

HOLY WAR: THE ROMANIAN ARMY, MOTIVATION, AND THE HOLOCAUST,

1941-1944

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the motivation of Romanian soldiers in combat and committing atrocities against Romanian Jews and Soviet civilians. While there has been some investigation into the Romanian Army's operations and its participation in the Holocaust the topic remains largely unexamined, despite Romania being the most important Nazi-allied army on the Eastern Front and the greatest independent perpetrator in the Holocaust after Nazi Germany. This dissertation argues that Romanian officers and soldiers were highly motivated in combat on the Eastern Front by nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. These things united Romanians of all classes to support a "holy war" to defend Romania from the alleged threat of "Judeo-Bolshevism." The Romanian Army reinforced soldiers' motivation through propaganda, coercion, and remuneration. Romanian soldiers were primarily motivated by intrinsic factors to fight, although extrinsic factors became more important to persuading soldiers to keep fighting as the war on the Eastern Front dragged on. The same factors motivated officers and soldiers to carry out atrocities, primarily against Jews, but also partisans, prisoners of war, and civilians in the Soviet Union. The Romanian Army was deeply complicit in Hitler's war of annihilation.

This dissertation fills an important gap because the current consensus, based primarily on German impressions and a highly sanitized nationalist narrative, claims that Romanian officers were Francophile, thus only reluctant allies of the Germans, and Romanian soldiers were simple peasants, therefore allegedly quickly demoralized due to insufficient motivation. Both assertions are propped up by a narrow approach focusing on the Romanian Army's combat operations on the front line. In contrast, this dissertation examines Romanian interwar society that shaped the motivation of soldiers, while at the same time expanding the scope to include soldiers' role in the

Holocuast, to argue that the Romanian Army had much greater motivation to fight the Soviets and participate in Nazi anti-Semitic policies than previously believed. This dissertation does not forget to address the motivation of women providing military service as well as ethnic, religious, and racial minorities who fought in the Romanian Army during the Second World War.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving and supportive wife Lisa.

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NOMENCLATURE

AMR	Romanian Military Archives
ANIC	National Central Historical Archives
ASNCRR	National Society of the Romanian Red Cross Archives
BMMN	National Military Museum Library
ACNSAS	National Council for the Study of the Archives of the <i>Securitate</i> Archive
SIA	Historical Section of the Army
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, during an interview in Bucharest, Mr. Halic and Mr. Dobrin, two veterans of the Eastern Front, became animated as they discussed the war. In response to an inquiry on rations Mr. Halic said Romanian soldiers never starved because they “laid their hands on” whatever they needed from Soviet civilians. Mr. Dobrin softened the comment by claiming that they paid for goods they requisitioned. Mr. Halic agreed, but then, laughing, remarked that “most often” they just took it by force. When asked about the murder of Jews, Mr. Halic drowned out Mr. Dobrin, who had been disputing the number of Jews killed by Romanian soldiers, and civilians, saying that the Germans could not be blamed for the atrocities in eastern Romania because Romanian soldiers had a “grudge” against Jews after 1940 when the Red Army occupied eastern Romania. He argued that Jews had abused the Romanian Army as it retreated before the Red Army as the Soviets occupied eastern Romania. Mr. Halic continued and stated that the alleged betrayal by Jews in northern Bukovina and Bessarabia had to be “reckoned.” Mr. Dobrin chimed in to add that Jews “paid” in 1940 when the Romanian Army returned in 1941.¹

Romania’s “holy war” between 22 June 1941 and 23 August 1944 was fought by soldiers motivated to fight against the threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism.” The wartime regime under General, promoted to Marshal, Ion Antonescu declared war on the first day of Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the USSR. Romania did not wait for a pretext, such as Hungary or Finland who only declared war days later after Soviet air attacks, because the Red Army occupied eastern Romania

¹ Halic and Dobrin, Bucharest, 2009.

in 1940. The Romanian Army provided 325,000 soldiers for the invasion. The Romanian Army made an invaluable contribution to the German Army's campaigns in 1941: assaulting the Stalin Line, besieging Odessa, fighting north of the Azov Sea, and occupying Crimea. During 1942, the Romanian soldiers helped finish conquering Crimea, win a great victory in the second battle of Kharkov, almost reach the Caucuses oil fields, and hold the exposed flanks at Stalingrad. At its peak in late 1942, the Romanian Army fielded an estimated 464,000 men fighting on various fronts in the USSR. After Stalingrad, approximately 110,000 Romanian soldiers helped hold the Kuban bridgehead until late 1943 and 75,000 survivors defended Crimea until spring 1944. The Romanian Army mobilized 432,000 soldiers to defend Romania during summer 1944.² The size, close cooperation with the German Army, and long alliance with Nazi Germany all demonstrate the extent of Romanian support for the “holy war” against “Judeo-Bolshevism.”

Romania’s military contribution is only one part of the story. The Romanian Army also implemented harsh occupation policies in the Soviet Union and, more than any other Axis ally, participated extensively in the Holocaust on the Eastern Front.³ The massacres of Jews carried out by ordinary Romanian soldiers were as terrible as any by *Einsatzgruppen*, paramilitary “task forces” formed from specially selected members of the Nazi SS, on the Eastern Front. The Iași pogrom killed 8,000-15,000 Jews. Romanian soldiers shot or otherwise murdered, with the help of civilians and the SS, 43,500 Jews in eastern Romania. Romanian soldiers killed 25,000 Jews in Odessa after it fell. Romanian and SS forces shot another 100,000 Jews during the winter of

² Alesandru Duțu, *Armata română în război (1941-1945)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2016), 9.

³ Richard DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers: Front Coalition to Collapse* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 130-132.

1941-1942 in Romanian-occupied western Ukraine, dubbed Transnistria.⁴ Romanian soldiers tasked with security between the Bug and Dnieper rivers in German-occupied Ukraine assisted the SS in rounding up or murdering Jews in cities such as Dubossary, Nikolaev, Kirovograd. In Crimea the Romanian Army implemented a harsh anti-partisan campaign and murdered or turned Jews over to the SS. During the fall of 1941, following massacres initiated by soldiers in eastern Romania, the Antonescu regime ordered 125,000-145,000 Jews deported from eastern Romania to Transnistria, joining Soviet Jews in ghettos and camps, and died in the tens of thousands from starvation, disease, and exposure. During 1941-1944 an estimated 300,000 Romanian and Soviet Jews were murdered under Romanian administration.⁵ The motivation of Romanian soldiers in committing these atrocities was linked to their motivation in combat against the Red Army.

This dissertation argues that Romanian soldiers were highly motivated by intrinsic factors on the Eastern Front between 22 June 1941 and 23 August 1944. The primary motivating factors were nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. These things united Romanians of all classes to support what they saw as a “holy war” to redeem Romania and destroy the threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism.” This common motivation aided in the creation of strong primary groups on the front, giving soldiers another reason to fight, to protect their comrades in the foxhole next

⁴ For the Iași pogrom, see, Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Press; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 166; for northern Bukovina and Bessarabia the number is derived from a recent averaging of high and low claims of all known massacres in the region, see, Simon Geissbühler, *Iulie însângerat: România și holocaustul din vara lui 1941*. Trad. Ioana Rostos (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2015), 156-160; for an estimate of the massacres in collaboration with the SS in eastern Romania, see Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally: Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 145; for an estimate of the Odessa massacre, see, DiDardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 133; for massacres in Transnistria, see, Eric C. Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of the Ukraine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 131-132.

⁵ In 2004, an official commission estimated 280,000 to 380,000 Jews were murdered west of the Bug in territories under Romanian administration during the war, see, International Comission on the Holocaust in Romania, “Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania,” 306, Minority Rights Information System, accessed 9 April 2016, <http://miris.eurac.edu/mugs2/do/blob.pdf?type=pdf&serial=1117716572750>.

to them. Intrinsic motivation not only explains why officers and soldiers of the Romanian Army fought against the Red Army, but why they initiated the mass murder of Jews in eastern Romania and collaborated with the SS in German-occupied territory in the Soviet Union to implement the “Final Solution,” the Nazi plan to exterminate all Jews. Officers and soldiers perceived Jews as a threat to them and their comrades who had to be dealt with radically. The crimes committed by the Romanian Army during 1941-1942 in the Soviet Union go a long way in understanding why soldiers kept fighting after Stalingrad. Fear of Soviet retribution for heinous acts committed in the initial advance motivated soldiers to fight in a lost cause as the German Army retreated and the advancing Red Army threatened their homes with spoliation.

Soldiers were part of an institution that trained them to fight, drilled them to obey without question, and required them to think of the group ahead of the individual. The Romanian Army exerted various means to motivate them in combat, nevertheless, such extrinsic motivation had a secondary role in motivating soldiers who believed in the war, especially in 1941-1942. Officers kept a close watch on their soldiers’ motivation and morale after crossing the Dniester River into the USSR. They used propaganda, coercion, and remuneration to reinforce soldiers’ motivation in combat and expanded the scale of atrocities, particularly against Jews in eastern Romania, but also Jews, communists, partisans, and Soviet POWs in the USSR. Officers were the backbone of the Romanian Army who cajoled, threatened, and rewarded their soldiers to keep them fighting. An officer’s decoration as a hero or punishment as a coward or an incompetent depended on the performance of his troops in combat, so they reinforced soldier’s intrinsic motivation whenever it faltered, and increasingly leaned on propaganda, coercion, and remuneration during 1943-1944. Officers clamped down their own and soldiers’ impulses to commit atrocities as it became clear the German Army would lose the war and the Red Army was likely to occupy Romania.

The traditional consensus, however, argues that Romanian soldiers were reluctant allies of the German Army. This was due, in large part, to the lack of access to archival materials in Romania after the Second World War, but just as importantly military and Holocaust historians developed two very different narratives of the Romanian Army in the Second World War that did not interact in its historiography. In fact, despite the fall of communism in Eastern Europe having opened archives, Romanian military and Holocaust historians continue to talk past each other, exacerbated by the fact they are divided by language – history of the Romanian Army is written almost entirely in Romanian and history of the Holocaust in Romania is mostly written in English. This work combines the two historiographies to properly understand the motivation of Romanian soldiers who fought alongside the German Army during the Second World War.

Missing Historical Debate

There is remarkably little debate about the motivation of Romanian officers and soldiers during the Second World War. In addition to two separate historiographies – Romanian military history that focuses on combat on the front versus history of the Holocaust in Romania that deals with crimes in Romanian-occupied territory – within each of the two camps there is a consensus. Romanian military historians argue that soldiers were brave but outmatched, were motivated to fight only to the Dniester, and were tragic victims of Nazism and Communism. Historians of the Holocaust in Romania argue anti-Semitic atrocities were planned from the top-down and soldiers followed orders. Both need to be challenged through a bottom-up approach. Furthermore, the motivation of soldiers in combat and committing atrocities are inviably linked.

Romanian military historiography of the Second World War is dominated by nationalist historians, many of whom are retired officers, who focus on the bravery of soldiers and defend the honor of the Romanian Army. The origin of the narrative of brave, but doomed Romanian

soldiers caught between “totalitarian” giants on the Eastern Front began in 1943 when diplomats of the Antonescu regime spread this apologist narrative in neutral capitals across Europe. After the initial communist seizure of power in 1947, the new regime created a narrative of liberation by the Red Army and talking about the role of the Romanian Army on the Eastern Front became taboo. Several diplomats who had served in the Antonescu regime and went into exile after the war wrote apologist memoirs in English that depicted Romanian soldiers as reluctant allies of the German Army. One of the few generals to escape into exile published an account in 1965 meant as an official history of the war against the USSR for the Romanian exile community because the General Staff had not written one – it is anti-communist and pro-Legionary.⁶ The Legion of the Archangel Michael was the Romanian fascist movement. After the end of the Soviet occupation of Romania in 1958 and under the new regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the leader of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 to 1989, the period between 23 August 1944 and 9 May 1945 when the Romanian Army was required to fight alongside the Red Army was celebrated by nationalist historians. Romanian communist historians named it the “Anti-Hitlerite War,” but were critical of how the Soviets treated the Romanian Army. In the 1980s, however, they began to partially rehabilitate the Antonescu regime and depicted the dictator as a tragic figure caught between the Nazis and the Soviets who defended Romanian sovereignty the best he could. The alliance with Nazi Germany could be referenced, but only indirectly and as a terrible mistake.⁷ The Holocaust

⁶ Most of his audience were former Legionaries, he himself was part of a Legionary puppet government, so his book criticizes Antonescu and praises the Legionaries, see, Platon Chirnoagă, *Istoria politică și militară a războiului românesc împotriva rusiei sovietice, 22 iunie 1941-23 august 1944* (Editia II. Madrid: Editura Carpatii, 1986).

⁷ For a concise overview of the development of the memory of the Second World War in Romania, see, Gavin Bowd, *Memoria Războiului, 1941-1945* (Bucharest: Editura Pro Historia, 2006).

in Romania was blamed on German “occupiers” and a few fascist Legionaries. This set the tone for Romanian military histories written after the fall of communism in 1989.

After 1989, nationalist military historians dusted off the old narrative of the Romania as a reluctant ally of the Axis and mated it with the communist narrative of the “Anti-Hitlerite War” to depict Romanian soldiers as heroes and victims in the Second World War. The rehabilitation of Antonescu, his regime, and the Romanian Army was remarkably quick.⁸ Mark Axworthy, a British historian, used his contacts with the British Military Attaché in Bucharest to be the first Western military historian to peruse newly available documents to published *Third Axis, Fourth Ally* in 1995 – with substantial assistance from Romanian military historians, two of whom are cited as co-authors. His book examines the Romanian Army, Air Force, and Navy between 1941 and 1945. It quickly became the standard work on the subject and greatly influenced histories of the Eastern Front written since. While a competent account of combat operations, which heavily emphasizes weapons and technology, Axworthy – following the lead of the Romanian nationalist historians he befriended – glosses over the Soviet occupation of 1940, claims Romanian soldiers lacked motivation after crossing the Dniester, misrepresents the politics of the officer corps, and overemphasizes the last months of the war fighting against Nazi Germany. The book also lacks footnotes and relies on materials at the National Military Museum and Ministry of Defense, both in Bucharest as he did not research at the Romanian Military Archives in Pitești. To his credit Axworthy does briefly acknowledge the Romanian Army’s participation in the Holocaust.⁹

⁸ For a detailed analysis of commemoration of the memory of the war in a wider context, see, Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁹ Mark Axworthy, Cornel Scafaș, and Christian Craciunoiu, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally: Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941-1945* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Hailer Publishing, 1995); the next year his co-author helped put out an illustrated history, see, Cornel I. Scafaș et al., *Armata română, 1941-1945* (Bucharest: Editura R.A.I., 1996).

In Romania, nationalist military historians downplayed the Romanian Army's role in the Holocaust as it did not fit with their narrative of bravery and victimhood. An awkward example is the inclusion of Colonel Gheorghe Carp, commander of the 7th *Roșiori* Regiment in 1941, in a book entitled *Romanian Heroes on the Eastern Front* in 1995. It includes a short biography and account of the death of 30 officers killed in combat, all lieutenant-colonels or colonels except for one general. Colonel Carp and several of his staff officers were killed "heroically" in an ambush during an attack in the Caucasus on 2 September 1942. The account does not mention that 15-20 Soviet POWs were shot in reprisal soon after. Even more problematically, in June 1941, Colonel Carp had ordered officers in his regiment to form "execution squads" and to murder all Jews and communists in its path that he and soldiers blamed for attacking or abusing the Romanian Army during its withdrawal from eastern Romania in 1940 as they advanced through eastern Romania. This case was thoroughly investigated during 1950-1951 by the *Securitate*, the communist secret police, and brought to light soon after 1989.¹⁰ Nevertheless, nationalists continue to depict army officers, and even member of the fascist Legionary movement, as anti-communists martyrs.¹¹ While dozens of books about the Romanian Army on the Eastern Front have been published in Romania during the last three decades, they do not add much other than more operational details. They continue to assert that Romanian soldiers were reluctant allies of the Wehrmacht, although

¹⁰ Alexandru Duțu și Florica Dobre, *Eroi români pe frontul de răsărit (1941-1944), volumul I.* (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1995), 25-30; for all the witness testimonies, see, ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, dosar 8178.

¹¹ When an anti-Legionary law was passed in 2015, criminalizing the use of fascist symbols, nationalists published a widely available book that argued "anti-communist heroes" were being attacked, see, Cezarina Condurache (coord.), *Eroii anticomuniști și săfinții închisorilor reincriminați prin legea 217/2015* (Bucharest: Editura Evdokimos, 2015).

they stress their bravery and importance to the German war effort at the same time, and if they address the Holocaust they minimize or justify the actions of the Romanian Army.¹²

Holocaust historians are largely unconcerned about the motivation of Romanian soldiers, especially because Romanian Holocaust historiography is dominated by intentionalist historians. Inspired by the work of Allied prosecutors at the Nuremberg Trials and Raul Hilberg, whose *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961 was the first comprehensive history of the Holocaust, a growing number of German historians began arguing that each step of the “Final Solution” was initiated from the top-down by Hitler and the events of the Holocaust unfolded according to the Führer’s master plan.¹³ In 1970, Karl Schleunes *A Twisted Road to Auschwitz* signaled the start of a challenge to the growing consensus.¹⁴ Another group of historians argued that Hitler did not have a master plan and it was German bureaucrats from the bottom-up initiated the steps towards genocide. The two sides came to be identified in the 1980s as intentionalists, the most extreme claiming Hitler decided to murder all European Jews as early as 1919, and functionalists, the most extreme claiming that Hitler had little part in initiating the Holocaust. During the 1990s, the two camps moved closer to the middle and today moderate intentionalists and moderate functionalists have come to a consensus that the Holocaust resulted from a mixture of top-down and bottom-up factors, only disagreeing about which factors predominated.

¹² The most recent account of the war by one of the most prolific Romanian military historian, and retired colonel, is almost totally about combat operations. It only briefly mentions atrocities against Jews. For example, the massacre of Jews at Odessa is reduced to a single paragraph and blames “communists and Jews” for triggering it. The harsh anti-partisan policies and reprisals are justified as military necessity, Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 110, 131.

¹³ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

¹⁴ Karl Schleunes, *A Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews, 1933-1939* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

A functionalist counterpoint has not yet developed in the historiography of the Holocaust in Romania. Matatias Carp, General Secretary of the Association of Romanian Jews, wrote the first history of the Holocaust in Romania when his “Black Book” was published in 1946-1948.¹⁵ It was based mostly on oral testimony and a few documents unearthed by post-war investigators for war crimes trials. A few German historians, especially Raul Hilberg, used German records in following decades to shed some light on the Holocaust in Romania, but in Romania the subject – other than Hungarian crimes in northern Transylvania – became taboo. In the 1980s, Jean Ancel, born in Iași in 1940 and died in Israel in 2008, took advantage of good relations existing between Romania and Israel to gather materials on the Holocaust when he visited Bucharest.¹⁶ He edited or wrote a half dozen influential works over the next two decades that culminated in *The History of the Holocaust in Romania* published posthumously in 2011. Ancel’s intentionalist approach rather simplistically applied German arguments to a Romanian context: Antonescu replaced Hitler, Legionaries stood in for Nazis, *Serviciul Secret de Informații* (the Romanian secret police known by its acronym SSI) became the Gestapo, Romanianization was Aryanization, an SSI unit on the front was an *Einsatzgruppe*, the Bucharest pogrom in 1941 imitated *Kristalnacht*, a Reich-wide pogrom orchestrated by Hitler in 1938, and Antonescu supposedly had a “master plan” to exterminate all Romanian Jews mirroring Hitler’s “Final Solution.”¹⁷ Ancel also favored higher estimates for the number of Jews killed by the Antonescu regime. Radu Ioanid’s *The Holocaust*

¹⁵ Originally four volumes, see, Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania: Facts and documents on the annihilation of Rumania's Jews – 1940-1944*, trans. Seán Murphy (Budapest: Primor Publishing Co, 1994).

