

# **German Submarine war in Portuguese Waters: Esposende – a Smuggling Network**

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We believe that the smuggling network that occurred in *Esposende* was not just about an isolated war episode, but a social/economical consequence of the German submarine war in the Portuguese shores. According to our investigations and historical document analysis, we believe that several Portuguese/Spanish smuggling networks flourished, especially alongside the Iberian coast, and traded goods and supplies with German submarine crews by taking advantage of the lack of vigilance in these coastal areas. We have very good evidences that take us to believe that this occurrence could happen all along the Iberian coast, in spite of several difficulties to prove considering the lack of documental sources. The Portuguese and Spanish historiography mentions this phenomenon, but never went deeper into this subject, stating only that were constant rumours and sightings according to the sources of the time. In this article the reader can have access to our perspective, and also reflect about the German submarine activity around the Iberian coast, particularly the Portuguese one.

## **1. German Submarine Activity in the Portuguese shores**

It's not the aim of this article to particularize the activity German submarines in the Great War context around the Portuguese coast, but we think that is important to mention the characteristics of German operations in this area, as well as some of their most important attacks. Portugal entered in the world conflict by many reasons, but most of the Portuguese historiography agrees that the capture and confiscation of the 72 German ships, at 23 February 1916, that had taken refuge in Portuguese ports since the beginning of the war, was the breaking point between German-Portuguese

diplomacy<sup>1</sup>. Imperial Germany declared war on Portugal at 9<sup>th</sup> March 1916 in response to this act. The capture of these ships was required by Great Britain, and the British proposal was accepted in *Belém* Palace, Lisbon, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1916<sup>2</sup>. Other countries like Portugal entered in the conflict in a very similar situation; it's the case of Brazil and Peru that captured German ships in the name of the British strategic diplomacy<sup>3</sup>. According to the author Marc Ferro, since the beginning of the conflict, about 743 German ships were anchored in neutral waters<sup>4</sup>, 72 of them, according to Oliveira Marques<sup>5</sup>, in mainland Portugal and his colonies. By cruising the numbers of both authors we can say that 10 % of these ships were actually refuge in Portuguese ports, which confirms, in some way, the geographical and strategic importance of the Portuguese coast, which converge the following route axis Atlantic-Mediterranean-Gulf of Biscay. The tonnage of the German ships anchored in Portugal was the double of the Portuguese merchant navy before the war that only had 138.000 tons in shipping<sup>6</sup>. This fact made the Portuguese and British authorities very interested in the capture of these ships, which could provide a significant provision of ships to both countries.

In the beginning of 1915, German submarine operations expanded to other stages of war, including the Mediterranean, the Biscayan Gulf and the Atlantic Ocean, which changed the strategy of the Allied navies. In the eyes of the *Etente Cordiale* perspective, Portugal had crucial key points in the Atlantic (Madeira, Azores and Cape Verde), which could provide supply bases, and military coordination centres down the Atlantic. In 1915, the German admiral Wolfgang Wegener wrote three reports about German naval strategy, by suggesting an unrestricted *U-boat* campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> Especially the colonial rivalries in Africa (Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique made frontier with German Namibia and Tanganyika), since the late XIX century, created several diplomatic tensions between Portugal and the colonial expansionist policy of Imperial Germany. Even before Portugal entered officially in the war against Germany, German troops attacked Portuguese posts alongside the colonial frontier.

<sup>2</sup> Great Britain and the Portuguese republican authorities agreed that 80 % of these ships would be sent to British war effort, and Portugal would have only 20 % of them. Some of these ships were destroyed by German submarines in route to British ports.

<sup>3</sup> Rui Ramos, "História de Portugal"; *A República Portuguesa durante a Guerra (1917-1926)*. In *História de Portugal* ed. José Mattoso, *História de Portugal*, vol. 8, (Lisboa: A Esfera dos Livros, 2009), p. 449.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Ferro, *A Grande Guerra 1914-1918* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 1990), p.144.

<sup>5</sup> A. H. de Oliveira Marques, *História de Portugal* (Lisboa: Palas Editora, 1986), p.235.

<sup>6</sup> António José Telo, *Primeira República – Do Sonho à Realidade* (Lisboa: Artes Gráficas, 2010), p.335.

In this reports Wegener highlighted the strategic value of the Biscayan Gulf and the coastal areas adjacent to Azores and Cape Verde, and proposes that German submarines should focus their operations on these same areas<sup>7</sup>. For the German admiral, taking Azores and Cape Verde was an unreliable hypothesis, but should be a granted acquisition in future peace treaties with the Allies<sup>8</sup>.

After Portugal entered on the war, German submarines started to mine Tajo's river mouth, trying to asphyxiate commercial routes from Lisbon port, in the spring of 1916<sup>9</sup>. Portuguese Navy had no resources to fight German activity, for various reasons. The political crisis installed in Portugal, since the falling of the Portuguese monarchy, in 1910, was fomented by numerous republican factions that couldn't make a durable administration supported by the parliament. This aspect, alongside the economic and financial crisis, wearied out the Portuguese political, economic and military institutions, including the Navy. The Navy had only four cruisers, two destroyers, and one submarine<sup>10</sup> and a few more than ten gunboats in reasonable conditions to give some struggle to German offensives by this time<sup>11</sup>. The Navy Arsenal<sup>12</sup> worked very slowly to produce more naval units, considering the fact that German ships, captured in Portuguese ports on the 23th February 1916, were sabotaged by their crews and needed repairs. It was also very difficult to the Navy to import new materials from the Allies to repair these ships. So the Portuguese Admiralty complemented its numbers by requesting civilian boats<sup>13</sup> and some of the German captured ships in order to raise the Navy's numbers. By June 1916, Portugal had new units centred especially in Lisbon, some Algarve bases and Leixões port

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<sup>7</sup> António José Telo, *Primeira República – Do Sonho à Realidade*, p.330.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rui Cardoso et al., *A Primeira Guerra Mundial. Livro Extra sobre a Participação de Portugal* (Lisboa: A Esfera dos Livros, 2014), p.74.

<sup>10</sup> Portugal was one of the first nations to have a modern submarine, by holding its first unit by 1913. The submarine *Espadarte* was the first example at the Portuguese Navy service. It was built in Italy, in La Spezia shipyards.

<sup>11</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates da Marinha Portuguesa. Volume VII – 1808-1975*, vol. 8. (Lisboa: Livraria Sá da Costa Editora, 1997), p.121.

<sup>12</sup> The Arsenal Navy, settled in Lisbon, suffered a fire at 18<sup>th</sup> April 1916.

<sup>13</sup> Some nautical clubs gave their yachts and boats to the Navy in change off military exemption.

(Oporto), including improvised vapours, gunboats and Tagus river galleons<sup>14</sup>. The Navy counted also with six modern German ships, now with Portuguese names.

As war went on, Portugal started receiving some aid from the Allies, especially with the new balance of power in the Mediterranean when Italy joined the Allies, in the middle of 1915<sup>15</sup>. It was the French government that first demonstrated some interest in protecting the Portuguese coast, thus ensuring its connections Mediterranean and Atlantic seas. In late 1916, France requested, near the Portuguese government, the establishment of auxiliary bases on its shore, as will be shown in 1917, particularly in Leixões, Aveiro and Algarve coast<sup>16</sup>. In September 28, 1917, French and the Portuguese military administrations created the Maritime Aviation Centre of Lisbon, in Bom Sucesso dock, next to the *Belém* Tower<sup>17</sup>. The French would be responsible for the defense of the port of Leixões (Oporto) and also installed, in May 1918, a seaplane base in San Jacinto (near Aveiro) with eight aircraft units<sup>18</sup>. With entrance of the US into the conflict, on April 6th 1917, the control of the Atlantic became vital, in order to allow the crossing of the American troops to French ports. In addition to the French defensive help, Portugal also received American aid in the Azores. The American Admiralty, after a dialogue with London, approved the installation of a military base in the Azores, in the second half of 1917. In late May 1917, Americans begin the actual installation of a military base, and subsequently deposited around 10,000 tons of coal to supply ships that were crossing the Atlantic by this time<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Aniceto Afonso, and Carlos de Matos Gomes, *Portugal e a Grande Guerra 1915-1917. As Trincheiras* (Vila do Conde: Verso da História, 2014), p.56.

