



Pracinha Oswaldo Saragiotto durante as comemorações do 74º aniversário do Dia da Vitória na Escola Preparatória de cadetes do Exército (EsPCEX), em 04 de maio de 2019

RODA DE CONVERSA

Texto de autoria de Thiago Pédico Saragiotto, publicado no site da BBC em 2003

Facing the Unknown

by Thiago Pédico Saragiotto

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People in story:

Oswaldo Saragiotto

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I am Brazilian, and I would like to tell the story of my grandfather in the Second World War. Although his parents were from Italy, he was born in Brazil, and he still lives here (he is 83 years old now). Along with some other thousands of Brazilian soldiers, he went all the way to Europe to fight the Nazis. His name is Oswaldo Saragiotto.

He was called up in 1942, and had some training in Brazil. By that time, Brazilian people knew about the war through the radio, but they saw it as something far from their reality. Because of that, during the training, my grandfather never even dreamed about going to Europe.

One day, my grandfather and many other soldiers were ordered to pack their things, and get ready to leave. They were not told where to. They were all boarded in a train, which was then completely closed. All the windows were shut, there were no seats, and there was an armed officer guarding each exit.

After 2 hours, the train stopped, and the doors opened. They were standing before a huge ship — most of them had actually never seen one. Brazil is a big country, and many soldiers lived away from the sea. They all got into the ship, 3500 men, and yet, they had no idea about their destiny. In the ship, there were some American officers. Within some days, almost all the soldiers were seasick — including my grandfather. They speculated about where they were being taken, but no information had been officially given.

At some point, the soldiers were finally told they were going to arrive in Napole, Italy. Of course, they all got excited and afraid at the same time. It was announced, in the ship, that they would land at 18:00hs. Thereto, the soldiers were amazed when they disembarked 4 hours earlier. Later on, they found out the reason: At the precise hour announced for the landing, the Nazis bombed the port. Somehow, they had obtained that information.

At the landing point, there were many Italian civilians waiting. The Brazilian soldiers did not understand why such civilians were offending and spitting on them. Soon, the misunderstanding was clarified: Brazilian uniforms were similar to the German's, and the Italians thought the soldiers were actually German prisoners.

Once in Italy, the Brazilians received some final trainings from the Americans, and were sent to face the enemy. Quickly, they got used to the horrors of war: death was all around them. My grandfather used to carry the tube of the mortar, and to deal with such weapon. The tube weighted 18 kilos, and he also carried a sub-machine gun. He was involved in many battles throughout Italy, including the fight for Monte Cassino.

On one night, his company was climbing a hill, knowing that the Germans were positioned on the top of it. It was raining lots, and the weather was very cold. Thus, after some hours marching, the soldiers were ordered to stop. My grandfather and some mates, including some officers, found shelter inside an empty house. It was a big house, with three levels. Since it was placed on the hill, one could entry it through the first floor (coming form below) and through the third floor (coming from above).

Unfortunately, though, during the night, that was very noisy, due to the storm, a German garrison posted itself just 100 meters above the house. When the day was born, a fierce shooting began, between the Germans outside the house, and the Brazilians inside it. Eventually, the Germans, who highly outnumbered the Brazilians, got into the house. Some Brazilians — including my grandfather, managed to escape by jumping out of a window, and rolling down the hill, under enemy fire. My grandfather lost some friends on that episode, and 22 Brazilians were taken prisoners.

Eight days before the war was over in Europe, my grandfather's company, counting 2000 men, faced a battle that went on for a wholly night. By dawn, the Germans finally surrendered: they were 15000 men.

My grandfather was preparing to move to France, when the war was officially over. He stayed then in Italy for some months, after what he was on the first ship to Brazil. The soldiers landed in Rio de Janeiro, where an enormous crowd received them as heroes. Although he was invited to stay in the army, he preferred not to. Today, despite his age, he still works performing marriages, as Justice of the Peace.

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Message 1 - Brazilian Troops.

Posted on: 15 September 2003 by [Frank Mee Researcher 241911](#)

This is the first time I have heard of Brazilian troops taking part during WW2, I thought I had heard read or seen most books accounts and documentary's on the Italian campaigns and never once heard of them. I have a feeling there was once mention of South American troops fighting in Russia for the Germans but cannot recall where I heard this.

It was interesting that Thiaqo's Grandfather took part in the hardest campaign of them all in Italy with probably the most loss of life and during the worst weather Italy had in years. I have visited the area and having been in the Army myself could not see how anyone could attack such a place successfully never mind capture it. Your Grandfather was a very brave man Thiaqo, you

live and learn something new every day.
Frank Mee.

Message 2 - Brazilian Troops.

Posted on: 15 September 2003 by [Thiago Pédico Saragiotto](#)

Thank you very much for your message. As far as I know, Brazil was the only South American country to officially send troops to WW2. Nevertheless, the Brazilians were not too many: a little more than 25000 soldiers were sent. The official reason for Brazil entering the war was the sinking, by a German submarine, of some Brazilian commercial ships on the Atlantic Ocean, in 1942. FEB (Brazilian Expeditionary Force) was incorporated to the 4^o American Army. There were 4000 Brazilians killed or wounded (a few of them from the air force). FEB has taken approximately 21000 prisoners, including 2 generals.

As to Monte Castelo, FEB was involved not only in the successful conquest, but also in 4 previous and unsuccessful enterprises. Normally, our soldier's movements were partially covered by the smoke produced through the burning of diesel oil, since the Germans held a very favorable position.

Message 3 - Brazilian Troops.

Posted on: 16 September 2003 by [Helen](#)

It's great to hear news from Brazil, isn't it, Frank? And the story is fascinating.

Do you think that there is some way of finding out more about Brazil's role in WW2? It sounds as if you've certainly read a lot about the Italian Campaigns, at least. But I'd like to know more about the possibility that they fought Russians.

Anyway, thanks for your contribution.

Best wishes
Helen (host)

Message 4 - Brazilian Troops.

Posted on: 16 September 2003 by [Helen](#)

Thiago

Have you thought about entering a forum on one of our research desks? I think you might get lots of support and interest from other users there, if you wanted to do more research, that is.

Best wishes
Helen

Message 5 - Brazilian Troops.

Posted on: 16 September 2003 by [Frank Mee Researcher 241911](#)

"Hi Helen"

I am not sure it was Brazilian troops who fought for Germany in Russia. Whilst doing other research I came across a mention of South American troops with the Italian and Hungarian Brigades in Southern Russia, they could have been from any of the countries in South America. It was a funny war in that Japanese fought for America, some Englishmen joined the Gestapo and went to Russia, Italians fought for Germany and the Allies some did both. The American Army was a hotch potch of ethnic second generation nationals and half of the Polish forces who fought for the allies started off in the German army. There is one noted case in Normandy where the Poles fought the Poles and those captured promptly changed side and fought for the allies. As I said a funny war.

Frank Mee.