¹⁶ The 12-volume work was the first major contribution since the “Black Book,” see, Jean Ancel, ed., *Documents concerning the fate of Romanian Jewry during the Holocaust* (New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1986).

¹⁷ He also argues that diplomats, politicians, and journalists were all in the pocket of the SS, implying that greedy Romanians had little ideological loyalty, see, Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, trans. Yaffah Murciano, ed. Leon Volovici (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 62-63, 152-153, 179-183, 217, 229.

in Romania, published in 2000, is probably more influential. His book is based mostly on Carp’s “Black Book,” Ancel’s collection of documents from 1986, and some new material collected by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum from Romanian archives after 1989. Ioanid does not challenge previous intentionalist arguments in his primarily descriptive account.¹⁸ The more recent work by Holocaust historians continues to build on this intentionalist foundation.

The intentionalists generally depict Romanian soldiers as simple executioners of policies emanating from Bucharest. The motivation of the officer corps or enlisted soldiers to kill has not attracted attention by historians of the Holocaust in Romania, and none have explicitly connected atrocity motivation in the rear to combat motivation on the front. In his 2010 book *Purifying the Nation*, Vladimir Solonari criticizes some of Ancel’s obviously flawed arguments, but he focuses on elites who made policy and ordered the mass deportation of Jews from eastern Romania after the Romanian Army had liberated it in 1941. He excludes atrocities in Transnistria or east of the Bug. Solonari acknowledges that “genocidal initiatives” from the bottom-up “were an important part” of the Holocaust in eastern Romania, but only briefly addresses the actions of mid-ranking officers.¹⁹ Diana Dumitru’s *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in The Holocaust* from 2016 examines the initiative of Romanian and Soviet civilians in her comparative history of the Holocaust in eastern Romania and Transnistria. Ironically, despite her subject matter, she takes a top-down approach. Dumitru’s arguments center on the role of the state in shaping society and claims Soviet anti-anti-Semitism propaganda during the interwar period successfully reshaped

¹⁸ Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000).

¹⁹ He ignores rank and file soldiers who he sees as directed by mid-ranking officers. “Although the initiative and order were coming from above, without the enthusiastic support of mid-level military and gendarme officers, mass killings would never have taken place,” see, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 171-172, 177.

popular Soviet attitudes towards Jews in less than 20 years. She also explicitly excludes soldiers or gendarmes. Dumitru assumes that soldiers had less free will, would always kill if asked, and only civilians murdered Jews “on their own initiative and without orders from above.”²⁰

This work takes a moderate functionalist approach to the Holocaust and contextualizes it in Romanian society, army politics, and soldiers’ intrinsic motivation. While policy-makers in Bucharest played a very important role, especially in the decision to deport Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia, popular anti-Semitic violence initiated by soldiers – or civilians – was at least as important. Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, Mihai Antonescu, began talking privately about “a historic moment” to “effect purification of the population” in eastern Romania five days before the invasion, but already on 2-3 July – after Army Group Antonescu began an offensive to liberate eastern Romania – he began speaking publicly on the “[r]adical purification” and “very severe” policies to be implemented in eastern Romania.²¹ He felt comfortable saying so because of popular anti-Semitic violence committed by soldiers. In 1940, soldiers had killed Jews during their retreat through Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Moldavia before the Antonescu regime had even taken power. By early July 1941, soldiers and civilians had already begun to murder Jews west of the Prut, including the notorious Iași pogrom. In subsequent weeks, east of the Prut, soldiers and junior officers usually initiated atrocities, mid-ranking officers chose to expand them, and senior officers legitimized them by issuing orders that justified what was already occurring. The crimes perpetrated by Romanian soldiers during the advance into eastern Romania in 1941 bear a remarkable similarity to crimes carried out by German soldiers against civilians in Belgium and

²⁰ Diana Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4, 6-7.

²¹ Quotes translated and found in, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 149-157.

France in 1914.²² However, atrocities did not end at the Dniester, but continued as the Romanian Army advanced into the USSR, as the massacre in Odessa shows, and farther east in Ukraine the SS directed Romanian soldiers who remained deeply complicit in the “Final Solution.”

The motivation of Romanian soldiers in combat cannot be divorced from their motivation in committing atrocities. A narrow focus on operations by nationalist military historians allows them to preserve the honor of the Romanian Army and maintain the fiction that its soldiers were only reluctant allies of the Wehrmacht. Historians of the Holocaust in Romania have focused on a top-down approach that largely ignores the officer corps and especially the rank and file of the Romanian Army because they assume Antonescu initiated everything and the army just followed orders. Romanian military history and history of the Holocaust in Romania need to be integrated because it shows that Romanian soldiers had strong intrinsic motivation on the Eastern Front.

Sources

This dissertation is the first academically rigorous account of the Romanian Army during the Second World War in English that is based on extensive original research. This work brings together archival materials, Romanian Army periodicals and newspapers, and soldier journals, all of which were created during the war. Furthermore, it integrates memoir literature, records from war crimes trials, and secret police files, which were written after the war. Finally, recent oral interviews with surviving veterans by the author inform the dissertation’s arguments. Of course, it also stands on the shoulders of historians who produced invaluable secondary literature.

The author not only researched in many archives that are less frequently used, especially by non-Romanian researchers, but examined their contents in a different way than most of those

²² John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale, 2001), 113-118.

who do carry out research in them. The most important was *Arhivele Militare Române* (AMR), or the Romanian Military Archives, located in the provincial city of Pitești, 119 km away from Bucharest. The AMR is the central repository of all official Romanian military documents from its inception in the mid-nineteenth century through to today. A portion of these materials copied onto microfilm are held at the *Serviciul Istoric al Armatei* (SIA), or the Historical Service of the Army, in Bucharest. The microfilmed material, as the author discovered, is not comprehensive and was selected according to unclear criteria set by communist military historians in the 1960s and 1970s, so one does not know what is missing from SIA microfilm. Therefore, it is necessary to research at the AMR in Pitești to discover all the documents in the original file. The author is one of the few foreign, and probably the first American, researcher to visit the AMR.

The AMR is a treasure trove. The author had already examined documents from the files of the Ministry of Defense held in *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale*, or the Central Historical National Archives, across the street from the famous Cișmigiu Park in Bucharest, so at the AMR he examined the collections of the most important field units, including Third and Fourth armies, Mountain and Cavalry corps, and others. Many files had never been looked at before and those that were had been examined by Romanian military historians. Things like army discipline, poor performance in combat, rivalries between officers, atrocities against Jews or civilians, and other unflattering subjects are generally avoided by them. AMR files include combat reports, orders, campaign studies, intelligence reports, complaints, requests, interviews, letters, and much more. They were invaluable in understanding the motivation of soldiers, attitudes in the officer corps, and details on Romanian participation in the Holocaust. The Romanian Army did not extensively document its crimes on the Eastern Front, but there is much to be gleaned from these records, especially on almost unknown acts perpetrated east of the Bug.

Official army publications of the interwar and war years are another source underutilized by historians. *Biblioteca Acadamiei Române* or the Romanian Academy Library, houses copies of military journals like *România militară*, or *Military Romania*, and military periodicals, such as *Sentinela*, or *The Sentry*, *Soldatul*, or *The Soldier*, *Eoul Crimeei*, or *The Echo of Crimea*, and many others published during 1941-1944. Propaganda reflected common beliefs in Romanian society and these official army publications provide key insights into military thought, common beliefs, and themes in wartime propaganda. No historian has ever incorporated these materials into a history of the Romanian Army during the Second World War.

In addition to official army records and publications, this work uses unofficial materials, such as wartime letters and diaries written by soldiers. The library at *Muzeul Militar Național*, or the National Military Museum, in Bucharest includes a Manuscript Collection with unpublished letters and diaries. In addition to such unpublished materials, *Editura militară*, or the Military Publishing House, has published many diaries written by officers and NCOs during 1941-1945. Three of them will feature prominently in this work. Major, later Lt.-Colonel, Vasile Scârneci's diaries from the First World War and the Second World War were published in a single volume with the title *Life and Death on the Front Line*. The decorated commander of the 3rd Mountain Battalion kept an almost daily record between 22 June 1941 and 1 January 1944 with extensive commentary on combat, life on the front, morale of his men, progress of the war, and even some atrocities. He provides the perspective of a mid-ranking officer on the front. Like many in the Mountain Corps he was from Transylvania. Scârneci was born in 1896 in the town of Rupea then in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. During 1914-1916 he spied for the SSI until Romania invaded. He volunteered as private, quickly was promoted a sergeant, and in 1917 received a battlefield commission as a lieutenant. Scârneci went to officer training schools during the interwar period

and rose in the ranks. After 1941, he fought from the Prut through Ukraine to Crimea and then in the Caucasus. His hatred of communism is palpable, as is his contempt for ethnic Germans in Transylvania and his suspicion of Jews.²³ Diaries written by NCOs provide perspectives from the rank and file. Sergeant Evsevie M. Ionescu served in the 53rd Artillery Regiment, supporting various mountain units, and kept a diary from 17 July 1941 to 3 January 1944. He was born in a village in Wallachia in 1910. He moved to Bucharest in 1926 and later Ploiești where he worked as a manager of a restaurant-hotel. He was drafted in 1933-1935, trained as an artilleryman, and called up when war threatened in 1939. Ionescu's diary is filled with immediate concerns, such as food and mail, but also carefully recorded passages from army newspapers and radio speeches on why Romanian soldiers were fighting and each time he visited a church to pray for victory.²⁴ Corporal Ștefan Cârlan served as a radioman in the 38th *Infanterie* Regiment and kept his diary from 31 March 1942 to 12 May 1945. He was born in 1918 in the village of Lacu Sărat outside the large port city of Brăila on the Danube. He was drafted in 1939, but not sent to the front until the 10th Infantry Division was remobilized to support the Axis invasion of the Caucasus in 1942. Cârlan's diary mostly chronicles his diet, he edited it in the 1970s hoping to published it and may have cut some things, nevertheless, it shows his reactions to news on the radio, his disdain for the backwardness of the USSR, respect for the faith of locals, and rumors on the front.²⁵ Obviously a serious work of history cannot be based solely on such anecdotal evidence, but these diaries are some of the few perspectives from the bottom written during the war and very important.

²³ Vasile Scârneci, *Viața și moartea în linia întâi: Jurnal și însemnări de război, 1916-1920, 1941-1943* (București: Editura Militară, 2013).

²⁴ Evsevie M. Ionescu, *Însemnări din război: Jurnalul unui sergent (1941-1944)* (București: Editura Militară, 2005).

²⁵ Ștefan Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile! Jurnal de război (1942-1945)* (București: Editura Militară, 2007).

Soldiers wrote personal memoirs of their experience after the war and a growing number are being published. These memoirs vary greatly, but they can be roughly be grouped into three types: those written during communism, those written after 1989, and those written by veterans in exile. In the first group are memoirs written by senior officers seeking to justify their actions during the war, such as *With the Marshal until Death* written by General Constantin Pantazi, the Minister of Defense between 1942 and 1944 and close friend of Antonescu, or *Memories of an Intelligence Officer* by Colonel Ion Grosu, head of Third Army intelligence from 1941 to 1944. While they clearly had an agenda and pushed blame for war crimes on the Germans, they give an important perspective of leaders in the Romanian Army.²⁶ Mid-ranking officers penned memoirs usually less to defend the Antonescu regime than to defend their own honor, such as Major, later Lt.-Colonel, Gheorghe Răscănescu, who wrote a couple short accounts at the urging of family on his wartime accomplishments at Odessa and Stalingrad, or Captain Dumitru Păsat, who wrote a memoir to celebrate his wise leadership over a rehabilitation unit at Stalingrad.²⁷ Veterans who wrote memoirs in exile usually did so in English and were often minorities of some kind, such as ethnic Germans like Immanuel Weiss and Sigmund Landau or Baptist George Crisan, and near the end of their lives. They usually contain a strong anti-communist message.²⁸ The fall of communism in Romania triggered a new phase of memoir writing by veterans who could finally tell their stories without fear. With titles such as Sergeant Emilian Ezechil's *To the Gates of the*

²⁶ Ion Grosu, *Memoriile unui ofițer de informații* (Bucharest: Editură Militară, 2009).

²⁷ Gheorghe Răscănescu, *Erou la cotul Donului: Însemări din război, 1941-1944* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2017); Dumitru Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitanului Dumitru Păsat, 1941-1945* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015).

²⁸ Immanuel Weiss and George F. Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight: A Peasant Caught between the Red Star and the Swastika: Immanuel Weiss's True Story* (Lincoln, NB: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1991); Sigmund Heinz Landau, *Goodbye, Transylvania: A Romanian Waffen-SS Soldier in WWII* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1985); George Crisan, *An Amazing Life: Escape from Romania* (New York: Vantage Press, 1990).

Inferno, 2nd Lieutenant Dumitru Teodorescu's *The Mountain Soldier's Pride*, and 2nd Lieutenant Gheorghe Netejorū's *I too fought in the East*, all published after 2000, these memoirs further the comfortable narrative that Romanian soldiers were tragic victims of Nazism and Communism.²⁹

While all these memoirs have certain issues they are still useful sources.

Another important source of soldier accounts after the war are the testimonies of veterans during investigations into war crimes by the communist secret police, known as the *Securitate*. These records are available in *Arhiva Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* (ACNSAS), or the National Council for the Study of the Archives of the *Securitate* Archive in Bucharest. For obvious reasons the testimony of the officers and soldiers interrogated by agents of the *Securitate* is not entirely reliable. These veterans were accused of war crimes and tried to shift the blame elsewhere, usually claiming that they had been ordered to commit the crimes they were accused of and were threatened with punishment if they had not followed orders, but they provide some of the few detailed accounts of atrocities. The testimony in these documents from ACNSAS have buttressed the intentionalist arguments of historians of the Holocaust in Romania.

Lastly, the author carried out a series of oral interviews with almost 40 veterans in over a dozen cities across Romania. The National Association of Veterans of War has an office in each county seat that helped facilitate contacting veterans of the Eastern Front for the interviews that were held either in the county office or the personal home of the veteran. These interviews were useful because the veterans could be directly asked about their motivation during the war. Some had been interviewed a few times by local reporters or historians, who had been directed to them

²⁹ Emilian Ezechil, *La porțile infernului: 1941-1945* (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2008); Dumitru Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte* (Baia Mare: Editura Marist, 2013); Gheorghe Netejorū, *Și eu am luptat în est: Spovedania unui fost prizonier de război* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2010).

by the National Association of Veterans of War as well, so their testimony was already polished. Others had not been interviewed before. By the time the interviews took place at least 20 years had passed since the fall of communism and most had been exposed to the new post-communist narrative of the Eastern Front with Romanian soldiers as heroes and victims. They also knew of accusations against the Romanian Army by Holocaust historians. All these influences must have colored their testimony during the interviews, but not enough to make them worthless.

The factors that had motivated them during the Second World War still resonated. There was usually little hostility towards the Germans, most veterans described the Germans as correct, civilized, and respectful – some did acknowledge that they did not act that way towards Jews and communists – and the Soviets as dirty, uncouth, and barbaric. A few shed tears over the decision by King Mihai I to abandon the Germans on 23 August 1944. All repeated nationalist arguments – one came with a pamphlet on Romanian claims to Bessarabia that he gave to the interviewer. Those who took part in the withdrawal from eastern Romania in 1940 still felt anger over the Soviet occupation. They were somewhat candid when asked about the Holocaust. While none admitted to personally carrying out atrocities a few did relate stories of atrocities that they had seen on the front. Many contested the numbers of Jews that Holocaust historians have proved were killed and justified those that were as punishment for alleged acts by Jews in 1940.

Motivation and Military Professionalism

The Romanian Army was a young institution in 1941, dating only to 1860, and it was not very professional. The Romanian Army had become effective in mobilizing soldiers on a mass scale but proved less successful in training or leading to fight efficiently in battle. The state also experienced increasing difficulties in raising the funds necessary to properly equip soldiers with modern weapons and technology, both of which were becoming more complex, expensive, and

difficult to obtain. When the Romanian Army went to war in 1877-1878, 1913, 1916-1919, and 1941-1945 it relied on soldiers' motivation to make up for its deficiencies in training, leadership, and equipment. During the Second World War, Romanian soldiers proved to have deep reserves of intrinsic motivation while fighting alongside the German Army and, if and when that faltered, Romanian officers applied extrinsic motivation to keep them fighting.

By the interwar period, the Romanian Army was semi-professional at best. According to Roger Reese, who recently distilled the characteristics of military professionalism from previous scholarship on the subject, the “yardsticks to measure professionalism” are: special knowledge and skills, impulse to improve standards of performance, a strong corporate or group identity, recognition and articulation of special interests for the institution, autonomy, and volunteerism.³⁰ The core of the army was the officer corps and it was the most professional part of the Romanian Army by the Second World War, however, it was divided between regular officers, for whom the army was a chosen vocation, and reserve officers who served temporarily out of obligation to the state, who did not become very competent before leaving active duty. When war began in 1941, the Romanian Army had to rely on these poorly trained reserve officers. Regular officers looked down on them because of their inexperience and accused them of being unable to control their soldiers, but reserve officers proved highly motivated in combat despite suffering heavy losses.³¹ The army lacked a professional non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps and during the war also

³⁰ Roger Reese, *Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918-1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 2003.

³¹ A report in January 1941 pointed out that “on very many occasions distinctions are made between them and active officers.” Reserve officers were upset they were treated as inferiors, especially since they had answered the call to fulfill their patriotic duty, see, AMR, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 410, f. 341; reserve officers only had a year’s training at a military school and two months service in a unit. Nonetheless, most reserve officers fought bravely, although a few older ones were unfamiliar with new weapons and out of practice, see, Mark Axworthy, “Peasant Scapegoat to Industrial Slaughter: The Romanian Soldier at the Siege of Odessa” in *Time to Kill: The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945*, ed. Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Pimlico, 1997), 228-229.

relied on reserve NCOs. A new contingent, or class, of enlisted men was drafted each year to replace the outgoing contingent and despite two years of military service most left poorly trained soldiers because of unprofessional attitudes of officers, incompetence, and budget shortfalls.

The only thing the Romanian Army had plenty of in 1941 was motivation.

The relationship between military professionalism and the Holocaust is complex. Poorly trained soldiers led by inexperienced reserve officers often panicked when they came under fire and usually targeted Jews or others identified as communists to be shot in reprisal for casualties that they suffered. At the same time, however, senior officers with years of training believed that Jews represented a threat to military security and so when they were presented biased reports that confirmed their preexisting beliefs they justified ordering reprisals and ethnic cleansing by citing military necessity. It should be stressed that the Romanian Army did not train its men to commit atrocities against Jews before 1941. Nonetheless, many officers and soldiers, after initial chaotic pogroms and massacres, became adept killers with further tutelage from the SS.

