipients. Without the action carried out by these women – some more, some less, as always everywhere, even at war –, many more soldiers would have died and many more would have suffered far worse consequences of their non-lethal wounds. Theirs was the privilege of being nursed by these women.

Saving soldiers on the battlefield, in battle. No Minister did that, no General did that; the Para-Nurses did that; the field Medics did that, the Doctors and Nurses at the hospitals did that. A service the country can never enough acknowledge, even less pay or repay.

The young ladies, having worked to become trained Nurses, having been alerted to the necessity of Military Nursing done by women with parachutist training, *volunteered*, manifesting a most advanced ethical and political-social attitude, defying almost everyone and every cultural paradigm of Portuguese society.

The «Six Marys», for all were named «Maria», started to prove, and ended up by proving, to the rest of the society, that women could, in fact, not only do the same tasks usually performed by men, but, in their case, perform a task that was not performed by men, for, although being jumpers as war fighters, they did not do that as professional rescuers. Women were about to do so. Women, for a fact, did so.

To really understand the greatness of the rescue personnel under war conditions, one has to comprehend that a bullet or a piece of shrapnel or any other missile are stupid objects. They do not choose the people they wound. A Commando armed with a

knife to silently cut the throat of a sentry can choose not to do so, or to simply null that sentry operatively, instead of annihilating him/her. *It is not the knife that chooses*, it is, really, the man or the woman. Confronted with a rescuer, a Medic, a Para-Nurse, the Commando – or any other soldier –, can choose not to kill, just to make a prisoner or to impede the action. The stupid missile cannot do so. It follows strict physical principles, and, if these make it tear the flesh of the best rescuer in the world, it will tear that flesh.

This logic of the physics of missiles (even the so-called ‘smart ones’) follow the logic of war that is *a logic of killing*. Without this logic, there is no war, but a simple act of non-lethal violence. Sometimes these disparate realities are confused. They are not confused in the cruel reality of, precisely, *reality*.

Or when people go to war, they go to war to die, even if expected and expecting to live; some even surviving. Many do not, in fact, live. This principle – for it is a principle, it depends on no opinion – applies to military rescuers as it applies to special troops: the striking missile does not ‘know how to tell the difference’.

After what has just been written, it is, now, easy to understand, beyond any mythic or ideological irrationality, that this was the ambiance to which the Portuguese Para-Nurses were destined. It does not matter that someone thought or even said or even wrote or even legislated that they were not to undergo such possibilities, such «perils» (if this word serves a better understanding). It does not matter, for reality cares not about what people say about it. And this is no metaphor here, no personification of reality as a whole. This is how ‘stupid’ and lawless reality is. The reality to which the Portuguese Para-Nurses were sent was in no way different from any other reality of war: they were sent to the making of death, in order to help some of those under this condition to escape the grip of death. Having thus been exposed, they shared the exact same possible destiny as their – now the term is mandatory – comrades.

It is rather unsoldierly – perhaps it is military, in the most bureaucratic sense of the term, alas – to say that these women were the first women military: they were the first *women comrades* that the men in arms in Portugal ever had. *Comrades*: sisters in arms and in blood, and blood they dealt with, many litres of it. It is in *the sharing of the*

blood that dwells the military belonging of these women, not in some dull piece of legislative paper.

There are rather remarkable depositions made by the surviving Para-Nurses recalling the experiences of their military training and soldierly learning. Too long to be presented her. Nevertheless, the introductory text to the chapter dedicated to the military training of the book *Nós, Enfermeiras Paraquedistas* is quite rich in information pertaining to this theme. About the general idea of women's capacities, one can read, p. 79:

«There was, then, the general conviction that women did not possess the force, or the energy, or the courage, enough to face the toughness, the rusticity, and the perils inherent to military exercises, and mostly to get near a battle field! And, thus, in the case of war, women could only perform support functions.»¹⁶

In other western countries – and elsewhere –, many women had already fought under military circumstances, which was known, internationally known. For example, during WWII, thousands of women undertook military functions both performing non first line of combat tasks, and, as when members of the various groups either of secret agents or of «partisans», many fought in battles, many were wounded, many died.