<sup>15</sup> António José Telo, *Primeira República – Do Sonho à Realidade*, p.330.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Aniceto Afonso, and Carlos de Matos Gomes, *Portugal e a Grande Guerra 1915-1917. As Trincheiras*, p.60.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> António José Telo, *Os Açores e o Controlo do Atlântico (1898/1948)*, (Lisboa: Edições Asa, 1993), p.110.

## 2. German Offensives in the Portuguese shores 1916-1918

At April 17<sup>th</sup>, a German mine sank the Norwegian ship Terje Vikken, near Cascais<sup>20</sup>. This mine was dropped by U-73 when on transit to the Mediterranean. She was the first ship that sank off the Portuguese coast by German action. But 1916 had some more significant German attacks in this area. One of the biggest ships sunk in the Great War<sup>21</sup>, the French dreadnought *Suffren*, displacing 12.750 tons, knew his destiny off the Portuguese coast, when on route to France after the Allied offensive in the Dardanelles. At 25<sup>th</sup> November, the U-52 submarine, commanded by Hans Walther, torpedoed the ship causing 648 deaths, and had no survivors<sup>22</sup>.

In December 1916, German submarines attacked Cape Verde and Madeira. From the docks of Cattaro, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the U-38, commanded by Max Valentiner, attacked Funchal, in Madeira, in 3th December. Probably one of the most well documented German attacks in the Portuguese shores, as we can have access to Valentiner's perspective about the same attack in the book *La Terreur des Mers: Mes Aventures en Sous-Marin 1914-1918*<sup>23</sup>. Berlin expected that Max Valentiner would find a numerous British fleet in Funchal, but only sunk four ships; even so he was given a *Pour Le Mérite* medal by the *Kaiser* for this attack<sup>24</sup>. In the next day, a submarine was spotted near the S. Vicente port, in Cape Verde. Portuguese coastal artillery gave some shots and it was enough to the German withdraw<sup>25</sup>. The attack on Funchal confirmed the Allied fears about the U-boat growing presence and unpredictability on the Atlantic, has the *Entente Cordiale* admiralities suspected<sup>26</sup>. It was a very serious sign for what was going to occur in the Atlantic next year.

1917, the year of German submarine war zenith, globally speaking, was notorious in the Portuguese coast. In this same year, the tonnage of unloaded goods in

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<sup>20</sup> Paulo Costa, *Terje Vikken*. Accessed August 28, 2016.

<http://www.portugal1914.org/portal/pt/historia/a-guerra-1914-1918/item/6923-terje-viken/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ships hit during WW1. Accessed August 28, 2016. [http://www.uboaat.net/wwi/ships\\_hit/5825.html/](http://www.uboaat.net/wwi/ships_hit/5825.html/).

<sup>22</sup> Martin Gilbert, *A Primeira Guerra Mundial*, vol. 4 (Lisboa: A Esfera dos Livros, 1994), p.26.

<sup>23</sup> Max Valentiner, *La Terreur des Mers: Mês Aventures en Sous-Marin* (Paris: Payot, 1931).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.123.

<sup>25</sup> Aniceto Afonso, and Carlos de Matos Gomes, *Portugal e a Grande Guerra 1915-1917. As Trincheiras*, p.60.

<sup>26</sup> R. H. Gibson and Maurice Prendergast, *The German Submarine War (1914-1918)* (London: Naval Institute Press, 1931), p.134.

Portuguese ports represented only 20 % of 1913's total tonnage<sup>27</sup>. To have a good perspective of the deterioration of Portuguese ports supply lines, we could look to the wheat importation. Portugal imported 182.000 tons in 1916 (representing half of the intern market consume) and had only access to 55.000 tons in 1917<sup>28</sup>. In 1916, the port of Lisbon registered the entry of 2.521 ships (4.298.800 brute tons), that unloaded 1.336.936 tons in goods, and on the next year only 1.455 ships (1.858.135 brute tons) delivered 603.635 tons in this port<sup>29</sup>. In this same year German submarines sunk about 104 ships on the Portuguese coats, representing 1.467.161 tons approximately<sup>30</sup>. Most of them were British and Norwegian ships<sup>31</sup>. Portuguese waters experienced the entrance of the U-151 class (ex-*Deutschland*) in Atlantic naval war stage, increasing the operational range of the German operations.

On March 17<sup>th</sup> German submarines attacked four Portuguese fishing ships near Roca Cape, and according to the journal *O Comércio do Porto* the attack was conducted by two German submarines, one from the north and other from the south. This attack left around one hundred men as castaways, which were saved by patrol boats from Lisbon<sup>32</sup>. The book *The German Pirate – His Methods and Record*<sup>33</sup> tells the experiences of a German crewmember that participated in this attack, with the pseudonymous *Ajax*. In this description *Ajax* stated that German crews expelled Portuguese fishermen from the boats, and sacked the ships by taking fish and cloths after threatening them with pistols<sup>34</sup>. This record gives us an idea about how German submarine crews obtained fresh goods and supplies in high sea.

On 24<sup>th</sup> April, commanding U-35, Lothar von Arnauld de la Perière sunk four ships near Sagres, Algarve: the Danish cargo ship *Nordsöen*<sup>35</sup>, the Norwegian ships

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<sup>27</sup> Rui Ramos, “História de Portugal”; *A República Portuguesa durante a Guerra (1917-1926)*, p. 449.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Ana Prata, *Políticas Portuárias na I República (1880-1929)*, (Lisboa: Caleidoscópio, 2011), p.111.

<sup>30</sup> Miguel Castro Brandão, “(Con)Viver com o Inimigo – A Atividade Submarina Alemã durante a Primeira Guerra Mundial – Interações na costa de Esposende”, (Master Thesis, University of Oporto, 2015), p.72.

<sup>31</sup> Great Britain was the nation that lost most ships in the Portuguese waters, during 1916-1918 periods, with a total loss of 33 ships.

<sup>32</sup> *O Comércio do Porto*, (Porto) March 20, 1917, p.4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ajax, The German Pirate – His Methods and Record*, (New York, George H. Doran Company, 1918), p. 18.

<sup>34</sup> *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto), March 20, 1917, p.4.

<sup>35</sup> After been stopped by a few shots from U-35, the Germans put some explosives in the ship basement, after the crew leaving. This first intervention didn't sunk the ship in the first place, and it drifted to the coast. The Germans came later to sunk definitely the ship, near Sagres, Algarve. There is no consensus between Portuguese authors about German landing in the Portuguese coast, in attempt to

*Vilhelm Krag* and *Torvore*, and the Italian sailing vessel *Bieneimé Prof. Luigi*<sup>36</sup>. On the same day, U-35 also shared some shots with other ships: the Portuguese trawler *Galgo*<sup>37</sup>; three Spanish cargo ships: *La Castreja*, *Cataluña* and *Triana*<sup>38</sup>; and the French ship *Caravellas*<sup>39</sup>. Portuguese authors like Augusto Salgado, Jorge Russo<sup>40</sup> and Paulo Costa (website articles)<sup>41</sup> developed new studies about this attack, and we can actually have a very good perspective about U-35's activity in this particular day. There is also filming records about this occurrence, used to produce the 1917's German propaganda film *Der magische Grütel*. This singular episode shows that German submarines didn't had opponents in the Portuguese waters, and how vulnerable was the Portuguese coast. After this day, Lothar's ammunition stock was very low; and he decided to return to U-35's base, in the Mediterranean, arriving at Cattarro on 6th May 1917<sup>42</sup>.

