

Spared Lives

The actions of three Portuguese diplomats in World War II

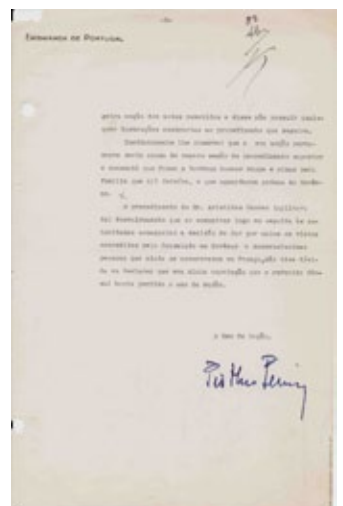
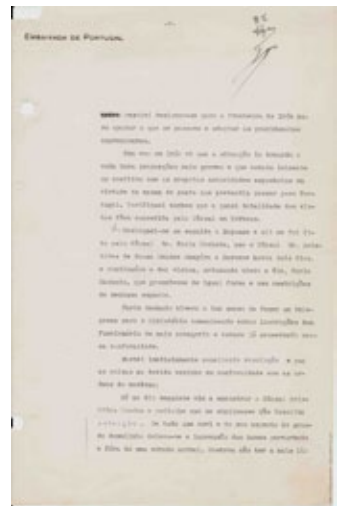
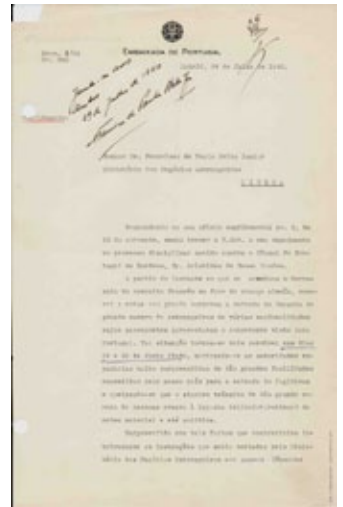
15–26 Jul. 1940

Deposition of the witnesses for the prosecution, Ambassador Pedro Teotónio Pereira and Captain Agostinho Lourenço.

(AHD - Disciplinary Proceedings against Aristides de Sousa Mendes)

DEPOSITION OF CAPTAIN AGOSTINHO LOURENÇO, HEAD OF THE PVDE, WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION IN THE DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS OF ARISTIDES DE SOUSA MENDES, ON 15 JULY 1940

Concerning the facts of the matter he said: Having been informed of the complaint... [by Count Tovar] he confirms the facts therein contained with the exception of the communication made by the British Embassy to the Secretariat of State, about which he knows nothing. He added that having been in Vilar Formoso during the last days of June of the current year to control the arrival of the refugees, he noted that most of the foreigners coming into Portugal had visas issued by our Consulate in Bordeaux; many of these foreigners were of nationalities which by determination of the Foreign Ministry were forbidden to be granted visas but who had to be interned in this country as the Spanish authorities would not consent to their return alleging that they had been allowed into Spain as their visa was valid for Portugal issued by a Portuguese consulate. Many of the visas had been issued on documents that were not even passports: simple identity documents, valid for local authorities served the Consul in Bordeaux as valid travel documents. He said nothing further...



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DEPOSITION OF AMBASSADOR PEDRO TEOTÓNIO PEREIRA, WITNESS
FOR THE PROSECUTION IN THE DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS OF
ARISTIDES DE SOUSA MENDES, ON 26 JULY 1940

Madrid, 26 July 1940

Dr. Francisco de Paula Brito Júnior
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
LISBON

In reply to your confidential letter nº 2 of 10th inst., I hereby present my deposition in the disciplinary proceedings brought against the Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, Mr. Aristides de Sousa Mendes.

From the moment when the defeat of the French army was accentuated by the German advance, I was surprised to notice the entry into Spain of a large number of different nationalities whose passports had the competent visa for Portugal. The situation grew worse on 19th and 20th June and the Spanish authorities were very surprised at so many facilities for entry granted by our country to the refugees, complaining that the fact of so many people in transit created delicate material and even political problems for Spain.

Surprised by such facts which are in total opposition to the instructions I knew had been sent by the Foreign Ministry to our Consul I decided to travel to the border at Irun to discover what was happening and take the appropriate measures.

Once in Irun I saw that the situation was worsening by the hour and that a conflict with the Spanish authorities was imminent on account of the large mass of people wishing to travel to Portugal. I also saw that most of the visas had been issued by the Consul in Bordeaux.

I then went to Bayonne where I was told by the Consul, Mr. Faria Machado, that Consul Aristides de Sousa Mendes had arrived in Bayonne two days previously and had continued to issue visas, ordering him, Faria Machado, to do the same without restrictions of any kind.

Faria Machado had had the good sense to send a telegram to the Ministry communicating these instructions from a functionary of a higher category and was already proceeding accordingly.

I immediately put a stop to this order and placed things on their proper track again in accordance with the government's orders.

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I encountered Consul Aristides de Sousa Mendes only on the following day and asked him to explain his extraordinary behavior. All I heard, coupled with his disheveled aspect, gave me the idea that this man was disturbed and not in his right mind. He appeared not to have the slightest idea of the acts committed and said he had no instructions contradicting the procedure he had followed.

I immediately observed that his actions would certainly be reprimanded and possibly even hierarchically disciplined and agreed that he should go to Bordeaux to change clothes, see his family and await orders from the Government.

The behavior of Mr. Aristides de Sousa Mendes implied such confusion that I immediately informed the Spanish authorities that the visas granted by the Bordeaux consulate to a large number of people still in France were null and void, and I had no doubt in stating my conviction that said Consul had lost the use of his faculties.

At the Service of the Nation

s/ Pedro Teotónio Pereira