

## L2. LECTURE

# The History of the Military Hospital of Porto

**Raquel Santos<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Anesthesiologist, Lieutenant Colonel of Portuguese Army, Anesthesiologist Doctor. Director of Anesthesiology in Oporto Portuguese Armed Forces Hospital  
✉ [santos.rakel@gmail.com](mailto:santos.rakel@gmail.com)



This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

**ABSTRACT:** The Porto Military Hospital, currently designated the Portuguese Armed Forces Hospital – Porto Branch, represents one of the most significant military healthcare institutions in northern Portugal. Its origins date back to the initiative of King Pedro V in 1860, leading to the construction of the first purpose-built national military hospital, whose construction began in 1862. Throughout its history, the institution played an important role during major historical events, including the revolutionary movements of 1891 and 1927, the participation of Portuguese forces in the First World War, and later the Colonial War (1961–1974), during which it developed expertise in reconstructive surgery, orthopaedics, and prosthetic rehabilitation. The hospital also contributed to civilian healthcare, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over more than 160 years, despite structural damage, institutional reclassifications, and political changes, the hospital maintained its commitment to medical care for both military personnel and civilians, remaining faithful to its longstanding humanitarian motto: *Hic non hostes nisi morbi*.

**KEYWORDS:** Military hospitals; History of medicine; Portuguese Armed Forces; Porto; Medical care in war.

This article aims to share a bit of the history of the beautiful old building located in the heart of Porto city, the Portuguese Armed Forces Hospital. It is believed that in 1860, during a visit by King Pedro V to the Military Hospital located in the Convent of São João o Novo, he made the decision to order the construction of a hospital that would ensure the best possible care for the military in the north of the country. The young king died in 1861. He was succeeded by his brother, Dom Luiz, who took the necessary steps to fulfill the wishes expressed by his predecessor.

On April 22 of 1862, in a ceremony of great solemnity, the cornerstone of the first national military hospital built from scratch was laid, a date that is still commemorated annually at this military unit. In 1869, while

the building was still unfinished, the first patients were admitted. With the establishment of the Republic in Portugal, in 1910, the hospital ceased to be called Dom Pedro V and became the Porto Military Hospital. In 1918, a fire broke out, damaging the facade and adjacent buildings. Reconstruction began at that time and was completed in 1920.

During the revolutionary movements, of January 31, 1891, and mainly of February 3, 1927, violent battles between military forces were fought in the streets of Porto. Newspapers from the time described the important role the Military Hospital played in receiving victims, including civilians, and its extraordinary capacity to perform numerous surgeries of major trauma, during the days with the highest number of casualties.



**Fig. 1** – Portrait of King Pedro V located in the main hall of the Hospital.



O edifício inacabado do Hospital Militar D. Pedro V, hoje denominado Hospital Regional N.º 1, segundo uma curiosa fotografia de 1865 em que se observa, à direita, o antigo sítio das Valas, antes da abertura da actual Rua da Boavista.

(Fotografia cedida pelo Arquivo do Hospital Regional N.º 1)

**Fig. 2** – The unfinished building of the D. Pedro V Hospital (Historical Archive of the Oporto Military Hospital, 1865)



**Fig. 3 and 4** – Ward and Operating Room of the Oporto Regional Military Hospital (Historical Archive of the Oporto Military Hospital, 1950s)

The military hospital's capability to respond to this mass casualty event was largely due to the experience its military doctors, especially surgeons, had gained during their participation in World War I. Ironically in that same year of 1927, it suffered a major setback and was reclassified as a Regional Military Hospital, with a less relevant role than the Military Hospital in Lisbon.

During the participation of Portuguese troops in the Colonial War in Africa, between 1961 - 1974, the Porto Military Hospital developed capabilities in the specialties of plastic and reconstructive surgery, orthopedics, and prosthetic rehabilitation for mutilated soldiers. Other interesting fact is that, the first Legionella patient described in Portugal was diagnosed in 1981 by Dr. Professor Levi Guerra, at the Porto Military Hospital.

Although until 2014 the hospital belonged to the Army branch, being the only one located in the north of the country, it was the first to serve as a common hospital for the three branches of the Portuguese Armed Forces and the Security/Police Forces. From that year onwards, it was called the Armed Forces Hospital - Porto Branch.

More recently, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it also became involved in providing health-care support to the Portuguese civilians, having received 86 elderly people during the first wave of the pandemic, in March and April 2020, mostly from care homes in the north of the country. And in the 2nd and 3rd waves of the pandemic, they opened 50 beds, in protocol with the Portuguese Regional Health Administration of the North, having received more than 320 COV-



**Fig. 5** – Coat of arms of the Portuguese Armed Forces Hospital.



**Fig. 6** – Stained glass window in the entrance hall staircase with the Oporto Military Hospital old motto.



**Fig. 7** – Armed Forces Hospital, Oporto branch, today.

ID-positive patients between October 2020 and March 2021 in support of the Portuguese National Health Service hospitals.

We can conclude that throughout its more than 160 years of existence, the Porto Military Hospital was built from scratch, rebuilt after a fire, and underwent renovations during time. It provided health support to military personnel and civilians, with particular relevance during the revolutionary movements that occurred in Porto city and recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Its name and classification have been altered according to the political will of the time. But throughout its history, it has always remained faithful to its old motto:

*There are no enemies here, only sick people.*  
*HIC NON HOSTES NISI MORBI*

#### REFERENCES

1. Secretaria d'Estado dos Negócios da Guerra. Ordem do Exército No. 12. 1862.
2. Author unknown. The unfinished building of the D. Pedro V Hospital [illustration]. Historical Archive of the Oporto Military Hospital; 1865.
3. Author unknown. Ward 4. Operating room [illustration]. Historical Archive of the Oporto Military Hospital; 1950s.
4. Carmo P. O Hospital Militar Regional nº 1 no tempo. Porto: NOVELGráfica; 2010.
5. Discurso recitado na inauguração dos trabalhos do Hospital Militar D. Pedro V, na cidade do Porto. O Jornal do Porto. 1862 Apr 23. Lisboa: National Library of Portugal.
6. Hospital Militar do Porto – pavoroso incêndio. Comércio do Porto. 1918 Jul 28. Gaia: Municipal Archive.
7. Ministério da Guerra. Ordem do Exército No. 7. 1927:915-924.
8. No Hospital Militar. O Jornal do Porto. 1891 Feb 3. Lisboa: National Library of Portugal.
9. No Hospital Militar. Comércio do Porto. 1927 Feb 7. Gaia: Municipal Archive.
10. Os feridos – No Hospital Militar. Comércio do Porto. 1927 Feb 8. Gaia: Municipal Archive.



21-22

November 2025

Hospital das Forças Armadas

Centro Clínico Universitário D. Pedro V

Porto, Portugal



JORNAL DA  
SOCIEDADE  
DAS CIÊNCIAS  
MÉDICAS DE  
LISBOA

[congressolusogalaico@gmail.com](mailto:congressolusogalaico@gmail.com)

