

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE REGIMENTS FROM OLTENIA TO THE ACTIONS CARRIED OUT BY “TUDOR VLADIMIRESCU” DIVISION*

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Abstract: “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division, created out of Romanian prisoners based on voluntaries, the purpose of it being that to eliminate the military men that proved hostile to the communists of the USSR, of controlling the armed forces of Romania politically and ideologically. The imposing of the social system was made through the instrumentality of the volunteering formations founded on the territory of the Soviet Union, through the captured war prisoners.

“Tudor Vladimirescu” Division was the first Romanian military formation on the territory of USSR that benefited by the services of a political body.

Keywords: division, soldiers, commanders, regiment, war.

The present work is a document-study that registers actions of the soldiers from Oltenia who belonged to the 1st Romanian Infantry Division, transformed into “Tudor Vladimirescu” the 1st Romanian Volunteer Infantry Division, organised under the careful supervision of NKVD. The name was inspired by the experience Tudor Vladimirescu had during the Russian-Turkish war from 1806-1812, when he fought in the Russian army, being decorated with “St. George” Order, 3rd class. Moreover, the members of the division considered that the Pandur’s leader had fought for the people, against those who explored them.

The imposing of the social system was done with the help of the volunteering formations founded on the territory of the Soviet Union, out of the captured war prisoners.

Such formation, made out of Tudor Vladimirescu the 1st Romanian Volunteer Infantry Division, the most significant contribution was for the conquering of the city of Debrecen. Thus, through order no. 037/1943, the Supreme Commander of the Red Army awards Tudor Vladimirescu 1st Romanian Volunteer Infantry Division (...)

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the name of Debrecen. Starting this moment, the unit is known as “Tudor Vladimirescu-Debrecen”¹. 1st Division Infantry from 1943 included the hunting regiments 85, 93, infantry, 1, 38 artillery, regiment 17 infantry.

The commanders of “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division, in the period: 15th of November 1943-1st of October 1944, colonel Nicolae Cambrea; 2nd of October 1944-30th of January 1945 and the 11th of March-12th of May 1945, colonel Mircea Haupt; 31st of January-10th of March 1945, colonel Iacob Teclu².

The soldiers that made themselves remarkable through bravery, courage and heroic behaviour were rewarded with promotion, or Romanian medals and military orders, as well as the military units as: the flag of the Division was decorated in 1946 with the order “Michael the Brave” with 3rd degree spades, the regiments 1,2,3 infantry Pandurs, in 1947; and “The Star of Romania” was awarded to Pandur Regiment I of Artillery in 1947³.

In the order of the day no. 1, from the 15th of November 1943, colonel Cambrea was claiming that the fight would bring them “liberty and abundance, and, you ought not to forget that we stand beside our friend, support and neighbour, the greatest and the strongest country in the world. Only besides it, our country will be, in the future, happy and respected”.

Colonel Nicolae Cambrea was appointed in front of the division (a general from November 1944, after an order signed by Stalin. This situation occurred because the unit was part of the Soviet army). He was the head of the General Staff of the 5th Infantry Division, taken prisoner after the battle from the Bend of the Don, in November 1942, and confined in the camp from Suzdal. Born on the 5th of April 1900, in the city of Târgu-Jiu, deceased on the 5th of February 1976, in Bucharest, he was decorated with the orders: “The Star of Romania”, 5th class (1942); “Iron Cross”, German, 2nd class (1942); “The Red Flag” and “Victory”, Soviet (1945); “Michael the Brave”, 3rd class (1946).

The division participated to the fights against the Hungarian army fights, but starting with the 29th of March 1944, joining the other Romanian troops, subordinated to the 2nd Ukrainian Front, according to the order of the Supreme Soviet Commander, no. 292.⁴ On the same day, generals Melnikov and Kovalenko arrived from Moscow, deciding that the oath ought to be taken on March 30th. The next day, the first echelon of the division started its heading towards the front, debarking, on April 23rd, at Vapniarka, where they celebrated the 1st of May, after the singing of the USSR and Pandur anthems.

