

# Brazilian Naval Division for War Operations (DNOG)

By [Cristina Luna](#)

**Created some months after Brazil's declaration of war against Germany, the Naval Division for War Operations (*Divisão Naval em Operações de Guerra* – DNOG), active between May and November of 1918, consisted of a mission whose objective was to patrol the African west coast and guard against German submarine attacks.**

## Table of Contents

[1 Preparations for war](#)

[2 The Spanish Flu and the End of the War](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)

[Citation](#)

## Preparations for war

When the First World War erupted in 1914, [Brazil](#) remained [neutral](#) until 1917 when German [submarines](#) torpedoed four Brazilian ships. Brazil declared war on [Germany](#) on 26 October 1917 and immediately began supporting the Allies. During a meeting at the Inter-Allied Conference in Paris from 20 November to 3 December 1917, it was decided that Brazil would participate in military activities, sending a naval division to Europe, a health division to [France](#), and a group of airmen to participate in the efforts of the Allied Air Force. Moreover, Brazil handed over around thirty German ships imprisoned at Brazilian ports to the Allies.

In order to accomplish the Navy attributions, war minister Admiral [Alexandrino Faria de Alencar \(1848-1926\)](#) determined through ministerial notice no. 501 on 30 January 1918 that the constitution of the Naval Division for War Operations (DNOG) would comprise of the cruisers *Rio Grande do Sul* and *Bahia*, the destroyers *Piauí*, *Rio Grande do Norte*, *Paraíba* and *Santa Catarina*, the tender

*Belmonte* and the tugboat *Laurindo Pitta*.

Rear Admiral [Pedro Max Fernando Frontin \(1867-1939\)](#) commanded the DNOG which was responsible for patrolling the area in the maritime triangle between Dakar (Senegal), São Vicente Island (Cape Verde) and Gibraltar. The Brazilian division stood under the command of the British Admiralty, represented by Admiral Hischcot Grant.

Frontin took command of the DNOG on 9 February 1918 and during the following months he dedicated to prepare the vessels and the crew, whose enlistment was voluntary. In May, the ships left on different days from Rio de Janeiro, heading to the Brazilian Northeastern coast and stopping at the ports of Salvador, Recife, and Natal. Before leaving Rio de Janeiro, the Cruiser *Rio Grande do Sul*, directly under Frontin's command and therefore the flagship, received a visit from the President of the Republic, [Venceslau Brás \(1868-1966\)](#) and several ministers and members of the National Defense League, an entity founded in 1916, which supported patriotism and the fighting for national sovereignty. During their navigation around the Brazilian coast, the vessels had combat and communication exercises.

The DNOG ships met at the Fernando de Noronha Archipelago before departing together for Africa on 1 August 1918. After a calm trip across the Atlantic, the division reached Freetown, Sierra Leone on 9 August where the British battleship *Britannia* convoyed them. At that harbor, Frontin introduced himself to admiral [Thomas Dawson Lees Sheppard \(1866-1953\)](#), commander of the British Division and thus DNOG.

On 23 August, the division set sail to Dakar. The crossing was taken under bad weather, with torrential rains and billowy seas. The night before the arrival, from 25 to 26 August, a submarine attacked DNOG, but the vigilance of *Rio Grande do Norte*, *Bahia* and *Laurindo Pitta* allowed them to react immediately with cannon shots and depth bombs. The Brazilian ships launched a zigzag route in the night that made it difficult for the enemies to attack. Afterwards, the British Admiralty notified Frontin that a German submarine had disappeared on DNOG's route, which the Brazilian naval division was credited for.

## The Spanish Flu and the End of the War

The DNOG was supposed to remain in Dakar for some days in order to repair the vessels, refuel, and allow the crew to rest, but the ships were struck with an outbreak of the [Spanish Flu](#). According to [João do Prado Maia \(1897-1989\)](#), a former member of the DNOG, the flu erupted in the cruiser *Bahia* on 6 September 1918. The flu spread rapidly throughout the vessels, impartial to rank, striking anyone from admiral to stoker. The flu left numerous people sick and dead, in the middle of a division composed of 2,000 marines and officials. Some of the infected were hospitalized in Dakar while others were brought to Brazil. The dead were buried in the city cemetery or brought to their homeland. The number of fatalities was so high that only a few were put in coffins; the others were tied to wood boards and wrapped in canvas. The remains of the 156 Brazilians who were buried in

Dakar were only moved back to Rio de Janeiro in 1928.

At the end of October, after reinforcements arrived from Brazil, the DNOG announced its displacement bound for Gibraltar. The division set sail from Dakar on 3 November and arrived in Gibraltar on 10 November, where the men attended a burial ceremony for the crew of the British battleship *Britannia*, which had been getting ready to receive the DNOG as it had in Freetown. However, a German submarine had torpedoed the *Britannia* the day before the Brazilian Naval Division arrived.

After months of travel and the misfortune of the Spanish Flu, the DNOG arrived in Gibraltar, its foothold, the day before the 11 November 1918 armistice put an end to the war. The DNOG was invited to visit some allied countries, such as Portugal and Great Britain, where King [George V, King of Great Britain \(1865-1936\)](#) welcomed its members. On 9 June 1919, a short time before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, the DNOG's ships returned to Rio de Janeiro, putting an end to the Brazilian Navy's participation in the First World War.

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