So, this «general conviction» is best attributed to Portugal and its cultural development state. Objectively, apart from objective prejudices, there is nothing that, as a principle, defines women as less capable for war than men. Objectively, one would have to make the experiment to find out if reality of action manifested universal – general is not sufficient, for there may be a grand exception that undermines the general results – ‘febleness’ of women compared to men, and in precisely what fields of action. The same problem arises when comparing men with men, for they do not act the same, and action varies according not just to the subjects, but also to the types of acting.

¹⁶ «Havia então a convicção generalizada de que as mulheres não tinham força, nem energia, nem coragem suficientes para enfrentar a dureza, a rusticidade e os perigos inerentes a exercícios militares, e muito menos de se aproximarem de um campo de batalha! E assim, em caso de guerra, as mulheres apenas poderiam desempenhar funções de apoio.»

What the author of the text is telling is that *there was a prejudice against women's capacities*. It was, then, up to these few women to demonstrate beyond any doubt that those prejudices were no more than, precisely, prejudices. Which they did. Not all of them. The failure of some of them, immediately failing the first jump from the training tower, does not make these women lesser women or lesser human beings, but common human beings, independently from gender, for the 'normal' attitude towards the eminence of such a jump is denial. They did not fail because they were women, as the men who indeed also failed did not fail because they were men, or lesser men, but because it is the common attitude. Whoever does not want to give credit to this utterance, please, just go to one of those towers now and perform the jump.

However, the women who, indeed, managed to jump not just from the training tower, but from the aeroplanes, they also did not do so for they were women, as the men who did the same did not do it for they were men, but they did it for they were objectively capable of doing so. Both women and men. This is objective and undeniable.

If one wants, one can call these people, men and women, «special», as many others were «special» in their fields of action. Nevertheless, it is just an adjective. The material greatness lies elsewhere, in the greatness of the action, in all fields, so, also, in the field of Women Para-Troop Nurses.

Having all the breveted women passed the first complex ordeal of military training, it is in the memories of active war rescue that the greatness of these women can be duly found. Some memoirs suffice to hint at such greatness. Let us begin with this contribution offered by Para-Nurse Eugénia Sousa:¹⁷

«Many were the experiences that there [in war zones] I had, and that only in that environment – the one of war – are passible of being experienced. They occurred in an environment full of difficulties,

¹⁷ SERRA Rosa (coord.), *Nós, Enfermeiras Paraquedistas*, «Prefácio» de Adriano Moreira, «Introdução», Fronteira do Caos Editores, Lda., s. l., 2014, p. 391: «Foram muitas as experiências que ali [em zonas de guerra] tive, e que apenas naquele ambiente – o da guerra – são passíveis de ser[em] experimentadas. Elas ocorriam num ambiente cheio de dificuldades, [estando nós] quase sempre isoladas, e tudo tinha de ser ultrapassado para podermos cumprir as nossas missões – tratar dos feridos que nos confiavam. Mas aquelas provações permitiram-me melhorar como pessoa, e melhorar em todos os sentido[s].».

[us being] almost all the time isolated, and all had to be overcome in order to being able to fulfil our missions – to take care of the wounded that were entrusted to us. But those ordeals allowed me to get better as a person, and to get better in every sense.».