After the fighting flags were blessed, and the priests released the troop from the old oath taken for the king, it was made a new oath of allegiance. An appeal

¹ Romanian National Military Archives, “Registrul Istoric”, file no. 71/1946, f. 1

² Alesandru Duțu, Florica Dobre, Leonida Loghin, *Armata română în al II-lea Război Mondial 1941-1945*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1999, p. 198.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 200.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

addressed to the Romanian unit commanders and signed, among others, by colonel Mihai Maltopol and lieutenant-colonels Nicolae Cambrea and Iacob Teclu, was asking them to side with the Russians⁵, to surrender to the Soviet partisans, in order to act together with them⁶, an action punished by death, according to the Military Justice Code from 1939 (art. 501), provisions that could not be applied due to the evolution of the political regime after 1945. Articles 498–499 of the same Code were provisioning that the ones who would raise arms “against Romania or its common allies” would face death, along with those who “willingly or with actionable negligence have agreements with the enemy for favouring their endeavours or overstepping the ones carried out by the Romanian army”. Nonetheless, from April 1944, “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division was already on the front, prepared to join the battle, against their own fellow soldiers. Only the stabilisation of the situation on the front and the postponing of the new Soviet offensive triggered the momentary battle restraint of the division. The Act of the 23rd of August 1944 solved a situation that might have had extremely disagreeable consequences.

The one who coordinated the propagandist efforts, enabled the ideological component between the division and the Soviets was Ana Pauker (whose real name is Ana Rabinsohn). She was helped, among others, by Petre Borilă (Iorgu Dragan Rusev), Leonte Răutu (Lev Oigenstein), Dumitru Coliu (Dimităr Colev), Vasile Luca (Luka Laszlo, the closest collaborator of Ana Pauker in the Soviet Union) or Valter Roman (Ernest Neulander). All the above mentioned would arrive in the country in the same time with the Soviet troops, in Bucharest, on the 31st of August 1944, on the Russian tanks.

Before founding it, the soldiers and the officers from the prisoner camps were presented with the two possible solutions: they would either join the movement, or would face a harsh captivity in Gulag. The overwhelming majority of the soldiers joined the appeal, approximately 90%, unlike the superior officers, from whom just a part of the officers joined the Division. There are at least two possible explanations for the great number of soldiers who proved willing to join the volunteering formations: they did not know precisely the provisions of the Military Justice Code, and the sanctions involved by such gesture, moreover, they were not aware of the importance carried out by the military oath, as the officers were experiencing.

The Soviet Government approved the creation of a volunteering military unit on the 2nd of October 1943. The actual establishment occurred on the 15th of November 1943, the members having to swear the allegiance oath, thus infringing the Military Justice Code severely – articles 498–499, respectively article 501 – that punished by death the act of treason.

The oath obliged the soldiers to fight against the Hitlerite troops and to develop a relation of friendship with the Soviet Union: “I swear, to my people

⁵ Romanian National Military Archives, “Registrul Istoric”, file no. 71/1946, f. 39.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

enslaved by the Germans, that I will fight for its freedom and prosperity. I swear that I will unhesitatingly fulfil my duties as soldier in the camp, on the battle field, anytime and anywhere, subject to my commanders' orders and keep the military secret. I swear that I will fight for a lasting friendship between Romania and the Soviet Union, which gave the strength to fight, holding my gun, for the destruction of the common enemy – the Hitlerite Germany. I swear that I will hold on my brotherhood in arms with the Red Army. I swear that I will fight to the last blood drop against the Fascist Germans that drawn my country into the infamous war”⁷.