On 4 July 1917, the U-155 attacked Ponta Delgada, in the Azores. The German submarine action in the Atlantic and Azores was notorious after the entrance of United States in the war<sup>43</sup>. In attempt to destroy the coal storage in Ponta Delgada's port, as Max Valentiner tried in Funchal on December 3th 1916, Karl Meussel bombarded the city and the port facilities. Portuguese coastal artillery simply had no range to stop Meussel's bombardment, but the American cargo ship *Orion* that was in a very good defensive position and fought back. U-155 withdrew a short time after. There were no significant damages in the city, and only one little girl died and three women were wounded<sup>44</sup>. Locals and the Portuguese authorities celebrated the

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sunk the ship with explosives. Some reports in Portuguese journals also confirm that some civilians were near this incident, and repulse by the Germans. The war diary of the submarine commander reports this aspect.

<sup>36</sup> Archaeological witnesses of these wrecks are been studied and protected by the *U-35 Project*, by CINAV (Portuguese Navy Research Centre).

<sup>37</sup> This Portuguese ship had a brief fight with U-35, and saved around seventy castaways from the sea.

<sup>38</sup> The ship *Triana* actually was damaged after U-35's shots. All three Spanish ships were inspected and released by U-35's crew.

<sup>39</sup> This ship shot against the German submarine, but turned away after a few moments.

<sup>40</sup> Augusto Salgado et al., *Project U-35. Relatório de Trabalhos 2014*, (Lisboa: CINAV, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> "Portugal 14 18", accessed 27 August, 2016, <http://www.portugal1914.org/portal/pt/>.

<sup>42</sup> *First World War U-boat – A Guide to the Video (Der Magische (The Enchanted Circe) (1917) and the Exploits of German Submarine (U-35) Operating in the Mediterranean (1919)*, (London: Loyd's Register of Shipping on behalf of the Imperial War Museum, 2000), p.127.

<sup>43</sup> António José Telo, *Homens, Doutrina e Organização: 1824-1974*, (Lisboa: Academia de Marinha, 1999), p.275.

<sup>44</sup> Jaime do Inso, *Marinha Portuguesa na Grande Guerra*, (Lisboa: Edições Culturais da Marinha, 2006), p.69.

American Orion crew, including the governor that sent letters to the American consul in Portugal, thanking his action<sup>45</sup>.

More German significant attacks were notorious in the last months of 1917. On 2 November, Waldemar Khopamel, commanding U-151, attacked two Brazilian cargo ships at S. Vicente port that carried huge coffee cargos<sup>46</sup>. On 12 December, the Germans bombarded Funchal again, by Erich Eckelmann aboard U-155. Germans made some significant damages in the city, killing five people and wounded several civilians<sup>47</sup>. One of the submarine shots damaged Santa Clara church<sup>48</sup>.

Even dramatic, 1918 showed a softening submarine activity in the Portuguese waters, but they continued a privateering war strategy. The effectiveness of the convoy system, created by the Allies, was felt, with the reduction of the number of casualties at sea. Although the year 1918 shows a significant number of shipwrecks, German stopped the attacks on cities or Portuguese military bases in the Atlantic.

Probably the most significant episode, in 1918, was the combat between the armed trawler *Augusto de Castilho* against Lothar's von Arnould de la Perière's U-139, on 14 October 1918, not far from Azores<sup>49</sup>. This combat has been the most mentioned combat in the Portuguese historiography, and probably one of the most documented. In attempt of protecting the passenger ship *S. Miguel*, the *Augusto Castilho* tried to distract U-139, in a very unfair fight, considering the German artillery superiority. The U-139 could simply shoot against the Portuguese trawler out of range, with 155 mm deck guns<sup>50</sup>. After a fierce fight the Portuguese trawler surrender, soon after the death of the commandant Carvalho Araújo and part of her crew.

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<sup>45</sup> António José Telo, *Os Açores e o Controlo do Atlântico (1898/1948)*, p.114.

<sup>46</sup> António José Telo, *Primeira República – Do Sonho à Realidade* (Lisboa: Artes Gráficas, 2010), p.335.

<sup>47</sup> Saturnino Monteiro, *Batalhas e Combates da Marinha Portuguesa. Volume VII – 1808-1975*, p.131.

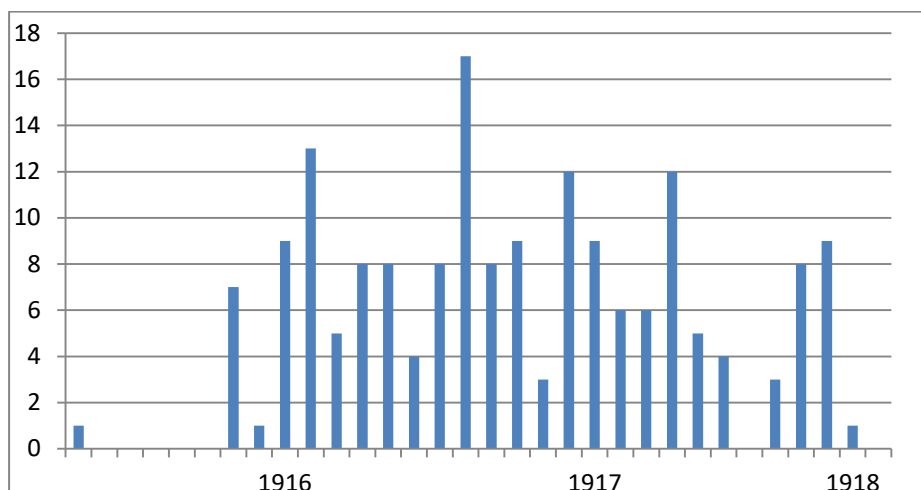
<sup>48</sup> Rui Cardoso et al., *A Primeira Guerra Mundial. Livro Extra sobre a Participação de Portugal*, p.77.

<sup>49</sup> Alberto Cutileiro, *O Combate do caça-minas "Augusto de Castilho" com o submarino Alemão "U-139" visto através do relatório do 1º oficial encarregado de artilharia, capitão-tenente Kurt von Pistor* (Lisboa: Centro de Estudos de Marinha, 1976), p.9.

<sup>50</sup> Aniceto Afonso, and Carlos de Matos Gomes, *Portugal and the Great War 1915-1917. The Trenches* (Vila do Conde: Verso da História, 2014), p. 86.