No moaning. No bitterness, just the objective facts and the effects, also objective, undergone by the subject of the action. Difficulties, missions; difficulties that preceded the missions, difficulties during the missions. Here is a person – who serves as a paragon, for these words are applicable to many others of her comrades – capable of surpassing the difficulties, carrying to the end the mission. Sometimes, it was not possible to deliver the best possible result, a living soldier, but, less than a miracle, the task, the mission went to the end, delivering what non-miraculous work can do. No more can be done, no more can be asked. This is the height to which these women rose themselves. Great, even when miracles were not available, because miracles were not available. For instance, in the words of Para-Nurse Eugénia Sousa:¹⁸

«Once, I was swimming at the Railway Workers swimming-pool [Mozambique], and they went and called me urging me to get back to the barracks. When I arrived, there were six or seven [wounded soldiers] and they were so blackened, so blackened from the mine that had exploded, that I wasn't sure if they were white or if they were black. I fought until I could no more, you don't want to know, in order to save them. Only you have to imagine is a white man completely burned. For 48 hours, I did not eat, did not sleep, I had to take them to Beira, afterwards to Lourenço Marques, use the same plane and go again to Beira. Later I asked about them, and they said that one or another were saved, but I doubt.».

¹⁸ ANTUNES José Freire, *A guerra de África (1961-1974)*, vol. II, p. 680: «Uma vez estava na piscina dos ferroviários a nadar, foram-me chamar para eu ir para o quartel. Quando lá cheguei, eram uns seis ou sete e estavam tão pretos, tão pretos da mina que tinha explodido, que eu não tinha a certeza se eles eram pretos ou se eram brancos. Lutei até não poder, nem queiram saber, para os salvar. Basta imaginar um branco completamente queimado. Foram 48 horas em que não comi, não dormi, tive de levá-los até à Beira, depois para Lourenço Marques, aproveitar o mesmo avião e ir novamente para a Beira. Mais tarde perguntei por eles, disseram-me que um ou outro se salvou, mas duvido.».

Terrible words. Nevertheless, one has to understand that, as in any field of battle, what is required of the rescuers is not – really – the *salvation* of the wounded, but the *care of* the wounded, thus making possible even their salvation later, when that is possible. *It is the presence and the care that are paramount*, without which there is no possible help, companionship in times of agony, and, as possible, the happy result: salvation from death. No wonder, soldiers named these comrades «angels in war». The Women Para-Troop Nurses were «angels from the sky».

The inhuman brutality of war touches everyone in the field of battle, i.e., the space and time where war is in act. Within that space, no one is safe, «friend or enemy». For the rescuer, both friend and enemy are object of exercise: when wounded, the soldier – or the civilian caught by the act of war – needs the rescuers' intervention. It is a very strong experience, the one where one is called to help both your comrades and the ones who are there to destroy your comrades, the ones who are your *enemy*, not a gaming adversary, but an existential enemy. The act of rescue, at least momentarily, transforms your enemy into someone who needs your help, just another wounded person in need. It is then that real humanity reveals itself, as we can see in the words of Para-Nurse Giselda Antunes Pessoa:¹⁹

«It happened even with PAIGC's²⁰ personnel. Once I went to fetch one from the bush who had lost a leg, and only spoke French. [... at the hospital in Bissau] he called for me again, there was a creole interpreter there, to explain to me that it had been I who had fetched him from the combat zone. He had recognized me. Back then, when I went to fetch him, there was no space in the helicopter and they wanted, for that reason, that he stayed back a little longer in the bush because the space lacked. I said no, that if the wounded man stayed in the bush, I would also stay. We had two wounded men, one ours and that one. There was a gentleman who was there at the front of the operations and who wanted to come in the helicopter, and because of that there was no space for the wounded man. That is why I said that if the wounded man stayed, I too stayed, if the Lieutenant-Colonel

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 682-683.

²⁰ The movement that fought for the independence both of Portuguese colony «Guiné» and for the Portuguese colony «Cabo Verde».

went and the wounded man didn't go, because there was no space, I too would not go. In the end, we all came back.».

The sense of justice is evident; also evident is the sense of duty and of humanity. Hierarchy means nothing when that which is at stake is the life and health of a human being. A «*human being*», not an «*enemy*». Health care *principles* overrule any *values*, either military or political.

