

New Chief in Lisbon

Gen. Francisco da Costa Gomes

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LISBON, Sept. 30—Gen. Francisco da Costa Gomes has become President of Portugal almost by default. A void had to be filled after the sudden resignation of

Man
in the
News

Gen. António de Spínola today and, in a country dominated by the military, that void was naturally

filled by the highest military man of all.

General da Costa Gomes is an expert swimmer, horseman and mathematician. However, neither his political leanings nor his political capacity has ever really been tested. There is a feeling in Lisbon that his new position is far from secure in what has become a highly volatile situation.

On Everybody's Good Side

One thing in his favor is that he has managed to stay on almost everybody's good side, a considerable accomplishment in a country where one is forced to choose sides almost all the time, where, if one does not like Communists, one is called a fascist, and vice versa.

General Costa Gomes, the jowly, head of the defense staff, is heavyset and jowly, despite his athletic activities, and his hoarse, high-pitched voice conveys none of the weight or the commanding presence of that of General Spínola. General Costa Gomez looks out on the world almost invariably through dark glasses, and up to now he has been content to stay out of the limelight.

He was born on June 30, 1914, in Chaves, a town in a poor area of the northwest that was then a province called Tras-os-Montes. He graduated from the military academy as a cavalry officer in 1935, and then took the unusual step, for a military man, of taking a course in Mathematics at the University of Oporto. He emerged with honors. The general married late in life and has a teen-aged son who is a law student.

Like his predecessor, he is a career officer who rose through the ranks in the service of a regime that he now denounces. Up to this year, he was involved only once in dissidence. In 1961, a military plot against Premier António de Oliveira Salazar, the long-time dictator of Portugal, was discovered, and General Costa Gomes, then Secretary of State for the Army, was removed from office. But he found his way back into Dr. Salazar's good graces to assume some of his country's highest commands.

As did General Spínola and so many other officers, the officer followed his star to

Africa, where careers could be made and opportunities for promotion abounded. He fought the African liberation movements in Mozambique from 1965 to 1969, first as second in command and then as commander, and took command of Portuguese forces in Angola in 1970.

In September, 1972, General Costa Gomes became head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a year later General Spínola became his deputy. When, in February of this year, General Spínola took the unheard-of step of publishing a book criticizing the African wars as well as the situation in Portugal, General Costa Gomes cast his lot with his comrade by backing the book. In March, he and General Spínola refused to appear at a gathering of generals to swear fealty to Premier Marcello Caetano, and the same day the two men were dismissed.

For a month, he remained at General Spínola's side, watching and waiting until, on April 25, a group of young army officers overthrew the Caetano regime in a coup. He then joined in the leadership of the movement by becoming the second-ranking member of the Junta of National Salvation, the seven-man body of senior officers that ruled the country during the first weeks.

A Law Unto Himself

General Spínola showed his trust in General Costa Gomes by sending him on a short visit to the African colonies to see that military discipline was maintained. Then, back in Portugal, he was made head of the defense staff again, but with heightened authority.

He was given a rank equivalent to premier, and became a law unto himself by keeping the defense establishment completely apart from the Government. But he continued to serve the President by maintaining discipline within the ranks of units based in Portugal.

Now he has parted with his old associate, stressing, in a short statement when he assumed office this evening, his disagreement with General Spínola's gloomy assessment of the political situation. But few persons in Portugal are sure that General Costa Gomes, too, will not one day be led to break with the leftist political forces now dominant.