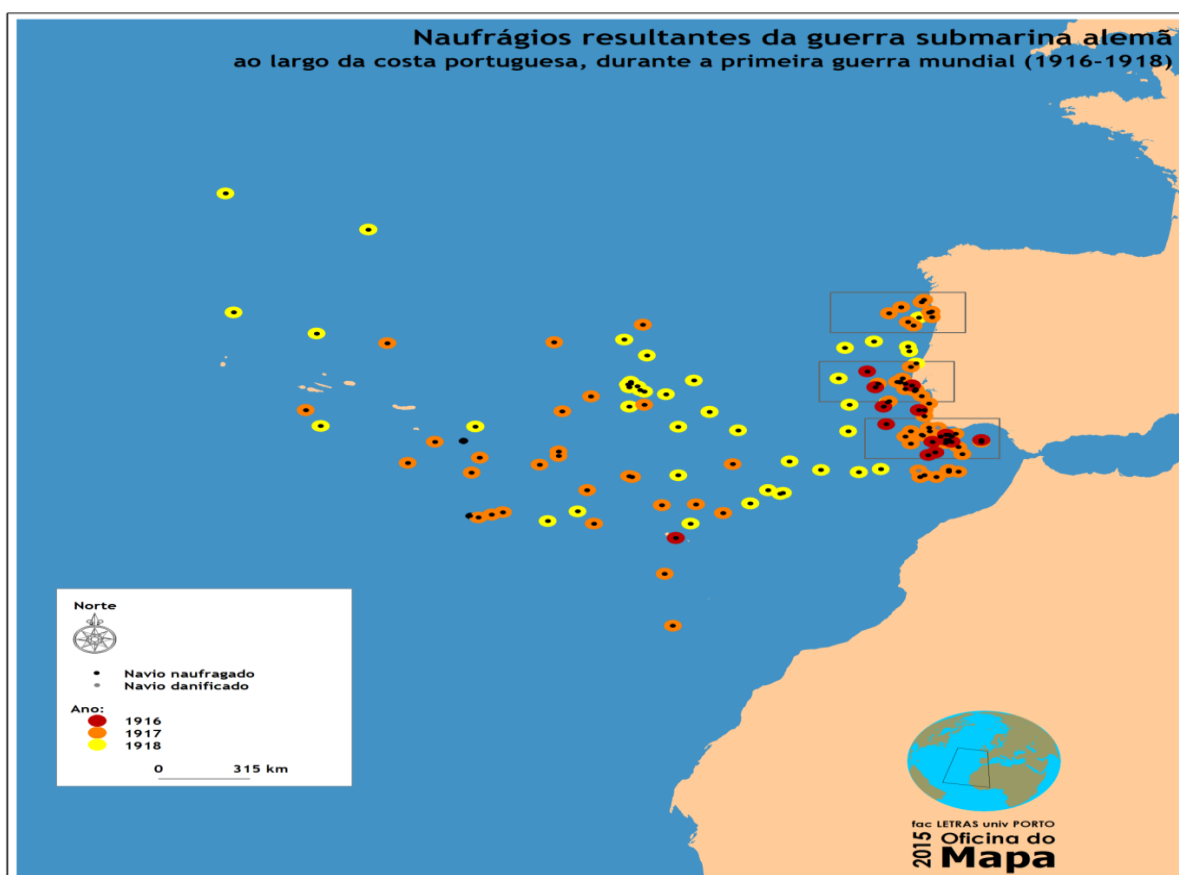
German submarines sunk around 176 ships<sup>51</sup>, either Portuguese and foreign ships, representing 1.603.104 tons in shipping, around the Portuguese coast (including Madeira, Azores and Cape Verde adjacent waters), and 90,4 % of them sunk in 1917, in 1916-1918 period<sup>52</sup>. The most problematic months are visible in Fig.1, were the months of January 1917 (with 13 ships recorded sunk), July 1917 (with 17), November 1917 (with 13) and March 1918 (with 12). There were some higher incidence peaks of submarine warfare, as is visible in the period from December 1916 to January 1917, or the period from June to September 1917. We note also some breaks, as in October 1917, and between April and July 1918.



**Fig.1.** Number of wrecks by months during 1916-1918, caused by German submarines in the Portuguese coast.

<sup>51</sup> This number cruises different historical sources, including Portuguese journals, German submarine war diaries *Kriestagebuch*, and information from websites like [www.uboot.net](http://www.uboot.net) and [www.wrecksite.eu](http://www.wrecksite.eu).

<sup>52</sup> Miguel Castro Brandão, “(Con)Viver com o Inimigo –A Atividade Submarina Alemã durante a Primeira Guerra Mundial – Interações na costa de Esposende”, p.141.



**Fig. 1:** *Wrecks caused by German Submarines in WWI, off the Portuguese Coast (1914-1918).* Map made by Oficina do Mapa (Map Workshop), Faculty of Arts of Oporto.

### 3. The Esposende Case: a Portuguese/Spanish Smuggling Network

To analyse this smuggling case we used several newspapers from that time<sup>53</sup> in order to cross information, but also used information that exists on the Portuguese Navy archives. Very few Portuguese authors mention this episode, and it was never fully studied in order to obtain a sustained conclusion of this incident. Let's follow the events chronologically. The case is first mentioned on the Portuguese journal *O Século*:

<sup>53</sup> During this investigation, we consulted various Portuguese newspapers, ordered by national, regional and local importance. The Portuguese national importance newspapers were *O Comércio do Porto*, *Diário de Notícias* and *Primeiro de Janeiro*. The regional ones were *Gazeta de Braga*, *Comércio do Minho*. The local ones were *Esposendense* and *O Cávado*.

“ Esposende: The fiscal police took 9.000 eggs for the german submarines (...) These boxes were carried by boats, that during the night escaped to the sea, and with the complicity of the Spanish, they were moved to German submarines. It seems that the traitors received 600 escudos (Portuguese currency at the time) per shipment. The carters that led the eggs to the beach were arrested (...) (Adapted by the author to the English language)”<sup>54</sup>.

According to this source, the 9.000 eggs came from the town of Barcelos, in northern Portugal, and were destined to German submarine crews off the Portuguese coast, with the aid of Spanish smugglers that were the intermediaries in this process. The same source mentions that the fiscal police from the area arrested this large amount of eggs on the beach, as well as the carters that carried them of Esposende with the help of some locals. The newspaper also confirms that the Spanish smugglers had a very important role by transporting the eggs to the German submarine crews, in small barges<sup>55</sup>. Other Portuguese journal *Diário de Notícias* also confirms this fiscal police operation<sup>5657</sup>. In the same day, the journal *Primeiro de Janeiro* headlined this report: *Smuggling for Spain or Supply to the German Submarines?*<sup>58</sup>. This journal advances with more elements, confirming that the local fiscal police was suspicious about a barge from Vila Praia de Âncora (north of Portugal) at some time, but the smugglers counted with various spies that protected the smuggling activities near the beach<sup>59</sup>. The same source also says that the characteristics of the boxes that carried the eggs sustain the idea that the eggs were destined to German submarine crews.

In 3th May the same journals press new information about the fiscal police confiscation. Apparently the smugglers were original from various towns around Minho region (North of Portugal)<sup>60</sup> and they smuggle not just eggs, but also other supplies like gasoline, and agricultural products from this region<sup>61</sup>. In second place, the carter of the egg boxes that was captured by the local fiscal police had an

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<sup>54</sup> *O Século* (Lisboa), May 1, 1917, p.2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *O Diário de Notícias* (Lisboa), May 1, 1917, p.2.

<sup>57</sup> It is quite likely that both journals have exchanged information, because textually, the *O Diário de Notícias* presents practically the same as the journal *O Século*.

<sup>58</sup> *O Primeiro de Janeiro* (Lisboa), May 1, 1917, p.2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> *O Século* (Lisboa), May 3, 1917, p.1.

<sup>61</sup> *O Primeiro de Janeiro* ( Porto), January 2, 1917, p.2.

administrative guide of the mail services of the region, which could provide some mobility in the area<sup>62</sup>. These journals arguments that the lack of vigilance on the north coast of the Portuguese allowed this kind of smuggling activities. On this same day, the local press did not react very well to the accusation made from the greatest Portuguese journals of the time. The local journal the *Esposendense* made very clear that this smuggling case was just a simple and regular contraband case that targeted to Spain, as it was usual in this region<sup>63</sup>. The local journal stated how difficult was the navigation on this coast<sup>64</sup> and the lack of a powerful lighthouse in Esposende made things very difficult to the smugglers to contact with German submarines. Even so, this same journal said that Spanish cooperation is a more reliable hypothesis, considering the fact that many of Spanish fishermen circulated illegally on this coast, without any kind of authorization by the Portuguese authorities<sup>65</sup>.

On 5<sup>th</sup> May 1917, the civil governor of Braga, Eduardo Cruz, visited Esposende to investigate this controversial case, which is confirmed by various Portuguese journals<sup>66</sup>. Eduardo Cerqueira Cruz requested various information's within the local fiscal police centre, and concluded that this smuggling network cooperated with German submarine crews, and operated between Apúlia and S. Bartolomeu do Mar<sup>67</sup>. According to the Portuguese governor this smuggling network operated at night, when the local vigilance and visibility were less considerable, and admitted the possibility of more kind of networks in the region<sup>68</sup>. Eduardo Cruz wrote also a letter to the Interior Minister reporting this smuggling case with German submarines<sup>69</sup>. The local press reacted badly once again. The journal editors simply didn't believe in the governor accusation, and stated that the people of Esposende

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<sup>62</sup> *O Século* (Lisboa), May 3, 1917, p.1.