To be duly noticed that this woman officer – one of the beings who supposedly perhaps could not endure the harshness of military life in combat – made her position good, obliging the other officers to follow the path of human decency, of humanity, of the humane mode of being, mostly needed precisely in times and acts of war. These strong, just and humane attitudes *make the difference*. They, then, *made* the difference.

It was a difference also made of constant anguish, with heights that reached the almost humanly impossible to endure, not just when rescue failed to save, not only when seeing your comrades torn to pieces, but mainly when one of your kind, a comrade Para-Nurse, paid the ultimate price in a tragic way, as one can perceive through the words of Para-Nurse Maria da Piedade Gouveia:²¹

«Another thing that marked me the most was the death of our colleague Celeste. She was on first alert and I in second. We were at the Officers' Mess having lunch, there was an alert, and Celeste went by jeep to the runway. Not even five minutes had elapsed, when I was told to go to the runway, to go and do an evacuation. I said that Celeste had already gone, but I was told there had been an accident. I went, running, to the runway and, when I arrived, she was already covered with the cloth used to cover the aeroplanes. I uncovered her and saw the brain all scattered around. Later, I was told that, at the moment in

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 679: «Outra coisa que me marcou muito foi a morte da nossa colega Celeste. Ela estava em primeiro alerta e eu em segundo. Estávamos na messe dos oficiais a almoçar, houve um alerta, e a Celeste seguiu de jipe para a pista. Nem cinco minutos tinham passado quando me mandaram ir para a pista para ir fazer uma evacuação. Eu disse que a Celeste já tinha saído, mas responderam-me que tinha havido um acidente. Fui a correr para a pista e, quando lá cheguei, ela já estava coberta com o pano de tapar os aviões. Destapei-a e vi o cérebro dela todo espalhado. Mais tarde contaram-me que, no momento em que a hélice lhe cortou a cabeça, ela tinha dado um grito que se ouviu em toda a pista, que ainda era grande.».

which the propeller cut her head off, she had cried so loud that she was heard all over the runway, that was rather big.».

And helplessness settles in. All seems in vain. Non the less, the unity between job to do and force of will, though unsettled, does not wither or fail, when human extreme need presents itself. This unity is the Woman Para-Troop Nurse herself.

Para-Nurse Maria Zulmira André summarizes:²²

«I did all the treatments that had been taught me as fit for those emergency situations, the fastest possible, in order that the [wounded military] went to the hospital, where he would receive the adequate treatment. It was anguishing to desire that all went as fast as possible, that the plane went faster... We even had no time for fears. There is a life there and we must do everything in order that such life is not lost.».

«No time for fears.» Common sense – not always compatible with “good sense” – ‘says’ that in war everyone is afraid. One may even wonder if it is not acceptable – socially, at least – to think that there may exist someone who is not, effectively, afraid at war, under the conditions of war, moreover, under the conditions of an intense battle. It seems that it is forbidden not to be afraid.

Well, it is not. There is nothing in the known structure of the universe that impedes not being afraid, and statistics are just what they are, they don't define possibilities, they merely describe, under the aegis of the parameters to which they obey, a certain 'state of fact'. Nothing more. So, it is possible that some person, any person, in principle, may not be afraid under the considered conditions; as it is evident that, under the same principles, there may be someone who may be afraid, under the

²² *Ibidem*, p. 673: «Eu fazia todos os tratamentos que me tinham ensinado a fazer para aquelas situações de emergência, o mais depressa possível, para que fosse [o militar ferido] para o hospital onde receberia o tratamento adequado. Era uma angústia desejar que tudo se passasse o mais rápido possível, que o avião andasse o mais depressa... Nem tempo temos para medos. Está ali uma vida e temos que fazer tudo para que essa vida não se perca.».

same conditions; as is evident that everyone may not be afraid or everyone may be afraid under the same conditions. What is not necessary is that all of them *must* be one way or the other. Facts and logic matter; ideology does not, when reality is at stake. Sooner or later, ideological trash shall always sink to the bottom, leaving both facts and logic on top. Scientific patience is paramount in order to perceive what really reality is or was.