The stabilisation of the front situation and the postponing of the new Soviet offensive made the division not join, for the moment, of the fight, avoiding the situation of the confrontation with the former fellow soldiers from the Romanian army. The shifting of the side, for that of the United Nations, that the Romania chose on the 23rd of August, resolved an extremely delicate situation, in which the division could have directly faced the numerous Romanian on its direction. In the new political and military situation, general Burenin, arrived on the 23rd of August 1944 at Sculeni bridge, transmitted to general R.I. Malinovski that the division should not join the fight and continue the marching towards Bucharest, placing 150 cars at its disposal. The first rapidly shifted towards Bucharest, having at Bulboca, next to Vaslui, their first encounter with an isolated German detachment. The second took the same itinerary, also engaging, on the 30th of August 1944, in a fight with the German troops from Ciunta hill, close to Deleni, also by Vaslui. Arrived near Bucharest, on the 30th of August 1944, the advanced echelon of the division entered the Capital the next day. Immediately, major Dumitru Petrescu, the head of the Education and Culture Department of the Division, along with other activists contacted the leadership of the communist party, and groups of militaries visited the Patriotic Defence. In the context of Romania siding the United Nations being done without an agreement with the Moscow authorities and the order in the country was maintained firmly by the new Romanian government, the Division, affiliated to the Soviet army, was sent on the front, north-east to Braşov, where it was subordinated to the Soviet Infantry 33rd Corps, attacking on the direction Iieni – Sf. Gheorghe – Malnaş. Further, they fought very well, within some Soviet army corps, on the south of Oradea and Debrecen, where it recorded great human losses. For the manner in which the army fought at Debrecen, it was mentioned by the Soviet Supreme Commandment, adding the name of the city to it⁸.

If from the point of view of the fights they participated in, it was nothing to be imputed, the division carrying out its missions on the battle field, after the 23rd of August 1944, similarly to the great units of the Romanian Army, from the political point of view, after the imposing, by the Soviets, on the 6th of March 1945, the government presided by Petru Groza, “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division became

⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 37.

⁸ Alesandru Duţu, Florica Dobre, Leonida Loghin, *Armata română în al II-lea Război Mondial 1941–1945*, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing, 1999, p. 200.

the main internal military support of the pro-Soviet government, led by Petru Groza, in the action of power consolidation. Rejuvenated and revigorated by successive batches of volunteers sent from the country at the beginning of 1945 (over 1000) people, along with almost 200 officers amongst the Romanian prisoners from USSR, the division caught the attention of the new Romanian authorities. In March-April 1945, shortly after the installing of Petru Groza government, from its effectives, there were selected almost 1000 officers, non-commissioned officers and troops, who, under the leadership of Dumitru Petrescu, shifted to Bucharest, being met in the North Station by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and trained in “Mihai Viteazul” barracks by activists from the Romanian Communist Party and representatives of the government, among which Petru Groza, Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu etc.

On the 26th of April, after a proper training, batch 1000 – prepared for becoming the nucleus of the political apparatus – was incorporated into the Romanian army, and the politruks were promoted and decorated. King Michael I attended the festivity, along with representatives of the government, the Romanian and the Soviet armies etc.

At the beginning of May 1945, 986 of them were sent to the great operative Romanian units from the front, where they filled the new-formed positions of commanders’ assistants in education, culture and propaganda. Shortly, in the country, on the 8th of May 1945, there was also created the proper organisational background, through the founding of the Superior Department for Education, Culture and Propaganda – E.C.P., in the subordination of the Ministry of War (but not the Minister), general Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu “the man” of the communist party. Even if, from political reasons, the political apparatus from the army was not openly claimed by the communists, for stopping the other political parties from interfering, it was created by the communist party in order to have, always at its disposal, the necessary instrument for transposing the proper policy into the army⁹.

There was often made a comparison between the manner the National Freeing Army, led by Platon Chirnoagă, was created, under the control of the Wien government, and the founding, on the USSR territory, of “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division. The ones who enlisted in the National Freeing Army were considering the act of the 23rd of August 1944 one of treason, and they were regarding the King and the Govern instituted at Bucharest as prisoners of an enemy army, the Red Army. For those enlisted in “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division, “the Romanian people was enslaved by the Germans”, and they were committed to fight against the enemy, the Hitlerian Germany. But while the first ones could seem consistent with the decision made by the Romanian state, through general Ion Antonescu, in a general enthusiastic moment, on the 22nd of June 1941, it is more difficult to understand when the Romanian prisoners from USSR might have realised that “the

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 199.

people was enslaved by the Germans”, those Germans they had fought beside until they became prisoners. Nonetheless, the moment “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division was created (October 1943), and when both the National Freeing Army was founded (November 1944), the already mentioned Code of Military Justice was in force. Thus, in October 1943, the enemy of Romania was USSR, therefore the prisoners from the Soviet Union were traitors and therefore liable to death penalty, by accepting the enlisting in a volunteer division, under Soviet command, as well as, in 1944, the enemy was represented by the Hitlerite Germany, and those who accepted to join the National Freeing Army were also considered traitors, and liable to the same penalty. Although they should have been tried in the same way, through relating to the juristic act, some proved to be more equal than others, just because they were struck by luck, the provisions of the Code of Military Justice (in force regardless the political decision) remaining just empty talk, due to the fact that could not be applied for some people, as a consequence of the political regime after the 6th of March 1945.