<sup>63</sup> *O Esposendense* (Esposende), May 3, 1917, p.2.

<sup>64</sup> The coast near Esposende has nine rocks called "the nine horses" by the locals that provoked numerous wrecks since the roman era. Only the local fisherman knew these paths very well, and how to navigate around them without any kind of danger.

<sup>65</sup> *O Esposendense* (Esposende), May 3, 1917, p.2.

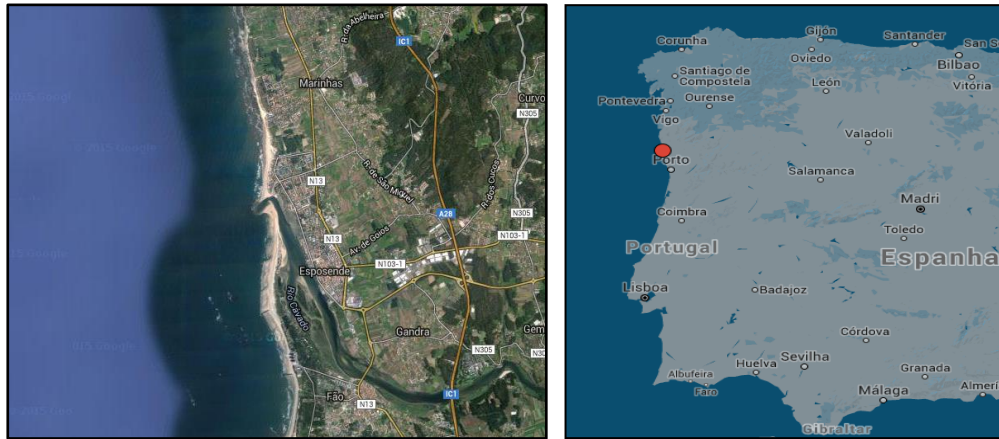
<sup>66</sup> The journals *O Comércio do Porto*, *Primeiro de Janeiro*, *Gazeta de Braga*, *O Esposendense*, *O Comércio do Minho* confirms the visit of the governor.

<sup>67</sup> *O Primeiro de Janeiro* (Porto), May 6, 1917, p.1.

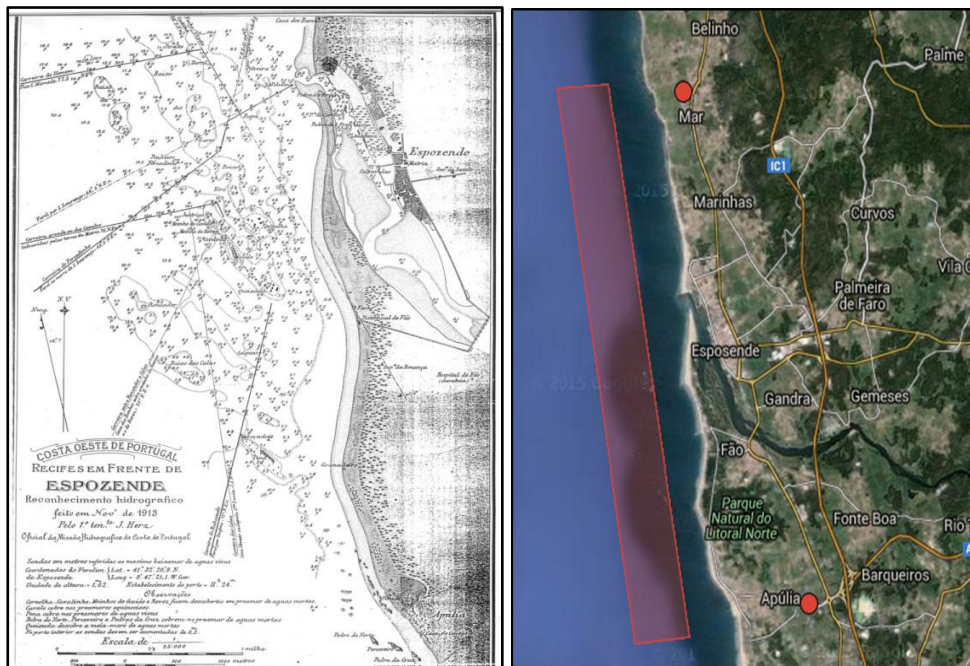
<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

were fighting for Portugal in Flanders, and they weren't national traitors has many of the Portuguese press believed<sup>70</sup>.



**Fig.3** Esposende and Cávado River Mouth **Fig.4** Location of Esposende



**Fig. 5** Map of Esposende in 1913 **Fig.6** Smuggling area near Esposende

<sup>70</sup> *O Esposendense*, (Esposende), May 10, 1917, p.2.

#### 4. The Esposende Case: a Portuguese/Spanish Smuggling Network – Analysis and Conclusions

Some recent studies made by Portuguese authors believe that this kind of interactions on Portuguese and Spanish shores could be frequent, and were the consequence of the economic crisis due to the war, as well as German ability to make various contacts on the Iberian coast, considering the fact that they did not have port facilities in the Atlantic. The Portuguese authors Jorge Russo and Augusto Salgado believe that Allied intelligence services, especially the British ones, had strong believes that this kind of smuggling networks existed along the Iberian coast<sup>71</sup>. The Esposende's case could be the best-documented case around this theme and could change our perspective about the German submarine activity near the Iberian coasts. Let's analyse this one, by cruising it other kind of documentation with appears in the journals.

Reflecting on the reports and news of the Portuguese journals, we can say that the smuggling network in this particular case had various contacts in many northern Portuguese towns, and could count with Spanish contacts and transportation units like the barges. The network was very well organized by using inland waterways, maritime and terrain routes to transport the eggs to Esposende's beach. The Portuguese smugglers were probably small merchant and hoarders who kept profitable strategies that explored local markets shortages, and according to one report, the eggs were stored in one house, in Gandra, near Esposende<sup>72</sup>. We believe that Portuguese smugglers brought the supplies to Spanish contacts off the Portuguese coast, and they delivered them to German submarine crews at high sea, somewhat far away from the Portuguese coast. But how far? We actually have no documented proofs that can provide any kind of answer in this subject. As far as we know, the U-boat that was nearest to the Portuguese coast was U-52, commanded by Hans Walther, as we can see in the navigation chart in the submarine war diary or *Kriegstagebuch*<sup>73</sup>, by 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> 1917. The commander never specified any kind of sea transaction; even

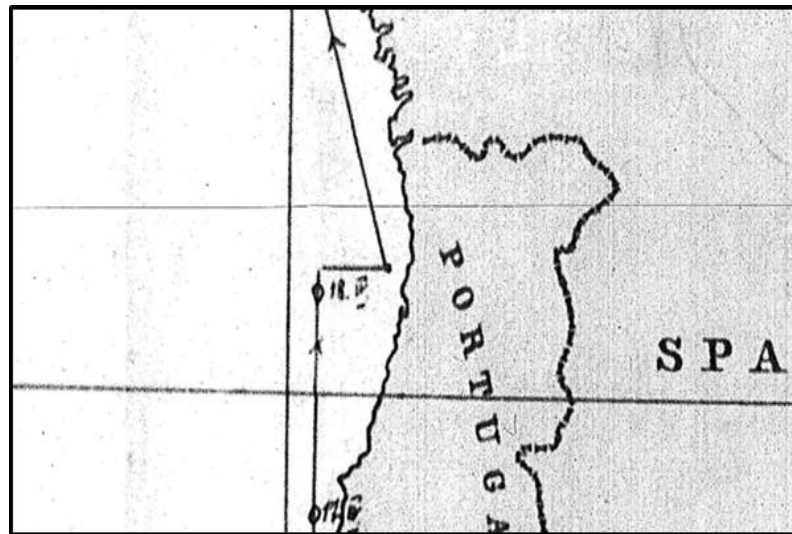
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<sup>71</sup> Jorge Russo and Augusto Alves Salgado, *Submarinos Alemães na Costa Portuguesa – O caso do U-35*. (Paper presented at Military Academy Colloquium, Lisbon, Military Academy, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto) May 5, 1917, p.1.