When Para-Nurse Zulmira says that there was no time for fears, she does not mean that psychologically she had no fear – which is meaningless under the circumstances –, but, there was no time, i.e., no margin for not acting in order to save the wounded, regardless of what she and her comrades felt, be it either fear, anguish, elation, or whatever feelings: *feelings do not save wounded soldiers*, action, appropriate action, may, appropriate action often does; not as often as the rescuers would like. Nevertheless, their finality was properly served, their «duty» discharged, their contribution to and for the possible common good made. Feelings were kept in the medical bag, and let open when ‘job’ was done.

This anthropological greatness is not compatible with psychological distractions or reductions. It is purely ethical, depending only on the person’s desire to help and on the realization of that desire.

On the other hand, «fear» is sometimes mistaken for other types of passions, as being scared with the noises or sights of battle, etc., or, worse, with ethic attitudes – that are actions, not passions –, as prudence and courage, absolute necessities for the soldier under battle situation; the direr the battle conditions, the more needed are both courage and prudence. A prudent soldier is not to be mistaken for a coward one, but for an intelligent one. Imprudence may win a combat, randomly, but it shall not win a war, which final result always depends on *intelligent governing of acts*.

Such were the generality of the acts of these Women Para-Troops. With unavoidable mistakes, due to imprudence, but generally governed by prudence.

A testimony, by Para-Nurse Maria do Céu Pedro, exemplifies what differentiates fear from temerity and from the courageous use of action, being as prudent as possible,

but not accepting leaving a wounded comrade behind; a difficult complex balance that leaves every time the agent on the cutting edge of the knife:²³

«One other time, the helicopter landed and I stayed at the edge of the bush, I could not get out of the helicopter. They entered deep in the bush and the Corporal didn't come back for a long time. I decided, then, to penetrate in the bush, and there I found them. They were taking more time because a Second Lieu-Tenant had stepped on a mine, had lost a leg; and they were applying him a compressive dressing in order to stop him losing blood. When they saw me, they said: "You, here?! You are mad, Lady!". It was really prohibited to get out; all of that was booby-trapped, I stepped on no mine for it was not due. But I must say that I never felt fear.».

Quite impressive, and impossible to be negated, except by the ones who lived not such facts. Of course, the «not due» means a factor that one can designate as «luck», never knowing how to properly define «luck». In reality, there is always an immense possibility of events that may occur, all pertaining to an intricate net of dynamic relations. If one is situated in a theatre of war, one must know that there is the possibility – the greater or lesser probability – of there being mines, anywhere; really anywhere. Formal prohibitions serve the purpose of helping to avoid casualties, fatal or not. Nevertheless, if one follows strictly all the rules and ponders profoundly on all the possibilities, one does not act in war, or acts too late, situations which are difficultly to discern.

One does act bearing in mind possibilities and rules, but having as main principle the need to serve one's aim, be it whatever it is (this is not the point, here). The aim of the Portuguese Women Para-Troop Nurses was to rescue their wounded or ill comrades.

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 675-676: «De outra vez, o helicóptero desceu e eu fiquei na orla da mata, não podia sair do helicóptero. Eles entraram pelo mato dentro e o cabo nunca mais aparecia. Decidi então entrar pelo mato e lá os encontrei. Estavam a demorar porque um alferes tinha pisado uma mina, tinha ficado sem a perna e estavam-lhe a fazer um penso compressivo, para que ele não perdesse sangue. Quando me viram disseram: "A senhora aqui?! A senhora é doida!" Era realmente proibido sair, aquilo estava tudo armadilhado, só não pisei uma mina porque não calhou. Mas devo dizer que nunca senti medo.».

What Nurse Maria do Céu did was to put her aim in front of her safety. Was this not the common bread of the life of a soldier at war?

The same *war* which unique goodness is to never be.