Organization of the Romanian Army

Following the First World War, the state made efforts to prepare the military to defend Romania if a war broke out with one or a combination of its hostile revisionist neighbors. After the enlarged state ratified a new constitution in 1923, it turned to reforming the Romanian Army. In 1924 a number of laws were passed reorganizing it. The Romanian Army was divided into regular [*activ*], reserve, and territorial [*miliții*] forces. Romania was divided into seven zones assigned to seven corps, numbered I-VII, each with three infantry divisions. Each corps also had a corresponding territorial corps that was responsible for recruitment, preparing for mobilization, and requisitioning materials for the royal maneuvers each fall; and in wartime were responsible

for training, mobilizing industry, and domestic security. Lastly, the Superior Council for the Defense of the Country was established to set defense goals and coordinate policy.³²

The General Staff was the most important army organization. Originally named *Statul Major General*, or the General Staff, when it was first established in 1859 by the interwar period it was known as *Marele Stat Major*, or the Great Staff, but for convenience's sake it will simply be called the General Staff. It was patterned on the French General Staff with its four sections: Section I–Personnel, Section II–Intelligence, Section III–Operations, and Section IV–Logistics. In April 1940 another four sections were created: Section V–Training, Section VI–Transport-Communication, Section VII–Superior Military Education, and the Adjutant Section. It also had the History Service, the Administrative Service, the Secretariat for the Superior Council for the Defense of the Country, the General Staff Troop Detachment, and the editing office of *România militară*, the official journal of the General Staff. The organization was headed by the Chief of the General Staff who in turn was aided by two, and after April 1940 three, deputy chiefs of the General Staff. The first Deputy Chief of the General Staff directed sections II, III, V, VI, and Adjutant, plus General Staff Troop Detachment, to plan combat operations. The second Deputy Chief of the General Staff was tasked with planning how to support combat operations and was assigned sections I, IV, VI, and *România militară*.³³ The third Deputy Chief of the General Staff was added to help with the increased workload after the total mobilization in 1940.

The General Staff was under the civilian control of the Ministry of National Defense. It had been known as the Ministry of War until the 1930s. The Romanian Air Force became more

³² Eftimie Ardeleanu, Alexandru Oșca, Dumitru Preda, coord., *Istoria statului major general: Documente, 1859-1947* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1994), 30-31.

³³ Ibid., 56, 233-235.

independent during the 1930s. First, the State Sub-Secretariat of the Air was established in 1932 and then four years later the Ministry of the Air and Navy was created. Both Air Force and Navy remained subordinate to the ultimate authority of the General Staff in case of war. The Ministry of Army Endowment was created in 1938 to coordinate the procurement of equipment. After the invasion of Poland, the General Staff divided Romania into three threatened “fronts” in 1939: East, between the Carpathians and the Dniester River; South, between the Carpathians and the Danube River, and West, between the Carpathians and the western frontier. The central zone, the so-called “Transylvanian Plateau,” was to act as a national redoubt if all three frontiers were overrun by a coalition of the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Bulgaria.³⁴

When Romania declared war, the General Staff became *Marele Cartier General*, or the Great General Headquarters. In previous wars, its titular head was the monarch, however, during the Second World War it functioned under Antonescu. Like the German High Command or the Soviet Stavka, the General Headquarters brought army, air force, and navy under centralized control, but unlike Hitler’s or Stalin’s high commands, it remained subordinated to the Ministry of Defense. It was occupied with directing operations, not formulating strategy, that was left to the Council of Ministers – any strategic ideas the Antonescu regime did think up were ignored by German High Command. The General Headquarters did not operate during the entire campaign against the Soviet Union. It was first active from 21 June to 21 November 1941. It was divided into General Headquarters–Echelon I that followed the front and General Headquarters–Echelon II that stayed in Bucharest, each directed by a Deputy Chief of the General Staff, and the Chief of the General Staff became Chief of the General Headquarters. During the invasion, Antonescu

³⁴ Ibid., 35.

accompanied General Headquarters–Echelon I from Odobeşti to Roman, then Iaşi, advancing to Chişinău, and finally halting in Tighina. From there it directed the assault on Odessa, demanded harsh reprisals in the city after it fell, and coordinated the demobilization most of Fourth Army afterwards before it too returned to Bucharest – leaving Third Army to direct soldiers east of the Dniester. Between 22 November 1941 and 7 August 1942, the General Headquarters reverted to the General Staff.³⁵ General Headquarters–Echelon I reactivated on 8 August 1942, traveled to Rostov to coordinate the deployment of Romanian units to the Don River and operations there. This time Antonescu, who was very ill, did not go with it. General Headquarters–Echelon II was renamed the General Staff—the Sedentary Part [*Partea Sedentară*] and stayed in Bucharest. After Stalingrad, General Headquarters–Echelon I returned to Romania, leaving a liaison detachment with Army Group Don to help coordinate the withdrawal of the surviving Romanian forces. On 30 January 1943, General Headquarters-Echelon I was again amalgamated with General Staff—Sedentary Part and for the rest of the war was simply called the General Staff.³⁶ For simplicity's sake only the terms General Headquarters and General Staff will subsequently be used.

During each of the two six-month periods the General Headquarters operated, it proved to be competent, if uninspired, in its operations. General Headquarters liberated eastern Romania and bottled up the Soviets at Odessa in 1941. At Rostov, during 1942-1943, it deployed a large force farther than ever before, was well-aware of the looming danger at Stalingrad, did its best to prepare for an expected Soviet winter counteroffensive, directed survivors to support the German relief attempt, and shepherded remaining troops home. The General Staff mobilized manpower,

³⁵ The Chief of the General Staff took over as Chief of the General Headquarters, one of his deputy chiefs of the General Staff stood as Chief of the General Staff, and another general was selected to fill the now empty Deputy Chief of the General Staff slot, see, AMR, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 686, f. 39.

³⁶ Ardeleanu, *Istoria statului major general*, 57-58.

reorganized the army in 1940, again in 1941, and rebuilt it in 1943 for a final showdown with the Soviets in 1944. The General Staff gained more influence as the war progressed. In April 1942 it took over recruitment from the Ministry of Defense. In July 1942 it tried to declare that it was not subordinated to the Ministry of Defense, it was momentarily rebuffed, but by October 1943 the Chief of the General Staff was considered a minister, with the chiefs of the general staffs of the Air Force and Navy his deputy ministers, and able to present views on an equal footing with the Minister of Defense during meetings of the Council of Ministers.³⁷ Whether as the General Headquarters or General Staff, senior officers did their best to support the Nazi war effort.

The infantry arm had 21 divisions during the interwar period, numbered 1st-21st Infantry divisions, three (12th, 16th, and 17th Infantry divisions) were disbanded after the territorial losses of 1940, plus the Guard Division located in Bucharest. Six additional reserve infantry divisions were mobilized in 1941, but only the 35th Reserve Infantry Division was used in battle. The rest of were cannibalized for replacement troops after 1941. A fortification division was also created in 1941. Each infantry division consisted of three infantry regiments, a semi-motorized scouting group, a single company of anti-tank guns, a pioneer battalion, and two artillery regiments. They were supposed to total of 17,500 men, but few of them were at full strength after June 1941.

There were three types of infantry regiments. Those considered elite were ten *Vânători* regiments – literally “hunters” – they had been historically armed with rifles and fought as light infantry in the nineteenth century, however, by the interwar period they were equipped the same as any regular infantry unit. There were some exceptions, two *Vânători* regiments were assigned to the Guard Division, plus two motorized *Vânători* regiments were attached to the 1st Armored

³⁷ Ibid., 315-317.

Division to act as mechanized infantry. There were thirty-three *Dorobanți* regiments – from the Hungarian *darabant* borrowed in turn from the German word *Trabant* for foot soldier – they had been territorial units during the nineteenth century, but by the interwar period they were regular infantry regiments. Finally, there were twenty-two *Infanterie* regiments, these had been created more recently and their lineage did not stretch back to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, so they lacked any historic designation. Each *Vânători*, *Dorobanți*, and *Infanterie* regiment had the same triangle organization with three battalions, and each battalion had three companies.³⁸

There were three special infantry arms that did not use the regimental system, they were the Mountain, *Grăniceri*, and Gendarme corps. The *Vânători de munte* – literally “Hunters of the Mountains,” established in late 1916 after German mountain troops inflicted repeated defeats on the Romanian Army – were troops trained in mountain warfare. In 1924, there were just two mountain brigades consisting of two mountain groups, a mountain artillery group, and a pioneer battalion. A “group” [*grup*] consisted of two battalions with six companies each. By 1940, the number of mountain brigades had doubled, and the 1st-4th Mountain brigades had been reinforced with another mountain group and a mountain howitzer battalion and renamed “mixed-mountain” brigades. Of 24 mountain battalions, eight were reserve units. The *Grăniceri* Corps – “frontier-guards” – was comprised of eight *grăniceri* groups, plus a riverine *grăniceri* group, that patrolled the frontiers of Romania during the interwar period. In 1940, each group was reorganized as an infantry regiment, but had inferior weapons and equipment. In 1941, three *grăniceri* regiments formed the *Grăniceri* Division, but it was pulled off the front after the battle for Odessa.³⁹

³⁸ Scafeș *Armata română*, 99-100; *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 42.

³⁹ Scafeș *Armata română*, 107, 152; Ardeleanu, *Istoria statului major general*, 32.

The General Inspectorate of the Gendarmerie was a militarized police force tasked with keeping order in the countryside – municipal police kept order in the cities. It was divided into the Rural Gendarmerie and Operational Gendarmerie. In the 1920s, the Gendarmerie was under the direct control of the Ministry of War, but in 1931 it was placed under the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Rural Gendarmerie had eight inspectorates across Romania, each with at least one gendarme legion with a gendarme company for each county. The Operational Gendarmerie had 13 gendarme battalions whose companies were broken up and assigned where they were needed. It had two more special gendarme formations – the CFR (Romanian Railway) Gendarme Legion and the Dismounted Gendarme Regiment in Bucharest. In the 1930s, there were approximately 14,000 gendarmes. The Romanian Army's seven corps were each assigned a gendarme battalion to function as military police. On 10 June 1941, the Gendarmerie mobilized more men to assign a gendarme company to every corps, division, and brigade. These gendarmes were under the authority of Romanian Army's Praetoral Service. Praetors were civil servants who combined legal and police authority. Army praetors ran the military justice system and used gendarmes as military police. A total of 33 gendarme companies were mobilized, approximately 10,000 men. Another 12 gendarme battalions were formed for use by the Operational Gendarmerie, four of which were assigned to Third and Fourth armies to reinforce their praetoral services.⁴⁰

The Gendarmerie played an important role in the Holocaust in Romania, but only those gendarmes in military police companies were directly under the control of the Romanian Army. The Ministry of Internal Affairs set up 12 legions in northern Bukovina and Bessarabia after the

⁴⁰ Ovidiu Marius Miron, *Jandarmeria română în perioada interbelică, 1919-1941: Mit și realitate* (Lugoj: Editura Dacia Europa Nova, 2003), 35, 46; Scafeș Armata română, 154-155.

two provinces were liberated during July 1941 whose gendarmes carried out the deportations of Jews to Transnistria after September 1941. Another 13 legions were established in Transnistria in November 1941, with four gendarmerie battalions from the Operational Gendarmerie, who were assigned to keep order. These gendarmes guarded Jews in ghettos and camps and some joined in massacre of Jews during the winter of 1941-1942. They continued to guard the survivors during 1942-1944. While the focus of this work is on soldiers in the Romanian Army, it is important to understand who the gendarmes were and how they were organized.

The cavalry arm attempted to modernize during the interwar period. While still trained in swordplay, cavalrymen were instructed to ride to battle and then dismount to fight as infantry. In 1924, the Romanian Army had two cavalry brigades, with three *Roșiori* regiments each, plus a *Călărași* brigade. Additionally, there were seven more *Călărași* regiments, one assigned to each of the seven corps, to provide a force for reconnoitering. Again, the respective titles dated back to the nineteenth century, *Roșiori* – literally “Reds” – were regular cavalry, while the *Călărași* – literally “Riders” – were territorial cavalry, but unlike infantry regiments these designations still had some meaning in the interwar period. The Romanian Army tried to increase the number of cavalry brigades, motorized *Roșiori* regiments, and turn *Călărași* regiments into permeant units. By 1940, the efforts to make *Călărași* regiments permanent were mostly successful, but most of the *Roșiori* regiments could not be motorized. The number of cavalry brigades had doubled, plus an independent *Călărași* brigade was temporarily created using territorial cavalrymen. In 1941,

of the 1st-6th Cavalry brigades only three had a single completely motorized *Roșiori* regiment. In total, there were 12 *Roșiori* and 13 *Călărași* regiments formed in brigades or with corps.⁴¹

The armored arm was tiny. The Romanian Army had organized the 1st Tank Regiment in 1919, equipped with a few French-produced tanks, and these First World War machines were the only armor until 1937. Initially, Czech-produced light tanks were ordered, then French-produced light tanks as well, and finally the 2nd Tank Regiment was established in 1939. These two tank regiments, plus a hodgepodge of tankettes and trucks built by Italian, Hungarian, and Romanian manufacturers were organized into a “moto-mechanized” brigade in 1940. The Romanian Army formed the 1st Armored Division in early 1941, modeled on the panzer division, with the help of German advisors. It proved difficult to replace losses in armor or motor vehicles.⁴²

The artillery arm was divided into army, corps, and divisional artillery. The Romanian Army mostly had outdated artillery from the First World War, plus a limited number of modern heavy artillery batteries. In 1924, the Romanian Army assigned one heavy artillery regiment to each of its seven corps, and in 1938 it had enough to form a reserve of heavy artillery for each army. Army artillery consisted of independent heavy artillery battalions, half old and half new artillery, and all pulled by horse – plus several more independent motorized anti-tank battalions. Corps artillery had motorized heavy artillery regiments, these were the best artillery units in the army, and there were eight of them in 1941 – plus several more independent motorized heavy artillery battalions. Divisional artillery consisted of two mixed-artillery (both field and howitzer) regiments for each infantry division – plus 18 independent motorized heavy artillery battalions

⁴¹ Scafeș *Armata română*, 114; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 63-64; claims all *Călărași* had been turned into reserve formations by 1940 is belied by a memoir of a former territorial cavalryman cited in Chapter IV.

⁴² Scafeș *Armata română*, 130; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 31-39.

that could be assigned at different times and places as needed. The *Grăniceri* Division received only a single artillery regiment. Every mountain brigade had nine artillery batteries (six field and three howitzer) in addition to two battalions of mountain artillery. Every cavalry brigade had a horse artillery regiment – plus a squadron of anti-tank artillery. The motorized *Roșiori* regiments had motorized artillery batteries and 1st Armored Division had a motorized artillery regiment.⁴³

A note needs to be made about Romanian terms for deserter. The word *dezertor* could include those soldiers who deserted to the enemy, deserted to the rear, was absent without leave (AWOL), or late from leave. Soldiers would first be listed AWOL, or “missing at rollcall” [*lipsă la apel*], before being listed as deserters. If a soldier returned before he was listed as a deserter, it’s likely the worst he would face was a flogging. Soldiers who broke or ran during an attack could be labeled deserters, but were generally dismissed as *fugari*, literally “runners” or “fleers,” and gathered up as quickly as possible and put back on the line after minimal punishment. The same is true of *trenzări*, from the French *traînards*, meaning “stragglers” or “slowpokes.” During major battles, especially those involving a retreat, Romanian units often lost track of their troops and listed some as missing or deserters when they were in fact trying to make their way back to their units. Very few soldiers deserted to the Red Army because they hated communism, there were also rumors that the Soviets shot POWs, and actual conditions in POW camps were terrible.

Since this dissertation is focused on the Romanian Army whenever a unit is mentioned it will be Romanian. Therefore, Third Army will always refer to the Romanian formation, and the same for all other units. German or Soviet formations will always be indicated as such, except for German army groups. The Romanian Army only twice organized an army group, and both

⁴³ Scafeș *Armata română*, 122-124.

times for only a few weeks. In spring 1940, when the Romanian Army mobilized to its greatest extent, it formed Army Group Nr. 1, but it was disbanded after territorial losses shrunk Romania. In summer 1941, the Germans directed the Romanian Army to establish Army Group Antonescu, which joined in the invasion of the USSR, but after the liberation of eastern Romania it too was dissolved. The German army groups North, Center, and South are so well known that it seems unnecessary to indicate that they are German. Only panzer units will not be indicated as German because the use of the word panzer already signals that the unit is not Romanian.

Organization of the Antonescu Regime

While the king was the head of the Romanian Army, between 6 September 1940 and 23 August 1944, power was wielded by Antonescu who was the *Conducător*. This means “leader” and is the Romanian equivalent of Duce or Führer. He was not the first to hold the title. Carol II styled himself as *Conducător* after he declared a royal dictatorship in 1938. The title was taken by Antonescu when he seized power and forced Carol II into exile, divorcing it from the crown, now the youthful Mihai I. Nevertheless, Antonescu successfully wielded power only because of widespread support from the army, civil servants, middle class, boyars, and peasantry. Like the Carlist regime, the Antonescu regime was both authoritarian and popular.

Antonescu ran Romania using the dictatorship established by King Carol II. All political parties had already been outlawed in 1938, except for a single party meant to support the royal dictatorship. When Antonescu took power in 1940, initially he decided to turn to the Legionary movement to fill the role of a political party to legitimize his military dictatorship, but less than five months later he suppressed and disbanded the Legion. He continued to rule without a party to support his regime. Carol II and Antonescu both used national referendums (or plebiscites) to lend legitimacy to their authoritarian rule. Carol II and Antonescu both appointed the ministers

to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and ruled by executive fiats called “decree-laws.” Antonescu’s second in command was a lawyer named Mihai Antonescu who became the Vice-President of the Council of Ministers. Despite their same last names, the two were not related. Henceforth, General Ion Antonescu will be referred to simply as Antonescu, and Vice-President Mihai Antonescu will always be referred to by his full name to avoid confusion between the two. Mihai Antonescu played an important role in shaping domestic and foreign policy, and for long periods of time he ran the Council of Ministers. Such as when Antonescu was with the General Headquarters on the front in June-August 1941 or during his serious bouts of illness in July 1942 and between November 1942 and February 1943.⁴⁴ The Antonescu regime functioned perfectly fine without the *Conducător* during these times and no one tried to take advantage of his poor health to initiate a coup. Antonescu relied on county prefects to enforce his rule through civil servants. Carlist prefects were replaced by Legionaries in 1940, who in turn were succeeded in 1941 by officers (primarily reservists) appointed by the Antonescu regime.

The Antonescu regime was more than the *Conducător*, Mihai Antonescu, and a clique of intimates. It was a coalition of officers, specialists, politicians, civil servants, and intellectuals, many of whom had previously been Carlists or Legionaries or former members of the outlawed Liberal or National Peasant parties, who supported the military dictatorship of Antonescu. His regime functioned effectively because of a national consensus that supported the *Conducător*. In

⁴⁴ During July 1942 Antonescu was sick enough that he had to retire to the mountain town of Predeal for his health. The cause of his sickness has been endlessly speculated. Doctors at the time believed it was malaria or syphilis. His detractors have jumped at the suggestion and argued that his alleged megalomania was in part the result of syphilitic madness, see, Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 473, 482, 489, 660n9; he was again very ill between November 1942 and February 1943 during the crisis at Stalingrad. The Minister of Defense says the sickness was finally diagnosed as malaria and he soon recovered once the correct medicine was given, see, Constantin Pantazi, *Cu Mareșalul până la moarte: memorii* (Bucharest: Editura Publiferom, 1999), 218, 222-223, 234.

other histories, Antonescu is presented as a strong dictator, but this overemphasizes his role and tempts one to blame him for Romania's contribution to the Nazi war effort. He made important decisions, such as invading the USSR, deporting most Jews from eastern Romania, demanding the Jews of Odessa be expelled from the city, deporting Gypsies, and refusing to make peace with the Soviets. He usually made these decisions, however, after discussions with the Council of Ministers who were in agreement. Furthermore, most of these policies were popular with the public and did not trigger mass protests. While the SSI placed people under surveillance, it was not large, nor were its agents particularly coercive under the Antonescu regime.