<sup>73</sup> Hans Walther, *Kriegstagebuch – des Kommandos S.M.U.-Boat „U.52“. für die Zeit der Vernunternehmung von 16.märz – 27. april 17.Kapitänleutnant Walther (Hans) (Cuxhaven-Altenbruch: Deutsches Uboat Museum Archive, 1917), p. 37.*

so we know that this U-boat made contact with Spanish vessels by this time, like the *Noya* ship, in order to impose the *Prize Regulations*<sup>74</sup>.



**Fig. 7** Hans Walther, *Kriegstagebuch – des Kommandos S.MU.U-Boat „U.52“*. für die Zeit der Vernunternehmung von 16.märz – 27. april

17.Kapitänleutnant Walther (Hans) ( Cuxhaven-Altenbruch: Deutsches Uboat Museum Archive, 1917), p. 37.

To look at this smuggling network we must also analyse the regional economic context and other reasons that stimulated their proliferation. Smuggling agricultural products was a constant in Minho's region, and in all the country, especially alongside the Spanish border. As we analysed regional newspapers, the local fiscal police confiscated, from several civilians that were selling smuggled corn, cattle, eggs and other kind of products<sup>75</sup>. The Great War aggravated the serious economic crisis in Portugal, diminishing sea trading routes, which originated an alimentary distribution crisis. To combat this crisis, Portuguese municipalities' administration taxed the food prices according to the abundance in the administrative sector, which created an imbalance between offer-necessity. Some civilians took advantage of this, by selling agriculture products in a better price in other municipalities. According to the Portuguese author Alice Samara, Word War One created the perfect conditions to the propagation of the hoarders that kept all types of goods stored to sell them later at

<sup>74</sup>Hans Walther, *Kriegstagebuch – des Kommandos S.MU.U-Boat „U.52“*. für die Zeit der Vernunternehmung von 16.märz – 27. april 17.Kapitänleutnant Walther (Hans) ( Cuxhaven-Altenbruch: Deutsches Uboat Museum Archive, 1917), p.15.

<sup>75</sup>Regional and local journals like the *Espozendense*, and *O Cávado* shows various reports about smuggling activities, especially on the borders of many municipalities in Minho region.

higher prices<sup>76</sup>. Alice also talks about new black market niches, where hoarders sell shortage products at prohibited prices, which made some regional figures very rich<sup>77</sup>. Fiscal measures to regulate prices and vigilance around smugglers were just not effective at all. Price stipulations were, in a practical meaning, just a theorist measure with few little results, considering the lack of local fiscal police effectives. The practice of hoarding favoured very specific clientele, in a relationship that connected the smallest farmer to the small retail merchant<sup>78</sup>. Even so the local authorities in Esposende tried to react, by prohibiting the exit of caprine and swine cattle beyond the municipal frontier, as a report confirms<sup>79</sup>.

But what arguments sustain that German submarines traded with this smuggling network near Esposende beaches? We believe that are five main reasons. In the first place, the visit of the civil governor of Braga, Eduardo Cruz, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, was just singular, to say the least, as many Portuguese journals report. If it was just a regular smuggling local case, as the local press defended, it would not justify the governor's arrival at the small town of Esposende. The governor confirmed that the egg boxes were for German submarine crews off the Portuguese post, considering the Spanish intermedium. The governor's suspicion was sustained in detailed and privileged information granted by the local fiscal police that arrested the smugglers near Esposende road, and we also have the information that someone wrote a letter to the Interior Minister to report the case, as Portuguese journals confirm. According to the same sources, Eduardo Cruz proposed more fiscal police effectives to raise vigilance efficiency along the coast<sup>80</sup>.

In second place, the Portuguese smugglers were arrested, condemned and judged as suspects for trading with German submarine crews, the enemy, as the Navy reports and Portuguese journals confirm<sup>81</sup><sup>82</sup>. This aspect is also very singular.

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<sup>76</sup> Alice Samara, "O Impacte Económico e Social da Primeira Guerra Mundial em Portugal", in *Portugal e a Guerra. História das Intervenções Militares Portuguesas nos Grandes Conflitos Mundiais – Séculos XIX e XX.*, ed. Nuno Severiano Teixeira (Lisboa: Edições Colibri, 1998), p.93.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *O Espozendense* (Esposende) July 12, 1917, p.2.

<sup>80</sup> *O Primeiro de Janeiro* (Porto) May 6, 1917, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> According to the report, in *O Comércio do Porto*, 5<sup>th</sup> May, the arrested smugglers were obligated to pay a great amount of money as penalization caused by this incident: 1.000 \$ 000 réis (Portuguese currency at the time). This aspect could give us a perspective about the value of this mulct, and also the crime rate.

<sup>82</sup> Arquivo Central da Marinha, Lisboa: Core 419. From Central Navy Archive (Accessed 2015).



Arrested smugglers also had to pay a very significant amount of money to the local fiscal police, considering the contact with the enemy. This case was classified as a crime.

The third aspect it's probably one the most important elements to analyse in this matter. Portuguese Navy departments actually reported the case, and some delegates suggest serious measures to prevent this type of occasions. According to a particular report from Oporto's captaincy, delivered to the Navy Ministry<sup>84</sup>, dated 8<sup>th</sup> October 1917 (6 months after the Esposende case), all Portuguese captaincies were ordered to prevent any kind of suspicious landing in to the coast, capturing any smuggled goods<sup>85</sup>. In this same report the Department underlines that smuggling cases like Esposende were not a big surprise, comprising the economic and social crisis provoked by the Great War<sup>86</sup>. Navy representatives visited Esposende to ascertain some information about to ships that were sunk in the area, and checked that various Spanish civilians were spotted in the area, transporting huge quantities of eggs in to ships stationed off the coast<sup>87</sup>. This document sustains press reports about the case, and also confirms Spanish presence in transportation operation off the sea:

“(...) This service is generously well paid and it's made very cautiously, and I believe that it's not just a regular smuggling case, but a supply line to German submarines that cross that waters (Adaptation to the English language by the author) (...)”<sup>88</sup>

This phrase proves that the Spanish smugglers have a very important role on this smuggling network, by making contact with German submarines off the coast. The writer of the document also reveals serious vigilance problems in the coast, declaring that the fiscal police posts are guarded only by two men and the local posts have 5 km between each other. He also proposes new sea patrols in the area, as well as more fiscal policemen<sup>89</sup>. Other captaincies reports, from all along the Portuguese coast answered to the Portuguese Navy enquiry from Lisbon. Most of them don't

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<sup>83</sup> Arquivo Central da Marinha, Lisboa: Documentação Avulsa 1611, caixa nº1611 - Processos nº8 de 1 a 67 - 1917, cota 4-XXXIV-2-1. From Central Navy Archive (Accessed 2015).