Non the less, there are wars. Within their actuality, the only goodness is found precisely in the acts of care, the acts of mercy, the common or exceptional acts of human goodness, wherever they come to being, whoever realizes them.

The last words, left without comment, pertain, for they can only pertain to them, to some of the Portuguese Women Para-Troop Nurses. The first testimony is given by Nurse Zulmira:²⁴

«As a Para-Troop Nurse, what did I do before the wounded, the dead and the suffering of their relatives? What we all did: I took care of the wounds and the pains, consoling, giving hope, soothing, being present. This was our mission, and on it we put in it all our effort, physical and emotional, always respecting each person as deign of all respect, consideration and dedication. / No one of us was spared from difficult situations, but I am sure that our presence was effective and rather promoter of humanity.».

²⁴ SERRA Rosa (coord.), *Nós, Enfermeiras Paraquedistas*, «Prefácio» de Adriano Moreira, «Introdução» (coord.), «Mensagem» de Isabel Rilvas, s. l., Fronteira do Caos Editores, Lda., 2014, pp. 381-382: «Como enfermeira paraquedista, o que fiz perante os feridos, os mortos e o sofrimento dos seus familiares? O que todas nós fazíamos: cuidava das feridas e das dores, consolando, dando esperança, acalmando, estando presente. Foi esta a nossa missão, e nela pusemos todo o nosso esforço, físico e emocional, respeitando sempre cada pessoa como digna de todo o respeito, consideração e dedicação. / Nenhuma de nós foi poupada a situações difíceis, mas tenho a certeza de que a nossa presença foi eficaz e muito humanizadora.»). On the subject of the respect due to each person, the words of Para-Nurse Maria Ivone Reis are quite significant: «As more troops were going to Africa for the defence of the populations, black or white – there, there were no whites and no blacks –, the mission that was proposed to us was to accompany all the wounded at the combat front, in order not to diminish the number of the qualified people present there [at the rear hospitals] to receive the wounded.», («Como iriam mais militares para África em defesa das populações, negras ou brancas – ali não havia brancos nem pretos, mas portugueses – a missão que nos era proposta era acompanhar todos os feridos que surgissem na frente de combate, de maneira a não desfaltar as pessoas qualificadas que estariam lá para receber os feridos.»).

Para-Nurse Maria de Lourdes Gomes recalls:²⁵

«My service time in the Air Force is, as I remember, peopled with various kinds of feelings, all of them contradictory. Summarizing, I can affirm that it constituted, simultaneously, the best and the worst period of my life. / It was the worst because of all that I went through, felt and suffered. In spite of, as any other Nurse, being prepared to face unpleasant situations regarding the physical condition of the patients, I confess that I was not psychologically prepared to face the state of many of the wounded who were delivered to me for me to treat and keep alive until [arriving at] the hospital. It had never occurred to me that there could have been so much human destruction, so much pain, so much unhappiness! What I suffered during those minutes in which I fought, alone, to keep the wounded alive! Today, I'm admired at having resisted to so much pain and suffering. Living a mixt of feelings, I was there, yet almost a lass, trying to minimize the suffering of the others, and, simultaneously, trying to balance myself. / Today, I remember all of this with much more serenity, but the most dramatic cases I still remember them, with tears in my eyes. / But, on the other hand, that period was the best of my life, if I consider other factors. / For example, I feel pride for having lived that experience, because there all my physical and psychic