It ought to be remarked that, although amongst all the prisoner officers, only 15% of the soldiers answered the initiative of the Romanian communists, 90% of them offered their support. The great percent of soldiers who answered might be explained through a lower level of knowledge and awareness of the Romanian military legislation in force at that time, as well as the different manner, compared to the officers, of relating to the value of the military oath. The document presented further on shows that “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division had been created on the USSR territory, as a structure of the Soviet NKVD, and that the proportion of those who accepted to enlist (officers and soldiers) in the division created at Stalin’s initiative, was relatively similar to that provided by the Romanian archive documents. The 856 officers mentioned in the report handed in by L. P. Beria to the Soviet leader, on the 7th of February 1944, represent approximately 9% of the division effectives. Because the Romanian officers from the Soviet camps had proved reluctant to such an initiative (a question of honour and dignity, moreover an issue that fell under the provisions stipulated in the Code of Military Justice), the political-military decisional factors from Moscow had to rapidly train 500 sergeants, at the military school from Riazani, basically for transforming them, over-night, into infantry, artillery and transmission lieutenants, able to command the military effectives of the division that was to be sent to battle in the offensive from the spring of 1944¹⁰.

Through the Decree no. 2625, signed by King Michael I¹¹, Commander of “Tudor Vladimirescu” 1st Infantry Division, general N. Cambrea and the head of the General Staff, colonel I. Teclu, it was released the order of the day no. 0277 from the 15th of August 1945: “Having considered the telegram no. 13-00181 of the Southern Army Group of Soviet Union Marshal F. Tolbuhin, along with the

¹⁰ Ioan Chiper, Florin Constantiniu, Adrian Pop, *Sovietizarea României. Percepții anglo-americeane*, Bucharest, Iconica Press, 1993, p. 136.

¹¹ Romanian National Military Archives, “Registrul Istoric”, file no. 71/1946, f. 38.

telegram no. 57.288 of the Romanian General Staff, I command: “Tudor Vladimirescu-Debrecen” 1st Volunteer Division, decorated with the Red Flag, is to be included, in the 15th of August 1945, within the Romanian Army effectives, depending, operatively, on the 2nd Military Corps...”¹². On the 6th of December 1945, the Commander of “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division, colonel I. Teclu, and colonel M. Haupt, the head of the General Staff, were dissatisfied with the soldiers of the 2nd Regiment of Infantry: “Our units move, file off and handle the arms similarly to some recruit units that have no more than a month in the military service”¹³. He also asserts that one of the conditions imposed by the soviets, for founding the volunteer formations, was that the soldiers were not supposed to be used against the Romanian units. The Russians realised that the volunteers might refuse to obey the order of shooting at the common soldiers, as long as the entire propaganda was focused on the German troops and the Romanian “traitors” from the country’s leadership. On the 12th of April 1945, it was created a new division of Romanian volunteers – “Horia, Cloșca and Crișan” whose political apparatus would be led by the communist Dumitru Petrescu (meanwhile become colonel), until the 31st of August 1945, when, being moved to the Superior Department for Education, Culture and Propaganda, is replaced by colonel Valter Roman¹⁴. Born in 1913, at Oradea, a Hungarian Jew (his real name being Ernest Neulander), Valter Roman had participated, as a volunteer, to the civil war from Spain, where he commanded “Ana Pauker” artillery division. In 1948, having a rank of Major-General, Valter Roman became the political instructor of the General Staff and the chief of the Coordination Commission for the Planning of the Military Publications printed by the National Defence Minister, but in 1950, in the context of the new purges, he was removed from the army.