Geography of Greater Romania

Interwar Romania was greatly expanded by annexations following the First World War. The Old Kingdom of Romania is comprised of two former vassal principalities of the Ottoman Empire called Wallachia and Moldavia – not to be confused with the contemporary Republic of Moldova. Somewhat confusingly, the Republic of Moldova comprises most, but importantly not all, of the territory of the former tsarist province of Bessarabia. Wallachia is a plain between the Carpathian Mountains in the north to the Danube in the south and stretching from the Iron Gates in the west to the Danube Delta in the east. Dobrogea, the region between the delta and Black Sea coast, was added to the Old Kingdom after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. Moldavia, which had included Bessarabia before 1812, is the region that runs north from the Danube delta between the Carpathian Mountains in the west and the Prut River in the east. Romania almost doubled in size after successful campaigns by the Romanian Army in 1918.

Greater Romania, or *România Mare*, stretched from the Dniester in the east and almost to the Tisa in the west after 1918. Russian Bessarabia was first to be annexed. The tsarist province included the territory between the Prut and Dniester rivers and its locals were called *basarabeni*

by Romanians. Many *basarbeni* actually self-identified as Moldovans because under tsarist rule they had not been as affected by Romanian nation-building efforts in previous decades. Austrian Bukovina was annexed next. It was a small mountainous region to the north of Moldavia and its Romanians were called *bucovineni*. Transylvania was occupied last. It consisted of the historic province of Transylvania, which in Romanian is called *Ardeal*, and eastern parts of several other Hungarian (Körösvídék/Crișana, Máramaros/Maramureș) and Austrian (Banat) provinces that include the Carpathian as well as the Apuseni mountains. The border of the western frontier was decided by the Great Powers and did not run along the Tisa River as many Romanian nationalist desired. Whenever discussing Transylvania elsewhere in this work, it refers to all this territory, not just the historic province. Romanians from the region are called *ardeleni*.

Between August 1941 and March 1944, the Romanian Army helped conquer and occupy part of Soviet Ukraine that was dubbed Transnistria by the Antonescu regime. Again, this name can cause confusion with the contemporary breakaway republic of Transnistria that consists only of a tiny strip of territory on the eastern bank of the Dniester. The Romanian-occupied province of Transnistria consisted of a wide swath of territory between the Dniester and Bug rivers. It was named after the nationalist term for Romanians living east of the Dniester in the USSR who were called *transnistrieni*. Most self-identified as Moldovans and Soviet nationalities policy tried to turn this imperial identity into a national identity to counterbalance to Romanian nationalism.

Jews and Gypsies: A Note on Terminology

The terms Jews and Gypsies will be used in this work. This does not mean that the Jews of Romania, including many who could trace their origins in the country back centuries, were any less Romanian than ethnic Romanians. The term Romanian Jews seems redundant, however. It will only be used when necessary to differentiate between Romanian and Soviet Jews. The anti-

Semitic pejorative *Jid* or *Jidov* in Romanian documents is translated as kike. The word *figan* has been translated as Gypsy. The term is a racial slur, but is the only word used in Romanian Army records. While some might object to using Gypsy rather than an appropriate name for the ethnic group, the fact is that any of the accepted versions – Roma, Romani, Romany – can easily create confusion for the reader. Once again, using the term Gypsy is not meant to imply they were any less Romanian than ethnic Romanians, nor does it indicate that the author is indifferent towards the discrimination faced by the Roma minority in contemporary Romania. It is purely for the sake of simplicity that the choice to use Gypsy has been made.

Dissertation Outline

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the interwar period and Romanian neutrality after the start of the Second World War between 1 September 1939 to 21 June 1941. It delves into both the long-term social, political and economic factors that underlaid Romanians' hostility towards "Judeo-Bolshevism" and the proximate causes of the war resulting from the Soviet ultimatum of June 1940 that later motivated soldiers in combat and committing atrocities. The second part covers the wartime period from 22 June 1941 to 23 August 1944. It examines the relationship between combat and atrocities, Romanian soldiers' commitment to Hitler's war of annihilation, and the Romanian Army's efforts to shore up soldiers' motivation and morale through extrinsic means as the war turned against the Axis. An epilogue covers the events of 23 August 1944 and final campaigns by the Romanian Army until 9 May 1945.

The first chapters are thematic. Chapter II examines the social composition of the Romanian Army in the interwar period. It summarizes the formation and development of the Romanian Army between 1830 and 1930 to show that the state did its best to build a modern army, but social and economic factors limited its modernization. Therefore, the Romanian Army

had to rely on soldiers' motivation, reinforced by strict discipline, to make up for deficiencies in professionalism, competence, training, and equipment. Chapter III argues that soldiers possessed strong motivation rooted in powerful ideologies. Nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism – and, for a sizable minority, fascism – permeated Romanian society before the war and acted as the basis of soldiers' motivation from 1941 to 1944. Chapter IV looks at the politics of the interwar Romanian Army to prove that the officer corps was conservative, authoritarian, and traditional. It also analyzes the Romanian Army's efforts to rearm and prepare for war as the international situation deteriorated during the 1930s. The next chapter is chronological. Chapter V covers the events of 1940 – the Soviet occupation of eastern Romania and rise of the Antonescu regime riding a wave of popular anger – that were the proximate causes for war.

The next two chapters are chronological. Chapter VI covers the last six months of peace and the first four months of war. During the period between late June and late October 1941 a great number of events occurred during the initial weeks of the invasion and the chapter is designed to show how closely related combat and atrocity were during the Romanian Army's advance through eastern Romania and into the USSR. Chapter VII chronicles the events between November 1941 to November 1942, again seeking to balance combat and atrocities on the front with occupation and atrocities in the rear. It argues that Romanian soldiers' motivation did not sputter out at the Dniester but continued all the way to the Volga River. The next two chapters are thematic. Chapter VIII examines extrinsic motivation as the Romanian Army used propaganda, coercion, and remuneration to motivate soldiers in combat. Rhetoric, fear of punishment, and a chance to profit reinforced soldiers' intrinsic motivation. This chapter also discusses morale, its relationship to motivation, and how morale increasingly affected motivation after 1943. Chapter IX investigates the motivation of women and minorities. It analyzes female

volunteerism, Jews in segregated labor battalions, ethnic and religious minority soldiers, and Gypsy soldiers. The final chapter is chronological. Chapter X covers from November 1942 to August 1944 and argues that Romanian soldiers fought committedly at Stalingrad and afterwards from the Kuban bridgehead to Crimea to Romania. Defeat and retreat negatively influenced morale, yet most kept fighting, due to a combination of intrinsic motivation, fear of capture or Soviet revenge, commitment to comrades, fear of punishment by officers, and a sense of duty. Atrocities perpetrated by soldiers against Jews, however, largely ceased during this period for a combination of reasons.

The Romanian Army did not lack motivation in Hitler's war of annihilation. The initial orgy of violence against Jews matched popular enthusiasm for the war against communism and it did not suddenly disappear after crossing the Dniester in July-August 1941 or during the winter crisis of 1941-1942. The heavy losses suffered in combat became a new means to motivate. The sacrifice of brave soldiers could not be wasted by simply giving up and going home, especially as the German Army seemed a hairsbreadth from victory over the threat of "Judeo-Bolshevism." Only after the disaster at Stalingrad and defeat at Kursk in 1943 did enthusiasm wane and morale suffer, but soldiers generally remained committed and officers coaxed, threatened, or rewarded if their men wavered. The fear of Soviet or Jewish retribution for crimes perpetrated by Romanian soldiers in the first year of the war reinforced motivation later. While they may have lost faith in "final victory" or reacted with cynicism to the rhetoric of "holy war" by 1944, Romanian soldiers supported the war against "Judeo-Bolshevism" to the very end of the Antonescu regime.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE ROMANIAN ARMY

In 1941, a Romanian Army with 326,000 soldiers invaded the Soviet Union alongside the Wehrmacht, but a century earlier it had not existed. Small bands of mercenaries motivated by lucre that were loyal only to the endless parade of princes in Wallachia and Moldavia had been replaced by a large national army motivated by intrinsic factors serving the Romanian state. This military revolution was based on social reforms that converted the peasantry to the new national cause. This chapter will examine the origins and development of the Romanian Army between 1830 and 1938 focusing on the reforms of the 1870s that created a mass conscript army based on universal military service, the expansion of the army during the *fin de siècle*, and the imperial aspirations of the army during the interwar period with the goal of showing how the Romanian state placed its trust in the intrinsic motivation of peasant soldiers to fight for the nation. As part of its development, the Romanian state tried to replicate the military innovations in the rest of Europe to create a modern army with a professional officer corps. It proved difficult because of social realities, such as a small middle class, wide practice of patronage, corruption, and elitism that privileged the upper classes. Romanian state penury and limited industrialization further contributed to the failure to create an efficient army. In consequence, the army relied on the will of its soldiers to try to make up the difference on the modern battlefield.

A systematic study of the development of the Romanian Army and its social composition by the interwar period does not exist. The Anglophone literature of the last 25 years glosses over it: Keith Hitchin's two volume history covering the formation of modern Romania between 1774 and 1947 only touches briefly on military matters, the renowned Dracula scholar Radu Florescu

wrote a thin monograph on his forbearer Ioan Emanoil Florescu who organized the army, and the main Romanian military historians, Glenn Torrey for the First World War and Mark Axworthy for the Second World War, both dedicate only a few short paragraphs to the social composition of the officer corps.¹ The literature in Romanian is nearly as sparse. Under communism Marxist ideology focused historical research on mythologizing workers or peasants and ignoring the old military elite. The state's foundation of *Editura Militară* in 1950 initially contributed little more than communist propaganda to educate soldiers of the new “popular” army, but by the 1970s it was beginning to publish some serious research on Romanian society and the army. Yet, the lion's share of its publications were operational narratives meant to support the nationalist myth with stories of bravery and sacrifice by Romanian soldiers; a tradition that it continues today. Nonetheless, as a new generation of post-communist historians emerges, serious work on the nineteenth century Romanian Army are beginning to appear.²

The modernization of the Romanian Army was divided into three periods. The first was between 1830 and 1856 when “Romania” was comprised of two principalities under a de facto Russian protectorate. Tsarist domination of Wallachia and Moldavia, although still technically tributary principalities of the Ottoman Empire, began in 1830 after the end Russo-Turkish War

¹ His two volume history of modern Romanian history cover a broad range of political, social, and economic issues in a framework focused on Romanian intellectual debates about modernization, see, Keith Hitchins, *The Romanians, 1774-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) and *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); started in the 1960s as a side project, see, Radu Florescu, *General Ioan Emanoil Florescu: Organizer of the Romanian Army* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 2007); his work on the war consists of a collection of articles and a monograph, see, Glenn E. Torrey, *Romania and World War I* (Iași, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1999) and *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

² For a summary of *Editura militară*'s early propaganda efforts, see, Călin Hentea, “Indoctrinare ca la carte.” ZF: Ziarul de duminică, accessed 2 January 2018, <http://www.zf.ro/ziarul-de-duminica/indoctrinare-ca-la-carte-de-calin-hentea-7730072>; a collection of articles by communist historians was translated into English celebrating the “popular” history of the Romanian Army, see, Gheorghe Savu, ed., *The Army and the Romanian Society* (Bucharest: Military Publishing House, 1980); a recent monograph explores the Romanian military before 1914, see, Dumitru-Dan Crîșmaru, *Elita militară românească în timpul lui Carol I (1866-1914)* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2017).

of 1828-1829 and ended in 1854 during the defeat of Russia in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. The second period was between 1856 and 1866 when nationalists succeeded in 1859 in unifying Romania, officially known as the United Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.³ The last period was between 1866 and 1914 during the reign of King (before 1881 Prince) Carol I. During his rule Romania fought its first modern war as an ally of Russia in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. The Romanian Army expanded radically during the nineteenth century: from the princes' bodyguards in 1830, to two small military forces totaling just 5,600 soldiers in 1848, to a unified army of 100,000 in 1877, and finally an army of around 470,000 in 1913 at the start of the Second Balkan War.⁴ The mobilization and equipping of soldiers presented a relatively simple and straightforward problem; while the recruiting of qualified candidates for the officer corps was more difficult. The rapid expansion of the army in the late-nineteenth century left the army straining to recruit, train, and improve the quality of its officer corps. Despite its efforts to attract educated and qualified officers from the elite of society, the Romanian Army was not very successful in creating a sizable or professional officer corps before the Second World War.

The reforms enacted in Wallachia and Moldavia by Russian General Pavel Kiselyov, in 1831 and 1832 respectively, established the basis for the modern Romanian army. For well over a century the Russian and Ottoman empires had fought periodic wars for control of the Black Sea with the Russians steadily gaining ground. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Romanian principalities had become a frontier placed under the rule of compliant Phanariote Greek princes.

³ For a detailed examination of the period leading to unification, see, Paul E. Michelson, *Romanian Politics, 1859-1871: From Prince Cuza to Prince Carol* (Iași, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998), 27-48.

⁴ Dan V. Pleshoyano, *Colonel Nicolae Pleșoianu and the National Regeneration Movement in Wallachia*, Tran. Kathe Lieber (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1991), 7; Cornel I. Scafeș et al., *Armata română în războiul de independență, 1877-1878* (Bucharest: Editura Sigma, 2002), 26; Călin Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History*, trans. Cristina Bordianu (Lanham, Maryland; Toronto; Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007), 119.

Whenever war was declared, the princes were responsible for providing supplies and laborers to the Ottoman army. The Greek War of Independence triggered a new conflict between the two empires resulting in the Russo-Turkish War of 1828-1829. As they had in the past, the Russians quickly occupied Wallachia and Moldavia, but then got bogged down besieging Ottoman forts on the Bulgarian side of the Danube. It was not until the Russians finally broke through the forts in the second year of war, allowing them to cross the Balkans to threaten Constantinople, that the Ottomans sued for peace.⁵ The Treaty of Adrianople granted territory and other concessions to Russia, independence to Greece, and de facto independence to Serbia, Wallachia, and Moldavia. The Romanian principalities became a Russian protectorate, although officially still vassals to the Ottoman Porte, and remained under direct Russian military occupation until 1834.

The Russian reforms in the principalities, called the Organic Regulations, set up modern state institutions and fundamentally altered the nature of military service for Romanians forever.⁶ Previously, the military forces in the principalities under Ottoman suzerainty were limited to the personal bodyguard of the prince, a few boyar cavalrymen, and frontier guards called *panduri*.⁷ These were the equivalent of Austrian *Grenzer*, irregular infantry recruited from free peasants who provided sons for military service during early adulthood in exchange for tax exemption and other privileges.⁸ *Panduri* lacked formal military training, combined various functions (border security, rural policing, revolt suppression, and service in the Ottoman army), were not regularly

⁵ For details of the campaign in the Balkans and the Caucasus, see, John Shelton Curtiss, *The Russian Army under Nicholas I, 1825-1855* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1965), 53-73, 39-45.

⁶ For an overview of the *Règlement Organique*, also translated as “statues,” see, Hitchins, *The Romanians*, 163-167.

⁷ The term bodyguard is misleading, as it numbered thousands, a small army, see, Radu R. Florescu, *The Struggle against Russia in the Romanian Principalities, 1821-1854* (Iași: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1997), 103.

⁸ For an examination of Austrian *Grenzer*, see, István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 26-27.

paid, and did not have clear hierarchy or system of discipline.⁹ In short, they lacked most of the hallmarks of professionalism. This all changed under General Kiselyov who first introduced the regimental system in Romania that created permanent soldiers – called the “National Militia” in Wallachia and the “Land Guard” in Moldavia – who received standardized training, uniforms, pay, equipment, and weapons.¹⁰ The social structure of these forces mirrored that of the tsarist army, whereby the boyar class exclusively provided officers and soldiers were taken from the peasantry, but there were important differences. Peasants between 20 and 30 were chosen by lot, one soldier for every 70 families, served for six years (not the 25 years required in Russia), and only free peasants who owned land or paid taxes were obligated to provide recruits.¹¹ Landless serfs who owed unpaid labor and other feudal dues to boyar masters under the system of serfdom then still in place could not be recruited. Therefore, the boyar-serf social structure in Wallachia and Moldavia greatly restricted the size of the army because the boyars refused to give up their claims on serfs. Officer cadets called *Junkers*, borrowing from Russian nomenclature (adopted from Prussia by Peter the Great), began their military service in their teens. The prince approved their assignment personally and so they enjoyed the benefits of princely patronage. The officer cadets often had the opportunity to study abroad at the expense of the court, usually in France; a perk that continued even after a one-year officer school was established in Bucharest in 1847.¹² The nascent armies of the principalities formed under Russian tutelage were tiny, there were just a few hundred officers in the 1840s, but laid the foundations for the modern Romanian Army.

⁹ Hitchins, *The Romanians*, 27.

¹⁰ Florescu, *General Ioan Emanoil Florescu*, 7.

¹¹ Pleshoyano, *Colonel Nicolae Pleșoianu and the National Regeneration Movement in Wallachia*, 6.

¹² Florescu, *General Ioan Emanoil Florescu*, 13-14, 10.

The Russian protectorate ended in 1854. The Crimean War broke out in 1853 when the Russians again occupied the principalities, the Russian Army advanced to the Danube but had to retreat under threat of Austrian intervention. Austrian and Ottoman troops occupied Wallachia for the rest of the war.¹³ The subsequent Russian defeat in 1856 made the end of the protectorate permanent. The Great Powers prioritized maintaining the status quo in the Balkans to prevent the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, so during the peace conference in Paris they decided against the unification of the Romanian principalities – against the wishes of local nationalists. The Great Powers did empower the Romanian elites to elect their own princes, rather than have them appointed by the Ottoman Porte or approved by Moscow. Romanian nationalists used the ad-hoc *divane* (parliaments) in Wallachia and Moldavia to carry out a *fait accompli* by coordinating the double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, a boyar officer and the Minister of War in Moldavia, as prince in both Wallachia and Moldavia. This *de facto* unification was reluctantly accepted by the Great Powers, much to the anger of the Ottomans, but the Sultan's protests were ignored. Prince Cuza tasked General Ioan Emanoil Florescu, trained under the Organic Regulations in Wallachia, with integrating two militaries into a single national army. The creation of the Romanian Army was officially pronounced on 26 May 1860, although it took several more years to accomplish.¹⁴ While Florescu integrated and standardized the army, Cuza carried out other republican-inspired reforms designed to dramatically change Romanian society, politics, and economics. Regarding the army, the most important of reforms took place in 1862, when the officer corps was opened

¹³ Orlando Figes, *The Crimea War: A History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), 116, 183-189.