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 425: «A minha passagem pela Força Aérea é por mim recordada com vários tipos de sentimentos, todos eles contraditórios. Sumarizando, posso afirmar que ela constituiu, simultaneamente, o melhor e o pior período da minha vida. / Foi o pior por tudo aquilo que passei, senti e sofri. Apesar de, como qualquer enfermeira, ter sido preparada para enfrentar situações desagradáveis relativamente à condição física dos pacientes, confesso que não estava preparada psicologicamente para enfrentar o estado de muitos dos feridos que me entregavam para tratar e manter com vida até ao hospital. Nunca me tinha ocorrido que pudesse haver tanta destruição humana, tanta dor, tanta infelicidade! O que eu sofria durante aqueles minutos em que lutava, sozinha, para manter os feridos com vida! Hoje, admiro-me de ter resistido a tanta dor e sofrimento. Vivendo uma amálgama de sentimentos, eu estava lá, ainda quase menina, tentando minimizar o sofrimento dos outros e, simultaneamente, tentando equilibrar-me a mim própria. / Hoje relembro tudo isto com bastante mais serenidade, mas os casos mais dramáticos ainda os recordo, com lágrimas nos olhos. / Mas, por outro lado, aquele período foi o melhor da minha vida se considerar outros factores. / Por exemplo, sinto orgulho por ter vivido aquela experiência, pois ali forma postas à prova todas as minhas capacidades físicas e psíquicas e as minhas qualidades morais. Tive experiências extraordinárias, observando o que de pior o homem pode provocar ao seu semelhante, mas também testemunhei situações onde a mais nobre faceta humana tinha o seu brilho. Enfrentei tremendas dificuldades, medos, dúvidas, por vezes quase que desesperei, mas, com maior ou menor dificuldade, sempre consegui ultrapassar todas essas barreiras.».

capacities along with my moral qualities were put to the test. I had extraordinary experiences, observing the worst man can provoke to his fellow human being, but I also witnessed situations in which the noblest human facet had its glow. I faced tremendous difficulties, fears, doubts, sometimes I almost despaired, but, with more or less difficulty, I always managed to overcome all of those barriers.».

Para-Nurse Cristina had a bullet for a friend, a very ‘intimate’ one:²⁶

«On the eve of leaving Mueda definitely, because I was going to be discharged, departing next day for Lisbon, my colleague Marina insisted on her doing all the evacuations that day, while I packed my suitcases in order to travel the next day. When the first evacuation call arrived, she went on, and when she returned, she said: “... I’m going to the Chinaman (small, and, I think, unique shop that existed in Mueda and which owners were Chinese) to do some shopping and I won’t be long!”. In this short period of time, another call for evacuation came, for Nangololo, and, then, I went on, not informing her. / When returning with the wounded man on board, the plane was shot and I was hit. Suddenly, I had the sensation that I had been hit with a horse kick on my head, coming from I didn’t know where! [...] The pilot managed to take the plane to the runway at Mueda. After having landed, the wounded man we had gone to Nangololo to

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 289-290: «Na véspera de deixar Mueda definitivamente, porque ia passar à disponibilidade, embarcando no dia seguinte para Lisboa, a minha colega Mariana fez questão em ser ela a fazer todas as evacuações desse dia enquanto eu fazia as minhas malas para embarcar no dia seguinte. Ao primeiro pedido de evacuação ela avançou e no regresso disse “... vou ali ao China (pequena, e penso que única, loja que havia em Mueda, cujos proprietários eram chineses) fazer umas compras, não me demoro!”. Neste curto intervalo, surgiu novo pedido de evacuação para Nangololo, e então eu avancei, não lhe dando conhecimento. / No regresso com o ferido a bordo, o avião foi alvejado, sendo eu atingida. De repente tive a sensação de que levava um coice na cabeça, vindo não sei de onde! [...] / O piloto conseguiu levar o avião até à pista de Mueda. Após aterrarmos, o ferido que tínhamos ido buscar a Nangololo ficou em terra e eu embarquei num helicóptero rumo à enfermaria do sector [...] Aqui, fiz uma radiografia para ver onde se encontrava o possível estilhaço. Após o Raio-X verificou-se, para espanto de todos e de mim própria, que tinha uma bala na cabeça, que entrara junto do lobo inferior da orelha direita, ficando alojada na nuca. Todos os médicos ficaram surpreendidos, quase incrédulos, a olhar a radiografia – e eu também! Não sei o que pensei, só me lembro que pedi um cigarro e fumei-o ali mesmo, antes de ser operada para extração do dito que, no fundo, foi meu “amigo”. Ela entrou, fez o seu caminho, e instalou-se “confortavelmente” num local onde não desse muito trabalho, se o proprietário do seu novo alojamento resolvesse desinstalá-la... Não fez estragos nenhuns na sua trajetória. O cirurgião operou, retirou-a com cuidado e, no fim da operação, ofereceu-ma. Até hoje a minha “amiga” bala faz parte do meu espólio.».