Through the Law 320, from the 26th of April 1945, according to article 1, “a part of the Romanian volunteers, officers, non-commissioned officers, sergeants and second-sergeants, and other inferior ranks”¹⁵ was reintegrated into the Romanian army. They constituted the nucleus of the political apparatus on education, being sent on the front to the 1st and 4th Army units, under the command of Victor Precup, who was close to the communists since his detention years from Doftana (1934–1940). The sinuous career of general Victor Precup (1889–1958) had started since the years of the Carlist agitation, contributing, through his vote, to the acquittal of Mihail Manoilescu, tried in 1927 by the Council of War, for the letters that he was bringing, from Prince Carol, to the main Romanian political leaders¹⁶. Dissatisfied with the manner Carol II had appreciated his role in the act

¹² *Ibidem*, f. 80.

¹³ *Ibidem*, f. 34.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

¹⁶ Ioan Chiper, Florin Constantiniu, Adrian Pop, *Sovietizarea României. Percepții anglo-americanе*, Bucharest, Iconica Press, 1993, p. 140.

of restauration, Precup organised, in 1934, on the occasion of the Easter Holiday, a complot having the King himself as a victim. Arrested, he was sentenced to 10 years of confinement and had his rank reduced (to that of lieutenant-colonel). At Doftana, while he was imprisoned, he was contacted by the communists, and after his release, on the 11th of September 1940, he continued to keep in touch with them. On the 12th of April 1945, King Michael I advanced him as brigadier general, being appointed, in May, the same year, the head of the Superior Direction for Education, culture and Propaganda. Later on, through Law 666, in August 1945, the two Romanian volunteer divisions were reintegrated in the Romanian army, preserving their former names¹⁷. Furthermore, after 1948, when the necessity to establish a new numbering for the great units and the Romanian military units, for them “to have no other connection with the past”, the head of the Organising Department from the political apparatus of the army, lieutenant-colonel Corneliu Mănescu, was proposing that “the adding of honorifical names to be done, for the moment, only for the two Divisions of volunteers, «Tudor Vladimirescu – Debrecen» and «Horia, Cloșca and Crișan»”¹⁸.

Within a political-military scenario, conceived by the new authorities after the 6th of March 1945, there occurred the process of purging for the military effectives, who did not agree with the new realities of the country, and with imprisonment of many of the superior rank effectives, especially that of laying the foundation for the “popular army”, built according to the Soviet model. Further on, “Tudor Vladimirescu” Division was successively transformed into an armoured division (1947), a tank Division (1948), commandment of the Tank Corps (1949, after the merging with the commandment of “Horia, Cloșca and Crișan” Division), renamed the 47th Corps of Tanks (1952), transformed in the “Tudor Vladimirescu-Debrecen” Commandment of the 37th mechanised Division (1959).

The huge efforts made by the Romanian people for removing the obsolete feudal relations and the replacing with new, capitalist ones, carried out in the context that the great surrounding empires, the Tsarist, the Habsburg and the Ottoman, were opposing any social-political transformations, united their actions for conquering the independence and for the constituting of the unitary national statute.

From historical perspective, the efforts of the Romania people, in its fight for justice and social freedom for defending the ancient territory, its entity, for unity and independence. Created and developed on the entire space between the Carpathians, the Danube and the Black Sea, inheriting a strong spirit of solidarity, the Romanian army proved to be firmly decided to fulfil the fundamental wishes of freedom¹⁹.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

¹⁹ Nichita Adăniloai, Vasile Alexandrescu și alții, *Istoria militară a poporului român*, vol. IV, Bucharest, Military Press, 1987, p. 902.

The problems addressing the future of Romania is to be imposed with commitment and determination to the European conscience, the army playing a special role in the huge movement of emancipation of the nations, regarding all the military forces on the continent and especially its south-eastern area.

The instauration of the communism in Romania was done especially with the help of the Soviet tanks, but the interface, the political representatives, were members of the Communist Party. The PCR leaders were only the beneficiaries of the military victories of the Soviet Union.

The fight of the Romanian army for accomplishing the unitary and independent national statute was naturally and necessarily integrated in the European context, evidencing the impulses it received, along with the ones it gave to the emancipation movement from the entire Europe.