¹⁴ Florescu, *General Ioan Emanoil Florescu*, 25, 52.

up to non-nobles, and in 1864, when the peasantry was emancipated from serfdom.¹⁵ These twin reforms were extremely important for the future expansion and modernization of the army.

The last period of significant army reform took place over the ten years after the fall of Prince Cuza in 1866. A “monstrous coalition” of liberal and conservative boyars carried out a bloodless palace coup to depose Cuza after becoming disillusioned with his republican reforms. The Romanian elite then turned to a foreign dynasty to legitimize their aspirations for complete independence, develop ties to the great royal families of Europe hoping for diplomatic dividends, and ensure a conservative executive as a reliable ally for the boyar elite. The 27-year-old Prince Karl (Romanianized as Carol) of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen accepted the offer. Trained as an officer in the Prussian Army, Prince Carol initiated a series of military reforms to “Prussianize” the Romanian Army.¹⁶ Romania was not alone; all European states rushed to reform their armies along the same lines after the stunning Prussian defeats of Austria in 1866 and especially France in 1870, considered the premier army in Europe. The most important reform, made possible by the recent emancipation of the serfs, was the law that introduced universal military service for all men except “foreigners,” meaning Jews, in 1868. These reforms created a core of regular troops backed by large numbers of reservists that would be mobilized to create a mass army. Between 1873 and 1876 army reforms proliferated: promotion based on merit and education, creation of a general staff and a war council, reestablishing a one-year officer school (the first one established in 1847 had burnt down), passing of a military code of justice, and extending universal military service to all male “residents” in 1876, thereby including Romania’s Jewish minority.¹⁷

¹⁵ Savu, *The Army and the Romanian Society*, 229.

¹⁶ Florescu, *General Ioan Emanoil Florescu*, 41-42.

¹⁷ Ibid., 43; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 10.

These reforms were quickly put to the test in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878. This time triggered by Ottoman repression of Serbian independence, the Russian Army marched into Romania, neglecting to ask for permission until the last minute, crossed the Danube protected by Romanian troops, and then became embroiled in the siege of Plevna in Bulgaria in a reprise of fifty years earlier. The Ottoman resistance forced the Russians to ask for Romanian assistance, and even gave Prince Carol titular command of the Russo-Romanian forces besieging the city. The performance of the Romanian Army during the siege was roughly equivalent to that of the Russian Army, an impressive display since less than twenty years had passed since unification, however, the Romanian Army also showed the same lack of professionalism that afflicted the tsarist army. Romanian officers resorted to mass frontal charges against prepared defensive positions without proper reconnaissance that resulted in high casualties.¹⁸ After Plevna finally fell the Russians advanced on Constantinople without the Romanians and forced the Ottomans to sign a humiliating peace. The Congress of Berlin redrew the map of the Balkans and paved the way for Romanian independence in 1881.

The Romanian Army continued to expand over the next three decades, but while it was able to mobilize masses of men it was less successful in properly arming and training soldiers. In 1883, Romania joined the Triple Alliance because it needed protection from Russia, which had annexed southern Bessarabia (returned to Romania after the Crimean War and the Treaty of Berlin gave Dobrogea to Romania as a sop for this wound) and was seen as Romania's primary enemy. An economic boom fueled by grain production and increasing international pressure due to European rearmament allowed a rapid expansion of the Romanian Army after 1900. In 1877

¹⁸ Scafaș, *Armata română în războiul de independență*, 83-120.

it had mobilized approximately 100,000 soldiers, but by 1913 the Romanian Army mobilization had increased by fourfold to over 400,000. This expansion exacerbated an existing dysfunctional relationship between the officer corps and enlisted soldiers. Sociologist William Ogburn refined the theory of “cultural lag” and argued that “various parts of modern culture are not changing at the same rate, some parts are changing much more rapidly than others; and that since there is a correlation and interdependence of parts, a rapid change in one part of our culture requires readjustments through other changes in the various correlated parts of culture.”¹⁹ After 1830, the Russian reforms sent the Romanian military on a radically different trajectory towards a modern army that continued in the 1870s and sped up even more after 1900. The culture of the officer corps, however, lagged behind. The emancipation of serfs and introduction of universal military service did little to change the attitudes of mostly boyar officers, who continued to treat soldiers like serfs. The sons of the educated bourgeoisie were required to provide military service, but most did so on a reduced basis or as reserve officers only in times of war, therefore the regular officer corps continued to be dominated by boyars who viewed peasant soldiers with contempt. Despite a growing number of non-noble officers after 1900 little had changed by 1940.

The Romanian Officer Corps

Officers were exclusively chosen from the ranks of the boyars until 1862 when the officer corps was opened to non-nobles, nevertheless, the army remained dominated by boyars and their aristocratic culture through the end of the Second World War. Few from the bourgeoisie chose a career as a soldier, so the Romanian Army, straining to find more officer candidates after 1900,

¹⁹ William Fielding Ogburn, *Social Change with Respect to Culture and Original Nature*. New 1950 Edition (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), 200-201.

turned to the peasantry. Therefore, in the middle of 1944, even after three years of war and total mobilization of society, including bourgeois reservists, most officers – 7,808 of 15,561 – still had rural origins.²⁰ In peacetime, the Romanian Army had even fewer middle-class officers because most regular officers were recruited from the rural gentry, military families, or well-off peasants. The nineteenth century saw the steady erosion of the absolute numbers of boyar officers, a trend that accelerated after 1900, but the officer corps continued to define itself as a social elite and embraced an aristocratic identity that imitated the imperial armies of Europe. An obsession with social status impeded professionalization and limited the efficiency of the Romanian Army.

The fact that Romanian society did not radically change during the nineteenth century contributed to continued boyar domination of the army. In 1830, an estimated 90 percent of the population lived in the countryside.²¹ It was only after 1880 that Romania started to modernize and towns and cities grew larger, with urban growth further accelerating after the First World War, most of which was concentrated in the capital Bucharest. The working class remained very small.²² Despite these developments, in 1930 nearly 80 percent of the population still lived in the countryside and Romanian society was relatively unchanged.²³ The middle class in Romania was a small bourgeois stratum consisting of professionals, intellectuals, and civil servants; army social structure reflected Romanian pre-industrial society. Therefore, in many ways, the German

²⁰ Alesandru Duțu, *Sub povara armistițiului: Armata română în perioada 1944-1947* (Bucharest: Editura Tritonic, 2003), 116.

²¹ Hitchins, *The Romanians*, 175.

²² Hitchins, *Rumania*, 345-346.

²³ Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building & Ethnic Struggle, 1918-1930* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 9.

criticism during the Second World War that the relationship between officers and soldiers in the Romanian Army resembled that between “lords and vassals” is accurate.²⁴

Despite the need to train a growing number of draftees during the *fin de siècle* period, the Romanian officer corps remained small, only around 10,000 in 1913, because the army could not attract enough qualified candidates.²⁵ As demand increased the army had progressively opened up the officer corps: first to non-nobles from military families, then the bourgeoisie, and finally even to peasants. Two four-year “schools for military sons” were set up in Craiova and Iași, in 1872 and 1881 respectively, with the specific purpose of training non-noble officer candidates.²⁶ These military families, however, were too few to provide the number of officers required after 1900. The middle class used their education to opt out of the regular army by becoming reserve officers, allowing them to pursue professional careers or work as civil servants. Peasants, on the other hand, found a career as an army officer very attractive, so many sons from well-off peasant families began to enter the officer corps in the decades after 1900. The only major obstacle for peasant officer candidates was the payment of a “horse tax,” and this was only a hindrance if one wanted to join the cavalry or the artillery, the more socially elite arms. The horse tax was 800 *lei* in 1906 and 12,000 *lei* in 1932 – roughly the equivalent to over a year’s wages of a peasant day laborer.²⁷ It was much easier for a peasant to become an infantry officer since only a high school education was required. Therefore, peasants who could afford it sent sons to the *liceu* (patterned

²⁴ Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 184.

²⁵ Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History*, 119.

²⁶ Ibid., 89.

²⁷ The *leu* (plural *lei*) is the currency of Romania. For the horse tax in 1906, see, Nicolae Dăscălescu, *General Nicolae Dăscălescu: sacrificiu, glorie și supliciu* (Bucharest: Editura militară, 2014), 20; for 1932, see, Victor Luca, Mihai V. Zodian, și Cătălin Radu, ed., *Războiul ofițerilor de rezervă (1941-1944, fragmente)* (Bucharest: Societatea Scriitorilor Militari, 2003), 34; a peasant day-laborer earned 30 *lei* a day, see, Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 10.

on the French *lycée*) and those who lacked the means to do that hoped that their sons could earn a scholarship to a military high school or obtain a spot with the help of a local patron.

The army was not an attractive career to the Romanian middle class who could easily obtain more financially rewarding work because the mediocre salary of an officer was not very attractive. The Romanian budget for the army in the *fin de siècle* was low, a dismal three percent for most of the *fin de siècle* before it was increased to 19 percent of the state budget by 1913, but this is still low when compared to its rivals: Russia 25 percent, Austria-Hungary 15 percent, and Bulgaria 25 percent.²⁸ During the *fin de siècle*, Liberal and Conservative parties alike prioritized the expansion of the economy and the state, including the army, but this drew much of the lower middle class into the growing civil service, leaving few to become officers. By 1901 there were 102,560 civil servants, roughly 2 percent of the total population, but 10 percent in urban areas. Civil servants' salaries were not that great, roughly half were paid less than 50 *lei* a month – the equivalent to a little more than the average wage of a worker in 1900.²⁹ Some used their position in government to make illicit profits, although augmenting one's salary by corrupt practices was not unique to civil servants because some officers were also corrupt, selling regimental supplies and equipment or using soldiers as laborers to pay for aristocratic lifestyles.³⁰ While salary may have been comparable, however, the middle class still preferred the civil service or professions to a career in the army for two more reasons – the provincial nature of army life and army culture.

Like most European armies by 1900, the Romanian Army used a regimental system that recruited men to the local regimental headquarters at posts that were scattered across the country.

²⁸ Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History*, 112.

²⁹ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 157, 162.

³⁰ Horia Vladimir Ţerbănescu, “Caricatura militară în presa umoristică românească de la unire până la războiul cel mare (1859-1916),” *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei, Artă Plastică* 47, no. 3 (2013), 25, 31.

Therefore, most junior officers could look expect to be assigned to dull postings in small towns, distant from large cities, for many years.³¹ After becoming the capital in 1859, Bucharest soon outstripped all the other Romanian cities in comforts, attractions, and culture; living in the capital became the goal of the upwardly mobile youths of Romania's growing bourgeoisie. Few among them envied the backward conditions officers endured in provincial postings. For example, the Moldavian city of Piatra Neamț remained without electric lighting, modern plumbing, potable water, parks, and even a railroad connection until the modernization of the city between 1907 and 1918.³² Even in 1941, the countryside seemed a world away from the modern civilization of Bucharest. Emil Dorian, a Jewish medical reserve officer briefly mobilized in early 1941 to set up a field hospital for the army in Găiești, a village 80 km northwest of the capital, recorded.

Life in Găiești was like any other draftee's wartime life. An endless village, stretching out on the road between Tîrgoviște and Pitești. The sad rural look of all Romanian villages, dusty, with gloomy, poverty-stricken little houses...The village has no running water, no electricity. The so-called toilet was a shed outdoors, with a hole in the ground to crouch over. Its stink, mingling with the smell of the linden trees in bloom, reached all the way to my room, where it was impossible to keep the window closed. The only important institution in town, where not even a movie house could be improvised, was the coffeehouse.³³

A job in the civil service, even a poor paying one, meant that one could enjoy the comforts of life in a modernized city that a career in the army could not always offer. It must be emphasized that while an officer's salary was not attractive to educated urban youths, it was to peasants who saw the army as a means of social mobility. General Nicolae Dăscălescu declared after that war that

³¹ Some officers joined nationalist groups before 1848 out of boredom, see, Pleshoyano, *Colonel Nicolae Pleșoianu and the National Regeneration Movement in Wallachia*, 11; to get the troublesome Antonescu out of Bucharest in 1938, King Carol II exiled him to a provincial posting in Chișinău, see, Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 45.

³² Dăscălescu, *General Nicolae Dăscălescu*, 19.

³³ Emil Dorian, *The Quality of Witness: A Romanian Diary, 1937-1944*, ed. Marguerite Dorian, trans. Mara Soceanu Vamos (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), 163.

he became an officer “for only one reason; to get my family out of poverty.”³⁴ Peasants grew up in villages more primitive than provincial cities, so coped better with the discomforts of army life and were attracted to the social status that came with being an officer that put them in a position of authority over others, often for the first time in their life. Therefore, because the middle class shunned the army, the officer corps turned to the peasantry to bolster its ranks.

The Romanian Army valued middle class skills in mathematics, engineering, medicine, and other technical fields, which boyar, military family, or peasant officers lacked. Therefore, it followed a pattern set by Germany that allowed educated youths to serve for a shortened period before becoming reservists to make universal military service palatable to the middle class, thus the Romanian Army balanced military needs and ambivalence towards military service. Draftees who graduated high school with a baccalaureate attended a two-month course at a reserve officer school followed by six-months of service before entering the reserve, while graduates from high school without a baccalaureate, or from trade schools, trained for two-months at a reserve NCO school and served for 10 months, before leaving the army.³⁵ Senior officers hoped some of these skilled youths might stay to make the army a career as officers or NCOs, but few elected to stay any longer than absolutely necessary. Then Captain Ion Grosu recalled that “the youth ran from the army like from a fire.”³⁶ These educated draftees were nicknamed *teteriști*, or TTRs, short for *Trupă cu termen redus*, or “Trooper with Reduced Term.” University students could apply for an annulment of their military service to avoid any service. Middle-class youths hoped to be admitted to the University of Bucharest and there obtain a law degree, the ticket for entrance into

³⁴ Perhaps disingenuously since he faced communist prosecution, see, Dăscălescu, *General Nicolae Dăscălescu*, 53.

³⁵ Luca, *Războiul ofițerilor de rezervă*, 57.

³⁶ He worked on the 9th Infantry Division’s headquarters staff, see, Grosu, *Memoriile unui ofițer de informații*, 74.

the civil service and a comfortable life in the capital.³⁷ In fact, educated youths saw the army as a refuge for mediocrities lacking other options. Ion Manolescu, native of the formerly Habsburg city of Timișoara who passed the baccalaureate in 1937, recalled, “I disliked the thought of being a soldier in peace time. Observation confirmed my prejudice as the majority of our officers were unusually stupid. Most of them had failed previously at the special entrance examination to the Bucharest University.” Overruling his protestations, Manolescu’s patriotic father required him to enter the army as an officer cadet at the School for Infantry Reserve Officers No. 1 located in the oil boomtown of Ploiești, center of Romania’s oil industry, rather than apply for university. There he found life “impossible” since “the whole town stank of tar and pig stytes” and boasted just a handful of clubs or cinemas for entertainment.³⁸ Luckily for him, the capital was just 67 km and a short train ride away, so Manolescu spent his leave each weekend in Bucharest.

Officers’ writings in the interwar period are full of criticism of middle class draftees and their supposed lack of patriotism, however, their accusations are false. In 1941, these young men answered the call to serve with enthusiasm and fought bravely on the front, the fact they had not wanted to make a career of the army in peacetime did not mean that they did not have motivation to fight to defend the country. Nevertheless, officers saw bourgeois draftees as troublesome: too independent, too soft, and too undisciplined. Indeed, they were less likely to tolerate the insults, slaps, or blows that officers were accustomed to doling out to peasant draftees. Peasant soldiers were more accustomed to physical abuse by social superiors and accepted the strict discipline of the army more readily. As the 2nd Călărași Regiment advanced to Stalingrad in 1942, Sergeant

³⁷ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Great Romania*, 213.

³⁸ John Manolescu, *Permitted to Land: An Autobiography* (London: Staples Press, 1950), 5-6.

Emilian Ezechil recalled that a private, a former law student, in his platoon had been slapped by an officer during training and instead of taking it or reporting it the private hit back. After court martial he was assigned to 2nd Călărași Regiment for a chance to be rehabilitated by bravery in combat.³⁹ Regardless of interwar officers' skepticism of middle-class youths, TTRs were sorely needed by the Romanian Army, especially those with technical skills. Yet even those without technical skills were still valued by officers who used educated TTRs in administrative functions, which officers often found difficult, boring, beneath them, or all three. Unfortunately, this meant that many TTRs – both junior officers and NCOs – were good administrators in the peacetime army, but poor combat leaders when they were called up after 1941.

Finally, educated urban youths choose not to stay in the army because they rejected the aristocratic culture, strict discipline, and anti-intellectualism of the army. Those few from the bourgeoisie who volunteered for the army often became disillusioned by an officer culture that stood in stark contrast to nationalist rhetoric of the army being the “school of the nation.”⁴⁰ The most famous example of this was Anton Bacalbașa. The son of the Brăila city police chief, born in 1865, he volunteered to serve in the army at age 18, but became disgusted with the conditions he found there: physical violence, strict hierarchy, arrogance, ignorance, and what he described as prison-like conditions for peasant draftees. After leaving the army, Bacalbașa became a writer and invented the character of *Mos Teaca*, or “Old Man Scabbard,” a tragicomic caricature of the ignorant and brutal officer. He named a socialist newspaper after this hugely popular character that he edited between 1895 to 1901.⁴¹ Central to his criticism of the army was a condemnation

³⁹ When his rehabilitation process was held up, this private went AWOL and shacked up with a Russian woman in Crimea. He was caught, court martialed, and sent back for rehabilitation, see, Ezechil, *La porțile infernului*, 48.

⁴⁰ Colonel N. Negreanu, “Problema Educațunei,” *România militară* LIII, No. 2 (Februarie 1921), 204.

⁴¹ Șerbănescu, “Caricatura militară în presa umoristică românească de la unire până la războiul cel mare,” 28-31.

of anti-intellectualism in the officer corps. Indeed, many officers were not well-educated, but intellectualism is not necessarily an important requirement for mid-ranking or junior officers. Most only need to be trained in combat tactics and leadership, but there were some very well-educated senior officers on the General Staff. Nevertheless, Bacalbașa and others lampooned the officer corps as abusive morons because they did not meet middle class expectations of literacy, intellectualism, or culture.⁴² Bourgeois officer cadets were very uncomfortable with the corporal punishment meted out by officers that they were sheltered from in their daily life in a city. Now 2nd Lieutenant Manolescu recorded, “The ranks were treated like animals. Beatings, torture and deliberate underfeeding were part and parcel of a soldier’s life during his military training.”⁴³ Thus, many TTRs probably preferred riding out their six or eight months of reduced military service at a desk doing paperwork, rather than the difficult work of training peasant draftees.

The size of the officer corps increased after the First World War to an estimated 14,500, but this was still relatively small because after annexations Romania’s size and its population had doubled and the could potentially mobilize 1.5 million men.⁴⁴ Major Emanoil Leoveanu argued in an article he wrote for *România militară* in 1924 that the boyars who used to make up a large number of the officer corps no longer viewed the army as a viable career and sought positions in the government or on important boards, while the educated youth also avoided military careers to seek better jobs in the liberal professions, thus leaving only a “class of modest men” to volunteer for military service out of patriotism. He ended plaintively, “Few are the blessed who inherited a

⁴² Glenn Torrey argues that the poor performance of the army in the First World War was due in part to educated reservists who lacked proper combat training, see, Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 16.

⁴³ Manolescu, *Permitted to Land*, 9.