<sup>84</sup> Arquivo Central da Marinha, Lisboa: Core 419. From Central Navy Archive (Accessed 2015).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

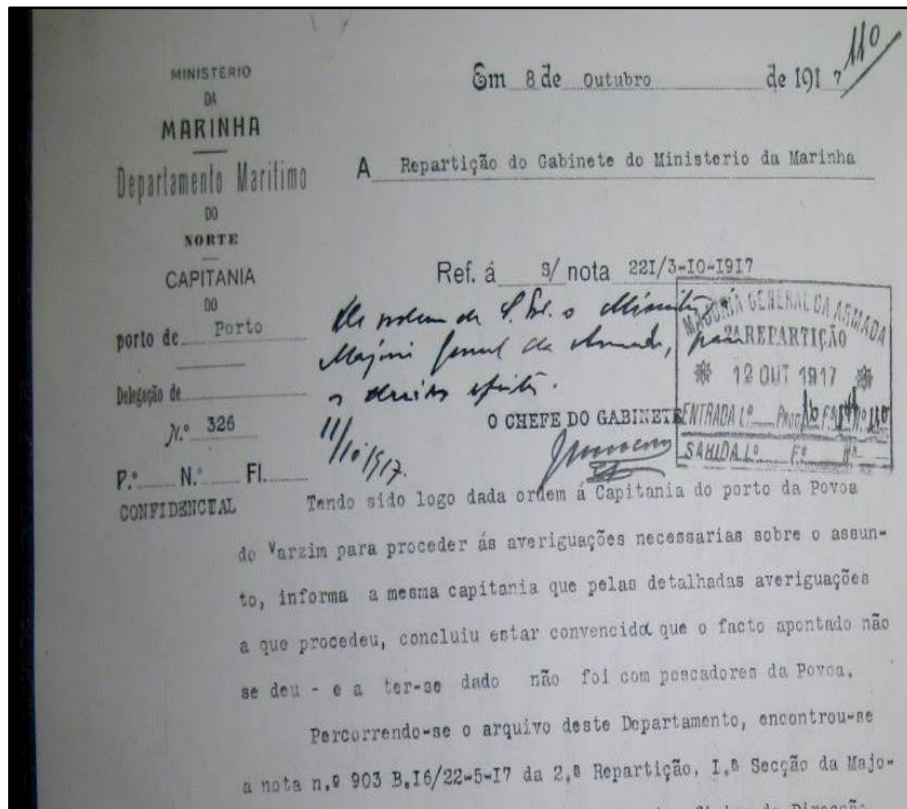
<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

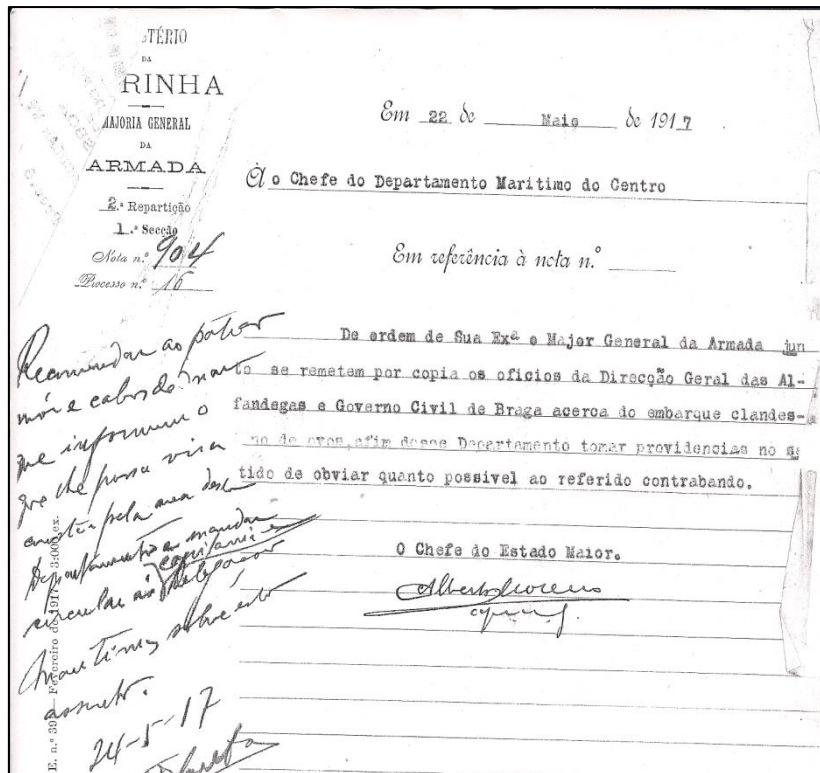
report any kind of smuggling activities near to the coast, in contrast to northern captaincies<sup>90</sup>. This proves once more the Portuguese Navy interest in obtaining some information about German submarines supply in the Portuguese coast.



**Fig.8** Navy report about the smuggling off the eggs near Esposende. These documents prove that the Portuguese navy were aware of the Esposende smuggling case<sup>91</sup>.

<sup>90</sup> Arquivo Central da Marinha, Lisboa: Documentação Avulsa 1611, caixa nº1611 - Processos nº8 de 1 a 67 - 1917, cota 4-XXXIV-2-1. From Central Navy Archive (Accessed 2015).

<sup>91</sup> Arquivo Central da Marinha, Lisboa: Core 419. From Central Navy Archive (Accessed 2015).



**Fig.9:** These documents mention not just the case of Esposende, but it has some reports about similar situations along the Portuguese coast. Some captaincies along the Portuguese coast were asked by the navy, if these kind of situations were regular<sup>92</sup>.

In fourth place, we must look to Esposende territory favourable conditions to the flourishing of contraband and smuggling trades, as journal and Navy reported. Navigation near Esposende was very dangerous before and during World War One, considering the geographical conditions as mentioned before. Various rocks and silting areas near Cávado River mouth and beaches complicated ship movements in the area, worsened by the lack of a powerful lighthouse. Portuguese journals reported plenty of news related to several wrecks that took place near Esposende. It wasn't only in Esposende area that was dangerous to the ship sailing in the zone, but all along the north coast of Portugal. Sources of the time mention an authentic “death corridor” in this area. As you can see in Fig. 11 between the Montedor (near Viana do Castelo) and Luz (Oporto) lighthouses there wasn't any reliable light system, as we can confirm in this report:

<sup>92</sup> Arquivo Central da Marinha, Lisboa: Documentação Avulsa 1611, caixa nº1611 - Processos nº8 de 1 a 67 - 1917, cota 4-XXXIV-2-1. From Central Navy Archive (Accessed 2015).

“ (...) The captains of the ships that often attend our port (Leixões, Oporto, Portugal) have complained many times that the northern coast of Portugal has insufficient light, considering the improvements that were been made. They think that putting a lighthouse in Fão or Esposende would allow ships to always have access to light, which does not happen now, because there are places where no one can see nor Montedor lighthouse nor Luz lighthouse (...) (Adapted to the English language by the author)”<sup>93</sup>.

Local elites requested many times, before and during the war, the construction of new infrastructures in this territory, like a powerful lighthouse or any kind of sonorous signal, as various news report in the journal *O Comércio do Porto*<sup>94</sup>. This area could encourage the proliferation of smuggling activities, considering the fact that most activities of this kind were made at night, as local administration confirm. To make things worse, to make things worse, in 1917 the lighthouse of Montedor was seriously damaged by a storm, which aggravated the light system in this particular area<sup>95</sup>.

The five reason consider Spanish neutral policy towards Germany in the Great War, which provided some “non-official” support to German submarines. Some Portuguese and Spanish authors consider that German submarines supplied in Spain, to operate not only in the Atlantic, but also in the Mediterranean. Spanish author Jaime Rubio Rosales defends that, during the Great War, an intense German submarine activity was notorious around Canary Islands, according to a local witnesses in La Gomera<sup>96</sup>. The Portuguese author Jaime Correia do Inso stated that German submarines that operated in Algarve coast, were supplied between Huelva and Cadiz, and the ones that operated in the Portuguese northern coast were supplied in the Galician port of Vigo<sup>97</sup>. Correia do Inso the also states that German presence in Canary Islands was constant<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto), October 17, 1917, p.2.

<sup>94</sup> *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto), December 19, 1914, p.4; *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto) December 15, 1914, p.1-2; *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto) January 3, 1915, p.5; *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto), January 5, 1915, p.3.

<sup>95</sup> “Faróis de Portugal”, Transportes XXI, accessed 27 August, 2016, <http://www.transportes-xxi.net/tmaritimo/investigacao/farois>.

<sup>96</sup> Jaime Rubio Rosales, *Submarinos y arqueología nazi en Canarias* (London: Lulu Press Inc, 2007), p.77.