fetch stayed on ground and I boarded a helicopter to be transported to the sector Infirmary [...]. Here, I had an X Ray, to see where the possible piece of shrapnel was at. After the X Ray, it was established, to the amazement of all, including myself, that I had a bullet inside my head, that penetrated near the inferior lobe of the right ear, ending up being lodged at the back of the head. All the Doctors were surprised, almost incredulous, looking at the radiography – and so was I! I do not know what I thought, I just remember that I asked for a cigarette and smoked it right there, before being operated to extract the said object, that, after all, was my “friend”. It entered, made its way, and settled “comfortably” in a place where it would not cause a lot of trouble, if the proprietor of its new diggings resolved to uninstall it... It caused no damage at all in its trajectory. The Surgeon operated, withdrew it carefully, and, in the end, gave it to me. Up until today, my “friend” the bullet is part of my spoils.».

Para-Nurse Maria de Lourdes Gravato²⁷ remembers:²⁸

«It is impossible to describe that which I underwent in that period of my life. Many of those events still inhabit my memory, for they are unforgettable. Some, being so painful, I never uttered a word about them to anyone, and they will forever stay with me, also due to the respect for those who were their victims. But there were also extraordinary moments of joy, of pure conviviality, of Friendship. And, always, of Dedication to our fellow human beings, to those who needed our help. In the lines here written, I want to engrave a vote of praise to all the young and less young, from one side or from the other, who fought the war. They, indeed, were and are heroes, they did not have a choice, they did not have an option. I was a volunteer.».

These last testimonies presented here manifest both grief and joy. Nevertheless, though grief was sometimes so profound that it never came to speech, joy seems to

²⁷ Formerly Maria de Lourdes Cobra, maiden name.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 407-408: «É inenarrável o que comigo aconteceu naquele período da minha vida. Muitos daqueles acontecimentos ainda hoje povoam a minha memória, pois são inesquecíveis. Alguns, por muito dolorosos, nunca os narrei a ninguém, e ficarão para sempre comigo, até por respeito por aqueles que foram suas vítimas. Mas havia também momentos extraordinários de alegria, de são convívio, de Amizade. E, sempre, de Dedicação ao próximo, àqueles que necessitavam da nossa ajuda. Nestas minhas linhas, quero que fique gravado um voto de louvor a todos os jovens e menos jovens, de um lado ou do outro, que fizeram a guerra. Eles, sim, foram e são heróis, não tiveram escolha, não tiveram opção. Eu, fui voluntária.».

have surpassed everything else, exalting these women to an anthropological height that is most uncommon, certainly much, much higher than the lamentable mediocrity of the ones who create wars and never lay their feet on the bloody fields they are the makers of.

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ABSTRACT:

Portugal had a group of military Para-Troop women composed by trained Nurses, whose main mission was to respond to evacuation calls for wounded soldiers, nursing them, keeping them alive until they could reach military hospitals in the rear. The idea, the path to convincing the men in power, the creation and development of this very small but very significant and effective force, along with the service it delivered, constitute a dramatic historical and noble part of the Portuguese Colonial War. The action of these paradigmatic women proved, beyond any honest doubt, the capacity of apparently common women to perform even the harshest and most difficult tasks, never losing, in their case, the profound sense of humane action that had been the ethic core of their formation as Nurses.

KEYWORDS:

Portuguese Women Para-Troop Nurses, war, wounded soldiers, evacuation, comrade, greatness.