⁴⁴ In 1937, 3,437,267 men of military age, or 17.60% of the population, were technically eligible for mobilization, only 1,546,641 were actually listed in the mobilization tables, but even that number was far beyond the abilities of the army to realistically arm, equip, and supply in time of war, see, Luca, *Războiul ofițerilor de rezervă*, 58.

fortune and equally few are those who through marriage have improved their material state.”⁴⁵

While officers from boyar or military families still dominated the senior ranks, Leoveanu shows that officers from humbler peasant origins now made up the majority by the interwar period.

Identity

By the interwar period boyars had long been a minority in the officer corps, but aristocratic culture defined the identity of the officer corps through the end of the Second World War. This was not an accident, but nor was it an inevitable result of the Russian reforms in the 1830s. The brief period of republican experimentation under Prince Cuza during 1859-1866 means that there was a real opportunity for the recently established Romanian Army to develop an officer corps with a very different culture. This proved unpopular with the conservative boyars who dominated the army – it was a group of officers that arrested Cuza in the palace coup of 1866 – who rejected the idea of an officer corps with a culture of meritocracy, egalitarianism, and virtue.⁴⁶ They favored instead an aristocratic culture stressing honor, social hierarchy, and Christian knighthood. The officer corps, supported by King Carol I, worked hard to maintain its aristocratic identity even as it was increasingly diluted with officers recruited from the peasantry. The formation of *România Mare* after 1918 only reinforced the imperial pretensions of the officer corps.

The Romanian officer corps self-consciously aped the older aristocratic officer corps of Europe and aspired to their wealth, social prestige, and political influence. In the absence of an advanced war school in Romania – the Superior School of War was only established in 1889 – officers went abroad for advanced military training, usually to military schools in France and

⁴⁵ Maior Emanoil Leoveanu, “Pericolul ce ne amenință,” *România militară* LVI, Nr. 5 (Mai 1924), 70-71.

⁴⁶ For details on a republican army, see, David B. Ralston, *The Army of the Republic: The Place of the Military in the Political Evolution of France, 1871-1914* (Cambridge, MA; London: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), 1-5, 9-25.

Germany, but also Austria-Hungary and Italy. Officers often returned with an inflated sense of importance after experiencing the deference accorded to officers abroad in other countries and brought back foreign aristocratic idiosyncrasies as well. As a 1908 army study complained,

The young Romanian officers who had been in Germany alienated themselves... Some from among them made as if they no longer knew the Romanian tongue, others returned with monocles and with [other habits] copied from the Prussian Junkers, and many more believed they were of a nobility as old as that which they imitated, others, finally, had German wives.⁴⁷

A few ethnic Romanians serving as officers in foreign armies emigrated to join the Romanian Army after 1866. These officers came from Transylvania in the Austro-Hungarian Empire or from Bessarabia in the Russian Empire and brought with them the aristocratic norms of those armies that only reinforced the aristocratic culture of the Romanian officer corps.⁴⁸

Officers aspired to live a comfortable life to match their aristocratic identity, regardless of their actual social origins. Officers did not live in garrison with their soldiers, in part because the army faced a chronic shortage of infrastructure as it struggled to keep up with its expansion after 1880, but more importantly because officers were expected to maintain themselves in comfort – particularly if they were married.⁴⁹ Local society expected officers to entertain and attend social events. Officers who could not afford these expenses, peasants and rural gentry alike, often fell into deep debt or avoided marriage entirely to escape the financial burden. General Dăscălescu, a division and corps commander after 1941, came from a peasant family and could not afford a proper home as a young junior officer, he rented a room in a peasant house, much less support a

⁴⁷ From *Mărturisiri* by General Radu R. Rosetti, a boyar officer on the staff of the General Headquarters and commander of a regiment in the First World War, a military historian in the interwar period, and the Minister of Education under the Antonescu regime. For the translated quote, see, Larry L. Watts, *Romanian Cassandra: Ion Antonescu and the Struggle for Reform, 1916-1941* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1993), 17.

⁴⁸ Savu, *The Army and the Romanian Society*, 230.

⁴⁹ For details on the army infrastructure program, see, Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History*, 87, 114.

wife and family. When asked late in life why he never married, he claimed that it was because wives were a distraction from military duty because “the husband has to give a lot of time to her. She has to be taken to the opera, the theatre, to military clubs, and visits with other officers.”⁵⁰ It was not the distraction of wives alone, but also the costs associated with wives and families that discouraged marriage.⁵¹ If they did decide to marry, officers tried to find a wealthy woman with a dowry, preferably from a boyar family. They often placed “marriage ads” in newspapers, such as this one printed a Bucharest newspaper in February 1941, “Artillery captain with foreign post experience, specialized training, owns private automobile, from a good family, brother-in-law a general, seeking to marry a woman up to 35 years old with a house and income.”⁵²

If an officer found a prospective spouse, he then still had to first obtain approval from his commanding officer before getting married. The army tried to discourage regular officers from marrying women with bourgeois origins. General Pantazi, then Minister of Defense, expressed dismay in a September 1942 meeting of the Council of Ministers that some officers’ wives had taken over Jewish businesses as part of the Romanianization of the economy.⁵³ He was adamant that while it was acceptable for the bourgeois reserve officers’ wives to carry out such activity, it was totally unacceptable for regular officers’ wives to be involved in what he considered vulgar commercial activity.⁵⁴ This aristocratic aversion to hard work among the officer corps also did not encourage many officers to make strenuous efforts when training their men.

⁵⁰ Dăscălescu, *General Nicolae Dăscălescu*, 52, 57.

⁵¹ Officer bachelorhood was very common in Eastern European armies, see, Deák, *Beyond Nationalism*, 140-142.

⁵² AMR, Fond Corpul Grănicerilor, dosar 2751, f. 1199.

⁵³ Romanianization was the equivalent of the Nazi economic policy of Aryanization, for details see, Ștefan Cristian Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to “Romanianization,” 1940-1944* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2015), 34-65.

⁵⁴ Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă și Maria Ignat, ed., *Stenogramele ședințelor consiliului de miniștri guvernarea Ion Antonescu, Vol. VIII* (Bucharest: Editura Mica Valahie, 2004), 206.

Although the principalities had been under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte, fighting for an Islamic empire for several centuries, a Christian chivalric ethos soon became a central part of the identity of Romanian officers. The simple republican medals introduced by Prince Cuza during his seven-year rule were replaced by more ornate medals based on Christian iconography under Prince Carol I after 1866. The culmination of the process of adopting a chivalric ethos was the introduction of the Order of Michael the Brave in 1916. This was the highest award for bravery that came with a knighthood and a substantial land grant.⁵⁵ Like the fabled “Blue Max” of the German Army during the First World War, the Order of Michael the Brave was an object of obsession for many officers during the Second World War. The Germans proved astute in the using decorations to motivate their allies.⁵⁶ Honor was a strong part of the identity of the officer corps, the motivation for duels or suicides over questions of honor in peacetime, and during the Second World War honor motivated officers to lead far forward and inspire their soldiers. It also motivated officers to push themselves and their men to the limit to fulfill orders.

Christianity shaped the identity of the officer corps in more ways than just its medals. The creation of an independent Romanian Orthodox Church in 1882 played an important role in legitimizing the officer corps’ imperial pretensions because it declared the army the defender of the true religion.⁵⁷ King Carol I made a conscious effort to use the Orthodox Church to prop up his young monarchy and encouraged close army-church relations. On 6 April 1870, High Decree No. 603 issued by Carol I declared that each regiment or battalion could have a chaplain [*preot*

⁵⁵ Michael was celebrated for briefly unifying Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania in 1601 see, Ioan Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi, volum I: Carol I* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2011), 95-96.

⁵⁶ The highest German medal the *Ritterkreuz*, the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross, was awarded to 16 or 17 Romanian generals, twice the number of any other German ally, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 49.

⁵⁷ Lucian N. Leustean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War: Religion and Political Power in Romania, 1947-65* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 33.

militar] “belonging to the dominant religion of Romania.”⁵⁸ The new national army and the new national church became closely intertwined. Officers often patronized local churches near their postings by organizing donations, contributing personally, and even providing soldiers as free labor for church projects. After the First World War, officers played an important role in helping to build new Romanian Orthodox churches in Transylvania since the region had been dominated by Catholic and Protestant elites supported by the Hungarian state who only tolerated Orthodoxy. In the Oradea Diocese alone between 1930 and 1940 officers gathered funds to build 70 churches and renovate many more.⁵⁹ During the Second World War, the officer corps repeated its efforts of church construction in occupied Soviet territory as part of the “Crusade against Communism.”

The aristocratic identity of the officer corps applied not only to boyars, but also by non-noble “military sons” and peasants who embraced aristocratic values after entering the army. These military families often wielded great influence in the army, employing nepotism to their advantage, Ion Manolescu discovered when he arrived at reserve officer school. “Company Commander: Radulescu; Platoon Commandner: Radulescu; Tactical Instructor: Radulescu.... I soon learnt that the Radulescu family had virtually monopolized the Military Academy.”⁶⁰ The officers from military families became as haughty and arrogant as actual boyar officers, if not more so. Antonescu was from just such a military family and was notorious for his arrogance.⁶¹ General Gheorghe Avramescu, who commanded the Mountain Corps for much of the Second World War, is a good example of a peasant adopting the aristocratic identity of the officer corps.

⁵⁸ Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History*, 102.

⁵⁹ Marian Moșneagu, Petrișor Florea, și Dan Prisăcaru, coord., *Armata română și cultele: studii și comunicări prezentate la sesiunea națională de comunicări științifice Pitești-Mioveni, 25 iulie 2014* (Brăila: Editura Istros, 2014), 116.

⁶⁰ Manolescu, *Permitted to Land*, 8.

⁶¹ Deletant, *Hilter's Forgotten Ally*, 38-39.

Born into the proverbial “modest peasant family” in Botoșani in 1884, he secured a position at the highly competitive Infantry Officer School in Bucharest in 1906 and graduated eleventh out of a class of 60 in 1908. The First World War proved a boon for his career as the dire shortage of officers after mobilization resulted in his quick promotion. He was wounded during the war and won many accolades, first while fighting the Central Powers and then Hungarian Bolsheviks. Today Avramescu is celebrated as a soldier’s general, but he actually had long abandoned his peasant roots and adopted aristocratic values, including aristocratic activities such as hunting, a hobby he practiced in occupied Crimea.⁶² He was so integrated into the aristocratic milieu that his daughter married into the princely Sturdza family, whose family lineage stretched back to the sixteenth century. Avramescu is not an isolated example of such acculturation.

Professionalism

The Romanian officer corps, using the definition and characteristics of professionalism already provided in the introduction, was still at best only semi-professional during the interwar period. The officer corps gained valuable experience in the First World War at great cost in the lives of soldiers – including several generals – in the campaigns of 1916-1917, Russian soldiers, French material, British loans, and training from Allied military missions prevented collapse.⁶³ Revolution in Russia empire isolated Romania, while delivering it Bessarabia, the implosion of the Central Powers in 1918 allowed Romanian soldiers to occupy Bukovina and Transylvania to declare *România Mare*, and a brief campaign against a weak and disorganized Hungary in 1919

⁶² Victor Nitu, “General Gheorghe Avramescu,” WorldWar2.ro, accessed 29 March 2016, <http://worldwar2.ro/generalii/?language=en&article=97>

⁶³ The importance of the French Military Mission of 400 officers, plus a few hundred NCOs and skilled technicians, has been greatly exaggerated, especially when compared to over a million Russian soldiers. Most likely the result of a strategy after the war to celebrate Franco-Romanian friendship for diplomatic reasons after 1918. For a traditional lionization of the French Military Mission, see, Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 180-183.

consolidated its expansion. The officer corps had believed that it was a professional force in the *fin de siècle*, but this confidence had been shaken by the disaster of 1916. After 1919, however, because the Romanian Army had removed salon generals scapegoated for defeat, girded itself with the panoply of modern industrial war, received training from the Allied victors, and fought a successful campaign against Hungary without any Allied help, officers once again felt sure in their professionalism and that they had mastered the demands of modern war.

During the 1920s, the Romanian Army rested on its laurels and officers felt that their role in the creation of *România Mare* justified interwar claims to increased social status that detracted from professionalization. In late 1924, the General Staff chose to publish an article in *România militară* that argued the officer corps should have the same social prestige and be treated with the same respect as the Imperial German Army had been before 1914.⁶⁴ Implicitly, the General Staff was claiming that the Romanian Army was an equal to what was generally considered the most professional and competent army in recent history. While the General Staff continued to prepare to fight the next war, especially in the 1930s – paying close attention to combat developments in the Spanish Civil War – as the storm clouds of war gathered, much of the officer corps’ time and energy in the interwar years focused on defending old or obtaining new social privileges instead. The difficult economic conditions of the interwar period, made especially acute during the global Depression, also exacerbated abuse of soldiers as labor and other corrupt practices by officer. If these economic difficulties greatly damaged the training and equipment of soldiers, they allowed

⁶⁴ Maior Ionescu-Sinaias, “Problema socială, morală și materială a corpului ofițeresc,” *România militară*, LVI, No. 10 (Octombrie 1924), 77-78.

the Romanian Army to improve the quality of officers it recruited during the interwar period and maintain relatively high standards of officer training leading up to the Second World War.

Romanian officer training lagged behind the rest of Europe before the First World War.

The first advanced military education institutions established in Romania were the School for Artillery and Engineering in 1881 and the Superior School of War in 1889, but even after their foundation many officers continued to go abroad for extra training in the latest military sciences unavailable in Bucharest. Since they attended military schools across Europe officers came back with different training, tactics, and doctrines from various European armies. By the First World War, however, most of the officer corps had latched onto the military theories of Charles-Ardent du Picq and the *offensive a l'outrance* due in large part to training in France.⁶⁵ Du Picq's work, published posthumously in 1902, became a sensation among military theorists across Europe. He argued that new firepower technology had altered battle less than most believed and that the army with the stronger moral strength, not necessarily the greater material resources, could still be victorious.⁶⁶ Romanian theories based on these ideas overemphasized the importance of spirit and marginalized firepower, material, and training; officers were trained to expect poorly trained and equipped soldiers to charge the enemy and overcome enemy firepower with national spirit.⁶⁷ Furthermore, while a smaller number of Romanian officers trained in Germany were well-versed

⁶⁵ Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 17; French army doctrine has been regularly denigrated since 1914 as foolhardy and relying too much on outdated Napoleonic tactics and *élan*, but many French officers actually understood the importance of firepower and material. Like all European militaries before the Great War, the French struggled to balance tactics, new weapons and technologies, and limitations in command and control, see, William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 20-22.

⁶⁶ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 28.

⁶⁷ The Romanians were not alone in this contemptuous attitude towards the danger of firepower on the modern battlefield. The Austro-Hungarian Army also resorted to similar tactics that resulted in the destruction of the pre-war army in the first campaigns of the First World War, see Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe: The Outbreak of World War I and the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 61-62, 65, 155-156.

in the doctrine of *Auftragstaktik*, or “mission tactics,” that expected officers to trust subordinates to take the initiative in planning the details of how to carry out a mission after being given a clear and concise order, they could not apply it to the Romanian Army as it required intensive training that was beyond its capabilities because there were not enough officers, many of whom were also disinclined to make the necessary efforts, and officers lacked professional NCOs to assist them.⁶⁸ Instead, Romanian officers and soldiers were trained to follow orders to the letter. Officers also lacked practice in conducting large unit operations; the first staff ride took place in 1888 and the first royal maneuvers were organized in 1894, repeated every autumn, but usually involved only brigades and divisions. This lack of preparation showed on battlefields in the First World War as Romanian generals were soon overwhelmed by the challenge of coordinating corps and armies.⁶⁹ Despite two decades for the army to improve its training, preparation, and leadership after 1918, the slow advances and costly frontal attacks of 1916 were repeated in 1941, especially by Fourth Army. Third Army performed better in 1941 and improved with experience in 1942-1943.

Before 1916, the Romanian Army was top-heavy with too many generals and colonels and not enough majors, captains, and lieutenants.⁷⁰ Furthermore, many obtained their position due to social status as members of powerful boyar families, political connections, or royal favor. These salon generals spent much of their time gambling at the Bucharest Jockey Club, going to social events, or being politicians instead of attending to military duties. Royal patronage helped promote favorites to senior positions. For example, General Constantin Prezan was an adjutant to Crown Prince Ferdinand in 1901 and, unsurprisingly, the close relationship paid off later when

⁶⁸ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 20; for the importance of NCOs, see, Dennis Showalter, “Army and Society in Imperial Germany: The Pains of Modernization,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 4 (Oct. 1983), 602-604.

⁶⁹ Petre Otu, *Mareșalul Constantin Prezan: vocația datoriei* (Bucharest: Editura militară, 2008), 43.

⁷⁰ Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 15.

following the disaster of 1916, the monarch – now King Ferdinand I – made Prezan the Chief of the General Staff in 1917.⁷¹ It should be pointed out that the future *Conducător* was an adjutant to Crown Prince Carol before the First World War and Prezan’s staff officer planning operations. Both eschewed the stereotype of salon generals and were relatively competent officers as well as royal favorites. Like Prezan, Antonescu’s used his close connections to the future Carol II to obtain prestigious posts, but unlike Prezan, he later embarked on a political career. After 1919, the worst salon generals having been purged, the senior ranks of the Romanian Army were filled by a new generation of experienced First World War veterans who proved able enough in the Second World War. Royal patronage, however, became even more important after Carol II became king in 1930, especially once he declared a royal dictatorship in 1938.

There was a clear pecking order among the different arms of the military that was based purely upon prestige or social exclusivity and not professional achievement. The cavalry was the most prestigious arm because it expanded the least in the fin de siècle and had the largest number of boyar officers still during the interwar period. These boyar cavalrymen, according to General Pantazi, “provided the model of gestures of honor, loyalty, and generosity in the army.”⁷² These officers mixed in the highest social circles, however, the cavalry’s prestige was diminished by its ineffectiveness during the First World War and was supplanted by the glamour of the knights of the sky. The new *Aeronautica Regală Română*, or Royal Air Force, attracted men from the most prestigious boyar families, such as Constantin Cantacuzino, whose family dated back to a Greek Phanariote prince of medieval Wallachia, and became a leading fighter ace in the Second World

⁷¹ Otu, *Mareșalul Constantin Prezan*, 27.

⁷² Pantazi, *Cu Mareșalul până la moarte*, 3.

War.⁷³ Nonetheless, the cavalry arm still carried a lot of prestige and political influence, in fact, five of the prime ministers of the roughly 35 governments between 1918 and 1945 were former cavalry generals, including Antonescu.⁷⁴ The cavalry did not only produce political soldiers, but also competent officers who proved apt pupils under German tutors in 1940-1944. The cavalry officers of better equipped units, such as Colonel (later General) Radu Korne, who commanded the 6th Motorized *Roșiori* Regiment from the Prut to Stalingrad and the reconstituted 1st Armored Division in 1944, successfully adapted to German tactics and thinking.

The First World War demonstrated that the artillery was the king of battle in modern war but lacked social prestige because although most artillery remained horse-drawn – thus requiring cadets to pay the horse tax – it still had more peasant officers and relied extensively on bourgeois TTR officers whose education in math were needed for coordinating indirect fire. The General Staff adopted proven French artillery tactics, even if geared towards positional warfare they were still effective, but reliance on TTR officers meant that many artillery officers during the Second World War were reservists. Romanian military historians claim that artillery officers were adept in French tactics by 1940 and obstinately resisted attempts by German military advisors to retrain Romanian artillery officers in German practices – or simply lacked the time to do so before June 1941. The shortage of training and professionalism of artillery officers, especially reservists, was more important than biased German arguments that French tactics were too "schematic" and less suited for mobile warfare.⁷⁵ French practices were sound enough if employed by trained artillery officers. During the battle for Odessa, as near a recreation of First World War positional warfare

⁷³ Dénes Bernád, *Rumania Aces of World War 2* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 33.