<sup>97</sup> Jaime Correia do Inso, *A Marinha Portuguesa na Grande Guerra*, p.56.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

We have no doubts that German submarines used Spain as a logistical platform to coordinate attack and had established supply lines, before attacking the Portuguese coast. Spanish coast contraband lines, according to captured German Navy Intelligence reports, had established spies in many coastal points, and organized small boats flotillas with local crews to attend submarine necessities<sup>99</sup>. It didn't took long for the Allies to notice that German submarines operated from Spanish ports, and pressed diplomatically Madrid after some polemic incidents. In May 1915, Allied delegacies denounced, to the Spanish government, the existence of German submarine gas posts, on the ports of Biurrún (Basque coast), Alsasua (Basque coast) and Villareal (near Valencia). This issue took Spanish minister, José Sánchez Guerra, to communicate with Oviedo, Granada, Huelva, Pontevedra, Castellón Seville, Coruna and Navarra to discover these kind of posts<sup>100</sup>. In September 1915, French press denounce various rumours around submarine supply in Spanish shores, including their Africans possessions<sup>101</sup>. In the summer of 1916, Italian government presented their suspects, arguing that Spanish vessels supplied German submarines in the Oriental Mediterranean<sup>102</sup>. There were some mediatic cases in this subject, taking for example the U-35 supply to the German refuge ship *SS Roma* in Cartagena port, which provoked French and British ambassadors to protest vilely in Madrid, asserting that the U-boat in question provisioned the *SS Roma* ship during his military activity<sup>103</sup>.

But how Spanish smugglers contacted with German submarine crews in the Portuguese coast? We can actually not response with total assurance. Eduardo González Calleja defends that we must look to the smuggling tradition between Spanish Galicia and the north of Portugal. These territories were not attractive to the German intelligence services because of the lack of good communication systems, but offered coastal enclaves very suited to German submarine supply<sup>104</sup>. Eduardo Calleja affirms that German espionage services established more easily near Cádiz and

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<sup>99</sup> Eduardo González Calleja, *El Dispositivo de Vigilancia Francés en Galicia durante la Primeira Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, 2014), p.1.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Jesús Perea Ruiz *Guerra submarina en España (1914-1918)*, vol. 16. (Madrid: UNED – Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie V, H,<sup>a</sup> Contemporánea, 2004), p.205.

<sup>104</sup> Eduardo González Calleja, *El Dispositivo de Vigilancia Francés en Galicia durante la Primeira Guerra Mundial*, p.7.

Canary Islands, considering the difficult in place bases in the Mediterranean<sup>105</sup>. Our historical analysis provided some reports in this matter, for example the U-38 before attacking Funchal, in Madeira, at 3th December 1916, supplied in Canary Islands<sup>106</sup>. The same source, based in an intelligence information of Cape Verde authorities, reports that one vessel was saw alongside a German submarine, loading gas<sup>107</sup>. This particular information could give us a very interesting picture about the smuggling case in Esposende. It's very likely that vessels and German submarines traded goods at the high sea, and we think that were a very common practice between German submarine crews. These reports sustain once more that aspect. Spanish intermediaries contacted Portuguese producers and smugglers, and then they established contact with German submarine crews at high sea, not too close to the Portuguese shore. But how far from the coast? As far as we can prove, German submarines didn't get very close from the shore, except some U-boats taking Max Valentiner's U-38<sup>108</sup>, and Lothar von Arnould de la Perière's U-35<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>105</sup> Eduardo González Calleja, *El Dispositivo de Vigilancia Francés en Galicia durante la Primeira Guerra Mundial*, p.7.

<sup>106</sup> *O Comércio do Porto* (Porto) December 6, 1916, p.3.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> After attacking Funchal, on 3 December, Max Valentiner anchored very close to Vila Baleira, in Porto Santo island, in Madeira archipelago.

<sup>109</sup> At 24<sup>th</sup> April, Perière's U-35 was very close to the Portuguese shore in Algarve, especially when destroyed the Danish ship *Nordsöen*, near Sagres.

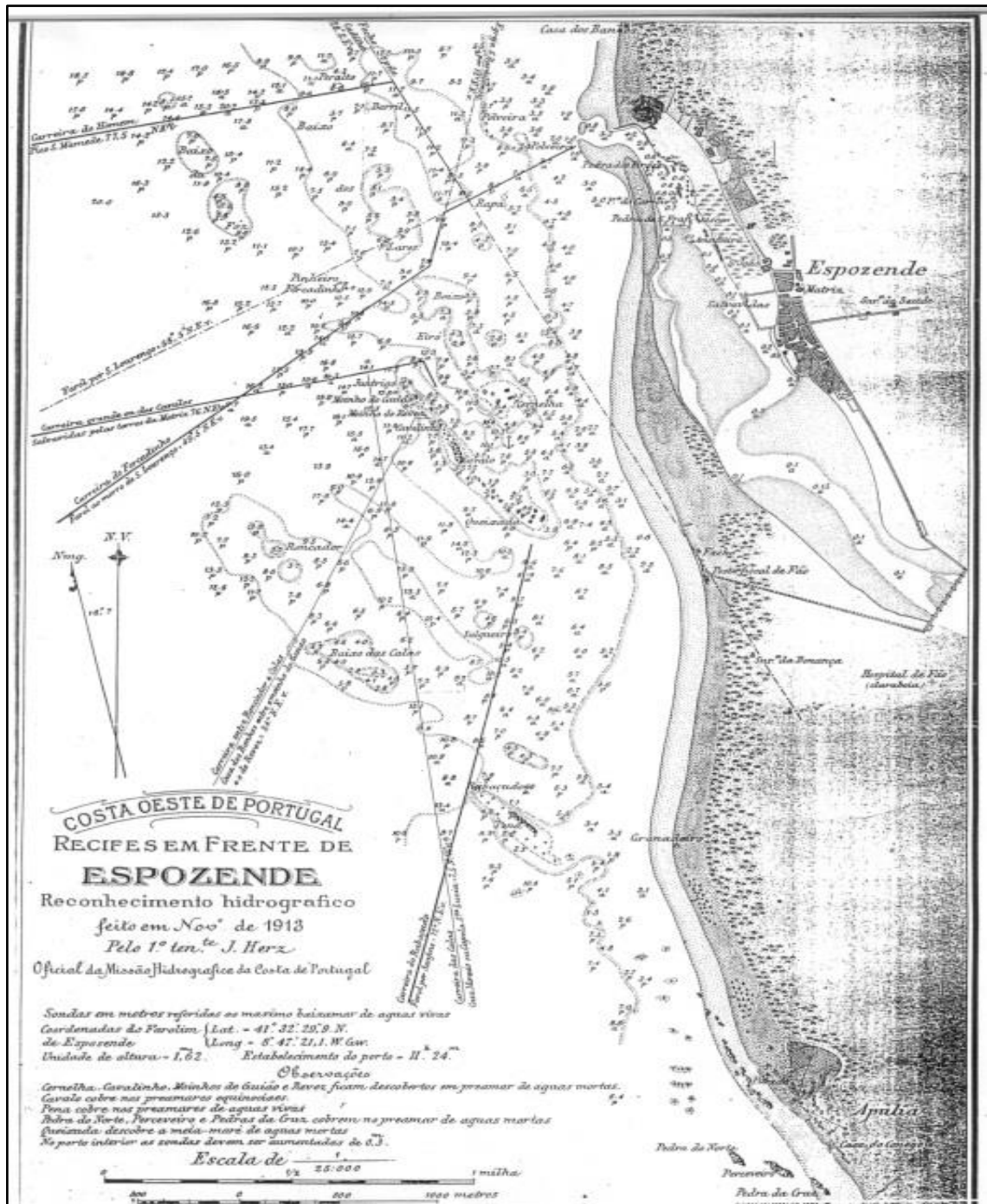


Fig.10. Map of Espozende, 1913.



**Fig.11.** North of Portugal lighthouse system, only Montedor (Viana do Castelo) and Luz lighthouses (Oporto) could provide a reasonable aid to navigators.



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