⁷⁴ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 63.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 41; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 100.

as possible that French practices were designed for, Fourth Army's artillerymen proved woefully unprepared to properly direct bombardments or coordinate with the infantry. Third Army proved to have marginally better artillery officers who improved with experience, but even in battles of position as at Sevastopol its artillery had similar problems coordinating with the infantry.

The infantry was officially celebrated as the queen of battle but lacked prestige because it had the most officers with peasant origins. A few infantry units, however, were still considered “elite.” The Guard Division, an parade formation in Bucharest, differed little from the average infantry division, but it was considered the best assignment because it was located in the capital, received special attention, got the newest equipment, and took the best draftees.⁷⁶ Those infantry officers seeking promotion or social advancement knew they could do so if they obtained a post in one of its two *Vânători* regiments, so the Guard Division had the pick of the litter of educated officer cadets. The *Grăniceri* Corps was tasked with guarding the border in peacetime with eight lightly equipped *grăniceri* regiments: two on the Bulgarian border, two on the Hungarian border, and four on the Soviet border. Claims that the *grăniceri* were elite had more basis in reality than the merely socially elite Guard Division. *Grăniceri* NCOs and soldiers signed up for longer than the usual two-year stint and gained experience on the frontier.⁷⁷ Their training and experience, however, was limited to combating smuggling, policing Soviet refugees, causing scandals with Hungarian border guards, and firefights with Bulgarian *komitadji*. An internal Grăniceri Corps study in 1939 expressed great concern about the quality of its soldiers. “While in comparison to his infantry and light infantry comrades, in most cases, the *grănicer* soldier is better prepared for

⁷⁶ Scafaș *Armata română*, 99.

⁷⁷ Victor Nitu, “The Border-Guards,” WorldWar2.ro, accessed 4 June 2016, <http://www.worldwar2.ro/arme/?language=en&article=33>.

war, nevertheless, he is not sufficiently formed, neither for combat or guard duties.”⁷⁸ The poor performance of the *Grăniceri* Division in 1941, improvised from three *grăniceri* regiments with extra artillery, meant it was not used again after Odessa. Finally, the Mountain Corps claimed to be *the* infantry elite. It had a strong *esprit de corps*, most draftees were *ardeleni*, and recruited officers at the top of their class. Their special uniforms, green berets, loose golf-style pants, and white socks (regular infantry wore puttees) set them apart and played no small role in attracting officer cadets.⁷⁹ The patronage of the Mountain Corps by King Carol II, when it was formed in 1916 he had been its titular commander as crown prince, and proximity to the summer palace in Sinaia, near Predeal, made a posting with a mountain unit second only to Bucharest. Mountain officers were expected to learn to ski, a hobby practiced by the social elite, and regularly mixed with boyars, princes, or politicians on the slopes of Predeal during the winter. When the Soviets dissolved the Mountain Corps in 1944, it was in large part because it was a bastion of socially connected anti-communist officers. Mountain infantry did receive special training in mountain warfare, officers were trained to take the initiative, and units organized as independent brigades. Mountain brigades (later renamed divisions) demonstrated tactical flexibility, high motivation, and were more combat effective than the average infantry division on the Eastern Front.

The tiny armored arm was the “ugly duckling” of the interwar army. Romania had little heavy industry, few experienced engineers, and shortages of equipment that made it impossible for it to keep up with the technical developments in armor during the interwar period that forced armies to constantly replace rapidly outdated machines; an expense the Romanian budget could

⁷⁸ Fond Corpul Grănicerilor, dosar 2529, f. 68-78.

⁷⁹ These uniforms made a big impression on cadets, see, Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte*, 12.

ill afford.⁸⁰ Yet the reason for the lack of attention towards armor went beyond just budgetary realities because to aristocratic minded officers the tank was an unattractive weapon of modern war. It was dirty, technical, and lacked the prestige of the cavalry (both horsed and motorized) that was expected to be the mobile element in offensive operations. The tank, as in most armies including the French military doctrine adopted by the Romanian Army, was an infantry support weapon that was supposed to follow behind the infantry at a slow pace. Doctrine did not foster a mindset for rapid advance or maneuver warfare, moreover, the army purchased French or Czech tanks designed for infantry support that lacked speed or maneuverability. Therefore, tank units were staffed by infantry rather than cavalry officers who received limited specialized training.⁸¹ The invasion of Poland and fall of France demonstrated the true value of tanks. The Romanian Army rushed to change attitudes and train better tank crews with the help of the German Military Mission to some success. 1st Armored Division performed well in 1941-1942 but suffered heavy losses in equipment that could not be readily replaced until 1944.

After the First World War, the Romanian Army expanded its military education system and improved the training of officers. In 1919 only three officer training schools existed in the Old Kingdom for each of the primary arms, infantry, cavalry, and artillery. Beginning in 1920 the army created two new infantry training schools in Sibiu, an officer administration training school was opened in Oradea the following year, and the artillery officer school was moved to Timișoara – all major cities in Transylvania.⁸² Most of this initial expansion was just integrating

⁸⁰ Alexander Statiev, “The ugly duckling of the armed forces: Romanian Armor, 1919-1941,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12, no. 2 (1999), 220-221, 225; even during the war Romanian industry could only produce stop-gap tank destroyers from captured materials in small numbers, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 219-235.

⁸¹ Luca, *Războiul ofițerilor de rezervă*, 40.

⁸² Ibid., 29-30.

infrastructure inherited from the now defunct Austro-Hungarian Army. New specialized training institutions were established in Bucharest in 1927. With the artillery trainers sent to Timișoara, the School for Artillery and Engineering became an independent school for engineer offices, the Medical-Military Institute expanded to become the Military Health Institute, and a wholly new Military Chemical Institute was established. These efforts kept pace with a steady growth of the enlarged officer corps of *România Mare*.

The Romanian Army took advantage of the economic crisis of the Depression to raise the level of education required to become an officer in the early 1930s. Economic stagnation in the 1920s, followed by budget cuts in the 1930s, meant that obtaining a law degree at the University of Bucharest no longer guaranteed a cushy job and bourgeois youths suddenly found the army a much more attractive option. The General Staff was able to raise the educational requirements to become an officer in 1932, officer cadets now had to pass the baccalaureate, and obtaining a spot in the reserve officer school became very competitive.⁸³ After an entrance exam, officer cadets had to fulfill three years of training to become a second lieutenant. Each day of officer training consisted of six-seven hours of coursework (60 percent training, 30 percent military culture, 10 percent general culture), three-four hours of individual study, eight hours of sleep, and the rest of the time assigned to meals, relaxation, and other activities, such as sports or choir.⁸⁴ In addition to higher standards of education, the Depression temporarily increased the number of officers by approximately 2,000 but shrunk again once the economy improved. The flood of urban youths – including Jews, other ethnic minorities, and even a few workers – into the officer corps triggered

⁸³ Ibid., 35, 53.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 38, 40.

a minor panic in the army and the General Staff soon worried about the level of “culture” of the new officer candidates.⁸⁵ The Romanian Army needed more middle- or working-class officers (and NCOs) because it embarked on a program of rearmament and partial motorization initiated during the Depression. In 1932, the General Staff opened more schools to cope with the sudden glut of cadets, which included a new mechanical training center to train officers, and NCOs, to maintain the army’s growing (if still relatively tiny) pool of motor vehicles.⁸⁶

The Romanian Army continued to train using French military doctrine and developed an aggressive defensive strategy in case Romania was attacked. The General Staff plans focused on absorbing attacks, halting them, and then followed up by immediate counterattacks to drive back the enemy from Romanian territory. Once this occurred, then one of Romania’s many military alliances should provide it with allies to defeat the enemy. Therefore, while Romanian military strategy was defensive, its tactical training focused on the offensive. An article in the May 1932 issue of *România militară* highlighted the aggressive doctrine of the small, effectively disarmed, Austrian Army, “Certainly, a small army, of a state reduced to modest means, could believe that it should think rather more about the defense than the attack.”⁸⁷ Romanian officers needed to avoid falling into the trap of a defensive mindset. Arguments, popular then and since, that an excess of French doctrine somehow robbed the Romanian Army of offensive spirit seem more than specious.⁸⁸ It was only when international events had stripped Romania of its allies that it

⁸⁵ A larger number of peasant officer and NCOs worried them too, see, Lt.-Colonel A. Locusteanu, “Necesitatea culturii pentru ofițer: cum poate ea fi facută,” *România militară* LXXIV, Nr. 10 (Octombrie 1937), 15-18.

⁸⁶ Luca, *Războiul ofițerilor de rezervă*, 31.

⁸⁷ Lt.-Colonel Gheorghe Ion, “Regulamentul de luptă al unei armate mici,” *România militară* LXIX, Nr. 5 (Mai 1932), 74, 76, 88.

⁸⁸ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 40; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 100; even the Antonescu regime blamed King Carol II for neutering the army, see, Alexander Statiev, “When an army becomes ‘merely a burden’: Romanian defense policy and strategy (1918-1941),” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 13, no. 2 (2000), 70-72.

became more defensively-minded – building fortifications in at the end of the 1930s – and even then, the Romanian Army advocated extreme aggressiveness if forced to fight alone. After 1941, the Romanian Army proved sufficiently aggressive, it was not doctrine, but shortages in training and equipment that limited Romanian unit's ability to fight mobile campaigns.

While the new generation of interwar officers may have received better training, it was the older generation of officers, with their *fin de siècle* training and First World War experience, who led the army in the 1930s. Officers from boyar or military families dominated senior ranks and officer leadership often attempted to overcome training, equipment, and material shortages by sheer force of will. Instead of calm, clear orders many senior officers resorted to shouts and threats. Major Scârneci's diary is full off examples, some generals even threatening to shoot him if he did not seize an objective, contributing to repeated, poorly supported, and costly attacks in 1941 that echoed those of 1916.⁸⁹ Some generals cared more about plaudits or medals than the lives of men. Some of the Germans' favorite generals, such as General Lascăr were ones willing to issue dramatic orders fulfilling their desire for personal glory, but usually resulted in bloody frontal assaults or doomed last stands. A twisted sense of honor bound Romanian generals to the Germans as they fought to defend “civilization” against the “Judeo-Bolshevik” threat.⁹⁰

Ethnicity

Before 1918, ethnicity was not important in the composition of the officer corps, except for its official exclusion of Jews and unofficial discrimination of Gypsies. The Old Romania was essentially an ethnically homogenous state but creating *România Mare* dramatically altered the

⁸⁹ He is actually very critical of high ranking Romanian commanders and uses scathing language to describe their perceived shortcomings. For several good examples, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moartea în linia întâi*, 133, 192, 227.

⁹⁰ Antonescu's loyalty to Hitler was representative of the army, see, Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 64, 235-236.

ethnic make-up of the country. Romania doubled in territory and nearly tripled the population of ethnic minorities (Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, and others) after the annexation of Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania. The ethnic minority population of *România Mare* was a third the population. The most important ethnic minorities in this period for officer personnel were Jews and Germans who had diametrically opposed experiences.

Jews

When the officer corps was opened to non-nobles after 1862 Jews were excluded. While serfdom was abolished, and other liberal reforms enacted, new anti-Semitic laws prevented most Jews from becoming citizens or serving in the new national army. The General Staff's need for manpower finally changed this, and the 1882 recruitment law declared that all "residents" were now subject to conscription, thereby obligating Romanian Jews to fulfill military service, despite still being denied Romanian citizenship.⁹¹ Jews were 3.3 percent of the population in 1912, one of the largest ethnic minorities and the Romanian Army could not afford to deprive itself of these men.⁹² Jews drafted into the army discovered they were not welcome in the ranks and educated Jews were not allowed to be officers. Discrimination against Jews did not change over time during the *fin de siècle*, in fact, anti-Semitism in the Romanian Army only hardened.

The army was an environment where anti-Semitism was openly displayed and cultivated by officers and soldiers alike.⁹³ A law in 1875 restricted Jews from becoming officers; a ban that a similar law in 1911 reiterated. Jews with professional training, such as doctors or pharmacists, who were qualified to become reserve officers because of their education were forced to serve as

⁹¹ Carol Iancu, *Evreii din românia: de la excludere la emancipare* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2009), 200.

⁹² Only the Gypsy minority was probably larger, see, Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 194.

⁹³ Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 239.

lowly privates. Beginning in 1895, many regiments took the initiative to restrict Jews from even becoming an NCO.⁹⁴ These restrictions were a response to popular hostility towards the idea of Jewish officers or NCOs. It was only after 1919 that the Romanian Army started to allow Jews into the officer corps, largely due to pressure from the Western Powers, and even then only as reserve officers.⁹⁵ These policies denied the army the skills of educated Jews, but according to senior officers anti-Semitic worldview kept it “pure” from their allegedly corrupting influence.⁹⁶ As the ultimate enforcer of law and order, however, the Romanian Army was the unenthusiastic protector of Jews from popular Legionary anti-Semitic violence. After 1940, the officer corps embraced anti-Semitism in the ranks and became the principle tool of persecution of Jews.

The officer corps blamed Jews for the humiliation the Romanian Army by the Red Army and local sympathizers as it retreated from eastern Romania after the Soviet ultimatum in 1940. The fall of France and the rise of the Antonescu regime radically changed official policy towards Jews, who were already seen as disloyal and/or communist sympathizers. Soon all Jews, not just reserve officers or NCOs, were expelled from the army and restricted from military service.⁹⁷ Jews were required to serve as forced labor by the army or pay a “military tax” in lieu of military service. The fate of Jews from Bessarabia and northern Bukovina after the army reconquered the territory from the Soviets was far worse.

⁹⁴ Iancu, *Evreii din românia*, 201.

⁹⁵ Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 232-235, 268-274.

⁹⁶ In late 1942, Mihai Antonescu said “only the Army, pure and healthy, Justice, and Education did not receive Jews” see,” Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor consiliului de miniștri guvernarea Ion Antonescu, Vol. VIII*, 381-382.

⁹⁷ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 27.

Ethnic Germans

Romania's ethnic Germans, who were concentrated in Transylvania – known locally as Saxons or Swabians – and Bessarabia. Those in Transylvania were particularly valued by the Romanian Army as many were former Austro-Hungarian officers and the state knew it required the support of ethnic Germans who were seen as “an element of order and work, having peaceful sentiments.” They were needed to counterbalance local Hungarians, so the government ordered the Romanian Army that ethnic Germans should “be treated like Romanians” when occupying Transylvania in 1918.⁹⁸ This favorable treatment continued into the interwar period and former Habsburg officers were assimilated into the army at their former rank, so ethnic Germans made up the only sizable minority in the Romanian officer corps through the Second World War.

These ethnic German officers were invaluable to the Romanian Army. Colonels, majors, and captains brought with them valuable combat experience learned during the last war, plus a few generals, such as Hugo Schwab, Carol (Karl) Schmidt, and Artur Phelps. Phelps decided to abandon the Romanian Army to join the SS in 1939. He was later followed by many Saxon or Swabian peasants who chose to avoid the draft or volunteered to serve in the SS. Nonetheless, Schwab, Schmidt, and most ethnic German officers remained in the Romanian Army and served loyally to the end of the war.⁹⁹ During the Second World War, ethnic German officers played an important, but overlooked part in the Romanian Army.

The Romanian Army had few Hungarian or Russian officers. Nationalist propaganda depicted Hungary as Romania's “millennial long” enemy, so there was little trust in them. Most

⁹⁸ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 368.

⁹⁹ Grant Harward, “Purifying the Ranks: Ethnic and Minority Policy in the Romanian Armed Forces during the Second World War,” *Studies In Ethnicity & Nationalism* 13, no. 2 (October, 2013), 167-169.

of the former-Habsburg Hungarian officers from Transylvania left to serve in the new Hungarian Army and relocated to rump Hungary.¹⁰⁰ Few former-tsarist officers from Bessarabia entered the Romanian Army. Russian officers either answered the demands of the Red Army to serve as “military specialists” or joined the ranks of the White armies trying to destroy the Bolsheviks.¹⁰¹ Few Russian officers chose the less attractive option of joining the Romanian Army.

Non-Commissioned Officers

The Romanian Army lacked a professional non-commissioned officer corps. The army had *subofițeri*, or “sub-officers” in Romanian parlance, but they lacked a corporate identity as career NCOs. Most NCOs were peasants, with a few workers or high school educated youths, selected from the annual contingent of draftees after a few short months of service – a draftee had only to serve two months before being eligible to be promoted to corporal and after another two months could be made a sergeant – and a short NCO training program.¹⁰² After serving the required two years most NCOs chose to leave the army rather than remain a NCO because they wanted to get back to interrupted lives, found army life unpleasant, or were hustled out due to budgetary cuts. The lack of career NCOs weakened the institutional knowledge of the army, compromised a potentially stabilizing intermediary between officers and soldiers, and made it more difficult to inculcate regimental *esprit de corps* in new draftees.¹⁰³

A few NCOs remained in the Romanian Army after fulfilling their two-year commitment. They were called *reangajați*, literally “re-hired.” Johann Emrich, a Saxon peasant draftee in the

¹⁰⁰ Joining 426,000 (200,000 from Transylvania) Hungarian elites, see, Deborah S. Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II: Caught in the Cauldron* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 42-43; Hitchins, *Rumania*, 338.

¹⁰¹ The Soviets forced tsarist officers to join the Red Army or else, see, Reese, *Red Commanders*, 19-20.

¹⁰² League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book: Seventh Year* (League of Nations: Geneva, 1931), 765.

¹⁰³ For an analysis of the role of NCOs in the Soviet context, see, Roger R. Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996), 120-121.

early 1930s, decided to stay on as an NCO for a couple more years to save up his wages in order to build a house and to pay the marriage dowry still customary in his village.¹⁰⁴ Like him, many *reangajați* served just a few years more rather than choosing a career as an NCO. Those who did remain often did not provide crucial service to the army as career NCOs; in 1931 over a tenth of the *reangajați* were regimental musicians, whose talents were not in leadership or training.¹⁰⁵ As the Romanian Army tried to improve the quality of personnel in the 1930s, it required *reangajați* to make a seven-year commitment, but the requirements to become an NCO remained very low. 2nd Lieutenant Manolescu later quipped, “No special qualifications were required, though it was implied that they should be able to read and write.”¹⁰⁶

Therefore, the NCO corps was divided between *reangajați* and short-term NCOs chosen from new draftees that contributed to the difficulty of creating a united NCO group identity. In 1931, there were 13,790 *reangajați* and 11,332 draftee NCOs.¹⁰⁷ The *reangajați* who decided to make the army a career aimed to achieve the rank of sergeant-major who primarily carried out an administrative function focused on the regimental economy [*gospodărie*], rather than effectively training conscripts.¹⁰⁸ At least *reangajați* chose to remain NCOs, the process of recruiting new NCOs from among draftees was less voluntary. Each spring, officers kept a lookout for likely NCO candidates with basic literacy seemingly the most crucial (perhaps only) requirement in the new batch of draftees. Officers promoted draftees from private first class to corporal to sergeant

¹⁰⁴ Rebecca A. Emrich, *In Search of the Lost Ones: The German Soldiers of Transylvania in the Second World War and their Stories* (Vancouver: For Love of Books, 2011), 5.

¹⁰⁵ Of 13,790 *reangajați* 1,434 were musicians, see, League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book: Seventh Year*, 767.

¹⁰⁶ Manolescu, *Permitted to Land*, 17.

¹⁰⁷ League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book: Seventh Year*, 767.

¹⁰⁸ Manolescu, *Permitted to Land*, 17; Grosu, *Memorii unui ofițer de informații*, 74.

as quickly as possible in order to benefit from their assistance during their short two-year period of military service. These draftee NCOs usually had little say in their promotion.

Pressured into a position of authority and planning to leave the army as soon as possible, many NCOs decided to use their position of power to exploit the next contingent of draftees for personal gain. Captain Grosu later recalled that NCOs “raised in rank – after being pushed by us, the officers – rapidly forget that they had also been privates and flaunt behavior [*mentalități*] unsuitable of a leader, so much so, that rather than a help, they were harmful, their comportment being completely contrary to regulations.”¹⁰⁹ In his semi-autobiographical work *From Military Life*, consisting of vignettes of army life before the First World War, Bacalbașa does not present a flattering picture of NCOs. Sergeants are depicted as bullies who haze new draftees, use their fists to enforce discipline, and fleece draftees of any valuable personal items.¹¹⁰ In one vignette a sergeant takes an immediate disliking to a draftee showing too much promise by mastering the theory and lessons taught very quickly. Bacalbașa insinuates that such brightness and initiative was resented or feared by the sergeant who proceeds to haze the recruit mercilessly: depriving him of sleep, insulting him at every opportunity, and physically pushing him around. In the end the once promising draftee, now broken by the sergeant, goes AWOL.¹¹¹ Bacalbașa is far from unbiased, but such cases remained common through the interwar period. For example, Private Weiss, a well-off ethnic German from Bessarabia serving as a territorial cavalryman in 1938, remembered, “the sergeants were always finding little ways to force us to give them money.”¹¹² The soldiers in his *Călărași* unit (a polyglot group of Romanians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and

¹⁰⁹ Grosu, *Memorii unui ofițer de informații*, 74.

¹¹⁰ Anton Bacalbașa, *Moș teacă - Din viața militară* (Iași: Editura Junimea, 1989), 65.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 68.

¹¹² Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 17-18.

ethnic Germans) had to present themselves at roll-call each morning with pristine uniforms, but often small stars on their riding boots would mysteriously go missing, Weiss believed taken by the NCOs, and privates would pay the sergeant 10 or 20 *lei* for new ones to avoid punishment. Unfortunately, such abuse by NCOs was a normal part of army life.

There were efforts to increase the number and improve the training of NCOs during the interwar years. As part of the general expansion of the military training system after 1918 new schools for training regular and TTR NCOs were established, but deficiencies in both number and quality of NCOs was never solved. After 1941, German commanders were shocked by “the absence of a non-commissioned officer corps as we know it.”¹¹³ The German Military Mission began helping to train NCOs in late 1940, but there was far too little time before the invasion of the USSR and the war only exacerbated the shortage of NCOs. The Romanian Army resorted to the mass promotion of sergeants and corporals who had distinguished themselves in combat to fill the positions of lieutenants and sergeants killed in battle.¹¹⁴ Many NCOs, however, had also distinguished themselves as killers during the invasion, initiating pogroms or massacres of Jews. The army initiated a crash program to train more NCOs (and officers) in early 1942. Although the quality of NCO training did improve with assistance from German advisors, the Romanian Army was never able to train enough NCOs and it remained a significant handicap.

The Romanian Soldier

In the 1830s, when General Kiselyov initiated his reforms, the vast majority of peasants were held in thrall to the boyars. The princes of medieval Wallachia and Moldavia were able to

¹¹³ Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, ed. & trans. by Anthony G. Powell (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004), 207.

¹¹⁴ Alexandru Duțu și Petre Otu, coord., *Pe țarmul nord pontic (17 iulie 1941-4 iulie 1942)* (Bucharest: Editura Funației Culturale Române, 1999), 34.

mobilize large armies through feudal levies of free peasants, but during Ottoman suzerainty the boyars had gradually enserfed the peasantry until they could no longer provide military service to the prince. In the eighteenth century, influenced by Enlightenment ideas, the Phanariote Greek princes of the principalities emancipated the serfs, however, they were not given land, nor were their feudal obligations revoked – especially the *clacă*, or unpaid labor owed to the boyar – and the boyars again gradually re-ensered the peasants. Therefore, only a few free peasants could be recruited into the army after the Russian reforms in 1830.

The emancipation of the serfs in 1864 was an extremely important event for the peasantry and the army. Romanian society did not immediately change because they were again not given enough land and were also required to pay a “redemption tax” similar to the one paid by Russian peasants for their emancipation that kept peasants in poverty and working boyar lands as landless tenant farmers. There were some clear improvements. Peasant no longer had to pay tithes to the boyar, respect boyar economic monopolies, or provide 12 days of *clacă* to the boyar each year.¹¹⁵ Emancipation marked the starting point after which Romanian society steadily modernized and the traditional authority of the boyars was undermined. This was a long process and the boyars fought to hold onto their privileges and power for as long as possible. It was not until the 1880s that Romania finally began to see the effects as cities grew, towns were electrified, and industry developed. Modernization, however, was uneven. In 1899, illiteracy still dominated the country as 78 percent of the total population, and as much as 85 percent in the countryside, could not read or write.¹¹⁶ While society changed only slowly, the army changed quickly.

¹¹⁵ Hitchins, *The Romanians*, 64, 80; Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1951), 10.

¹¹⁶ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 30-31.

The introduction of universal military service meant that each year a new contingent of peasant draftees was inducted into the ranks and as the Romanian Army grew larger it had to rely on peasants reporting voluntarily. Nationalism helped normalize universal military service since nationalist rhetoric portrayed the army as the defender of the nation, turning military service into a patriotic duty, and conscription became a normal part of peasant life, even a rite of manhood.¹¹⁷ The education reforms of Spiru Haret in the 1890s that increased rural literacy contributed to the spread of nationalism from the urban elite to the rural peasantry. The 1908 army law established the requirements of military service that changed little before the Second World War. All male residents were required to provide some sort of military service between 21 to 40 – seven years of possible regular duty, five years in the reserves, three years in the militia, and four years in the territorials – with draftees serving a mandatory two years if inducted into infantry and three years (to master the difficult skills of horsemanship) if inducted into cavalry.¹¹⁸ While military service as a patriotic duty became the norm by the *fin de siècle*, poor conditions or treatment by officers meant that military service was still seen by some soldiers as a kind of punishment.

The army culture could sometimes be a shock to the newly drafted peasant. Bacalbașa captures this transition in another vignette. In it the army barber, a gardener in civilian life, calls up draftees to cut their long peasant hair and beards while a soldier drafted the year before yells, “Go get your haircut, soldier! [After he’s done with you] when you go home people will think you escaped from prison.”¹¹⁹ The fleecing of new draftees by NCOs follows. Peasant draftees

¹¹⁷ For an examination of how the introduction of universal military service changed attitudes about manliness and redefined manhood in society in a German context, see, Ute Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription, and Civil Society* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2004), 25-27, 171-172.

¹¹⁸ Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History*, 111.

¹¹⁹ Bacalbașa, *Moș teacă - Din viața militară*, 121.

were confronted with a barrage of unfamiliar military words that they had to learn rapidly or be physically disciplined. Bacalbașa describes the growing disillusionment of new recruits in army life as they watched older soldiers celebrating the end of their two years of military service.

The recruits looked mournfully at the [departing] reservists, and for them this merriment of the freed [soldiers] was not a good sign; why were they celebrating so much, seemingly as if they had escaped from jail? Why? Is the life of a soldier not happy? What? Did the priest lie, the mayor lie, everyone lie when they said what a great pleasure it is to be a soldier? Did they lie...?¹²⁰

Things had not changed much by the Second World War. When Emilian Ezechil was inducted into the 2nd *Călărași* Regiment in November 1941, NCOs mocked “the newly arrived recruits in an absurd manner,” who had to wear civilian clothes for the first week of training, during which time the “mocking reached cruel and even unconscionable heights,” and only once they received uniforms did the hazing subside¹²¹ New draftees were supposed to be issued new uniforms, but often got “old rags” of mismatched tunics, puttees, trousers, and boots.¹²²

Not every peasant had the same reaction to military life. Life in the army could be better than life at home in the village for many draftees. Often it was the first time they received steady pay that they could spend as they liked or got to see more of the world than just their own small village or nearby market town. The food may have been monotonous, but it was at least regular: for breakfast a half cup of sweet tea and a slice of bread, for lunch a vegetable or bean soup three times a week and *mămăligă* (cornmeal mush) the rest of the week, and for dinner leftovers of lunch.¹²³ Of course, small army budgets, corrupt officers, and self-interested NCOs could

¹²⁰ Bacalbașa, *Moș teacă - Din viața militară*, 118.

¹²¹ Ezechil, *La porțile infernului*, 12.

¹²² Mihai Sebastian, *Journal, 1935-1944: The Fascist Years*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 18.

¹²³ Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 18.

combine to make army life miserable, however, as Sergeant Emrich declared to his family, “in the Balkans, to be a soldier in a time without conflict between nations was a blessing.”¹²⁴

Most draftees entering the Romanian Army before the First World War were Romanian Orthodox Christians. The Romanian Orthodox Church was a staunch ally of the state, but its influence in the army was limited and lacked a permanent structure before the First World War. Because of large numbers of religious minorities entering the ranks during the interwar period this changed. Most of the ethnic minorities, nearly 30 percent of the roughly 18 million inhabitants in 1930, were not Romanian Orthodox.¹²⁵ Added to this was the uncomfortable fact that nearly 60 percent of *ardeleni* from Transylvania were Greek Catholic (Uniate) believers who practiced the Eastern Orthodox rite but recognized the supremacy of the Roman Pontiff.¹²⁶ Due to the minority treaty forced on Romania at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 the army adopted a policy that mandated that each regimental chaplain to be chosen according to whatever was the religious faith of the majority of soldiers in a regiment. In theory a Uniate or Catholic priest, a Protestant pastor, a rabbi, or even an imam could be the regimental chaplain, but in practice since most draftees were Romanian Orthodox most regimental chaplains were too.¹²⁷

The creation of the *Episcopie militară*, or Military Bishopric, in 1921 strengthened army-church relations. Its purpose, “the Church will be *in the army* [italics in original], in other words, in an organic way, inside the national military organization.”¹²⁸ The Orthodox calendar dictated the yearly rhythm of the Romanian Army, punctuated by its holidays, while minorities had to do

¹²⁴ Emrich, *In Search of the Lost Ones*, 5.

¹²⁵ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 335-336.

¹²⁶ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 135.

¹²⁷ Moșneagu, *Armata română și cultele*, 139.

¹²⁸ Ilie Manole, ed., *Armata și Biserica* (Bucharest: Colecția “Revista de Istorie Militară, 1996), 172-173.

without spiritual guidance from their religious leaders and faced discrimination for their religious beliefs.¹²⁹ By 1924, officers and chaplains were concerned about the “Adventist danger” in the ranks. Transylvania and Bessarabia had small, but growing, groups of Adventists, Baptists, and other sects.¹³⁰ The pacifism, anti-state sentiments, “foreignness,” and especially proselyting zeal of neo-Protestant religious sects worried officers. Catholics, traditional Protestants, and Uniates were also viewed with a certain degree of suspicion by Romanian officers.

Jewish soldiers were the most suspect group in the army and were viewed with hostility by officers and enlisted men alike. Anti-Semitic officers saw Jews as spies, traitors, or worse (socialists or communists) and believed that they posed a security threat, while the anti-Semitic rank and file resented having hated Jews placed in any position of authority over them. Military service and wearing a uniform would not protect Jews. During the retreat from Bessarabia in 1940, Jewish soldiers were among the first targeted by fellow Romanian soldiers in a wave of anti-Semitic violence.¹³¹ All Jewish enlisted men were eventually thrown out of the army.

Officer-Soldier Relations in the Interwar Army

Despite the changes in the army and the shift in the social origins of the officer corps between 1830 and 1930 the officers of the interwar Romanian Army continued to treat their soldiers like serfs. The Constitution of 1923 guaranteed equal treatment before the law and universal male suffrage to peasants. The monarchy and parliament followed up these actions with large-scale land reform to give peasants land, first enacted by a decree-law in 1918 and followed by another in 1921 that expanded the amount of land expropriated, especially in the

¹²⁹ Johann Emrich missed his Lutheran church services and hymns, see, Emrich, *In Search of the Lost Ones*, 5.

¹³⁰ Locot. Gh. Popovici, “Pericolul ‘Adventist’ în Armata,” *România militară* LVI, Nr. 9 (Septembrie 1924), 82.

¹³¹ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 39, 41-43.

newly annexed provinces where the large landholdings of minority elites were broken up; this was the largest redistribution of land in Romania until communist land reform in the 1950s.¹³² The state made great efforts to make citizens of the peasants, but officers' attitudes altered little. The officers not only looked down on peasant soldiers, but also consistently ignored their needs or training while prioritizing their own comfort and social privileges.

The practice most detrimental to the relationship between officers and soldiers, to the military preparedness of the army, and to its professionalism was the use of soldiers as labor. During the interwar period the officer corps saw soldiers as a source of to exploit for personal gain. Some officers went so far as to equate soldiers with horses in their writings, demonstrating the depth of aristocratic contempt for soldiers, who they often saw as little more than beasts of burden.¹³³ When officers put soldiers to work the labor was sometimes relatively benign, such as having an orderly help an officer's wife do her shopping or doing chores around the house. It was more damaging when it involved large groups of soldiers being leased out landholders as agricultural laborers with the profits going to the regimental economy (or into the pockets of the officers) – a practice eventually endorsed by the army quartermaster as official army policy in the difficult economic time of the early 1930s.¹³⁴ The use of draftees as labor was terrible for the army because it replaced the training necessary to create competent and professional soldiers and had a negative effect on the combat efficiency of the army in 1941.

Regiments did not hire out all soldiers as labor and usually did so only at certain times of year when extra hands were needed, but this did not mean that officers were training soldiers in

¹³² For details on the land reform laws, see, Roberts, *Rumania*, 26-28.

¹³³ General Negrei, "Despre nevoiele ofițerilor și modul cum ar putea fi ușurate," *România militară* LV, Nr. 11 (Noemvire 1923), 1031.

¹³⁴ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 49.

the meantime because of another common practice of simply sending soldiers home on leave for extended periods of time. Officers justified this practice by citing budget shortfalls. Indeed, the interwar period was characterized by a sluggish post-war economy in the 1920s followed by the crisis of the Depression in the 1930s. During these difficult years the state budget was slashed, and senior officers decided to send soldiers home on even longer periods of extended leave and conscripted fewer each year because it was considered too expensive to feed, house, or pay them – much less to train soldiers. In 1925 the situation was so bad that General C. Dragu warned that

an [annual] contingent [of draftees] does not do more in their two years of active military service than *a maximum of 7 months of training*, the rest it passes on leave, in guards and services, [and] in endless drudgery (for example: work in the fields, in vegetable gardens, [gathering] forage, wood[cutting], carrying out special missions [*delegati*], etc) [author's italics].¹³⁵

Even if General Dragu was exaggerating for the sake of his argument, which was the need for soldiers to get at *least* 10 to 12 months of training during their two years of military service, the fact that soldiers were not being trained for combat because they were being used as labor or simply sent home is painfully evident. Nicolae Iorga, a respected historian and minister in the government formed by King Carol II after declaring a royal dictatorship in 1938, gave a speech that year to the officers at the Superior School of War in Bucharest in which he condemned the practice of extended leave because it interrupted training and caused soldiers to forget what they had learned, so when they were re-called to their unit they returned almost as raw recruits.¹³⁶ It is easy to blame these practices on corruption or dismiss them as pragmatic solutions to interwar economic difficulties, but they predated the First World War and continued after the economy

¹³⁵ General C. Dragu, “Reducerea serviciului militar activ. Aplicarea Principiilor democratice (Urmare și sfârșit),” *România militară* LVII, Nr. 3 (Martie 1925), 21.

¹³⁶ Nicolae Iorga, *Stări sufletești și război-e-Sufletul româesc-Îndreptare de ostași* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1994), 176.

improved. The underlaying issue was the clash between the chronically small state revenue of a poor country like Romania and the need for a large army to defend the gains of *România Mare*.

During the *fin de siècle*, Carol I had depended on the Triple Alliance to shield his kingdom and make up for the inability to properly finance the Romanian Army. Romania no longer had such a strong alliance to protect itself during the interwar period and military subsidies from Western Europe dried up, so that even when a third of the state budget was dedicated to military expenses by the late-1930s it was still not sufficient for the army's needs.¹³⁷ Officers did not stop, and the General Staff continued to use draftees as laborers through the end of the Antonescu regime.

Officers remained aloof from their men and often put themselves first before the soldiers. They wore uniforms that were of a much higher quality and more stylish than the cheap uniforms for draftees. The beginning of war in 1941 increased demands and exacerbated shortages. The wartime intelligence reports on the morale of the army on the front consisted mainly of officers' complaints about low salaries, cost of living, and the difficulties in maintaining uniforms.¹³⁸ The NCOs seemed to have aped the officers in this respect as well. Granted, officers required these things to be effective commanders, but the reports always prioritized the needs of the officers, and to a lesser extent the NCOs, while soldiers were expected to make do. This attests to the lack of concern for their men that permeated the officer corps. Not all officers were heartless,

¹³⁷ Christophe Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei, 1930-1940*, trans. Daniela Codruța Midan (Bucharest: Editura militară, 2008); 54.

¹³⁸ There are almost too many examples of these complaints to count, but to reference just a few, officer concern about inflation in 1941 and cost of living, see, ANIC, Fond MR: CM, dosar 56 bis, f. 26; for officers unable to repair their boots (soldiers often only had cardboard soled shoes), dosar 56 bis, f. 332; for early 1942 report prioritizing the need to get officers a new set of clothes (no mention of that need for soldiers), dosar 137 vol. II, f. 70; a report on the dire situation in Crimea in 1943 emphasized the fact officers looked as bad as the common soldiers with worn out uniforms and missing their baggage that had been lost in retreats, see, BMMN, Fond Manuscrite, MSS 676, f. 12.

especially during the war, and shared in the same privations as their soldiers while fighting in the Soviet Union that bound them together in comradeship.

The gap between officers and soldiers is most starkly evident in their food and quarters.

The strict social hierarchy in the officer corps was reflected in different meals: one for high ranking officers, one for lower ranking officers, and another for NCOs, while the soldiers all ate from a common pot. The legendary (or depending on one's perspective infamous) cauldron soup [*bors la cazan*] was a simple, sometimes watered down, soup consisting mostly of beans cooked in a large pot.¹³⁹ The conditions of army barracks also left much to be desired. There had long been a shortage in military infrastructure; before the First World War recruits often bunked in tents due to the shortage of barracks. Soldiers' barracks had common beds, with several soldiers sharing each bunk, lacked bathing facilities, often did not have heating in colder months, and had generally unhealthy sanitary conditions.¹⁴⁰ In contrast officers lived in houses away from the garrison; they even complained if their house lacked a good root-cellars or garden.¹⁴¹

If they could afford it soldiers augmented their army rations. Private Weiss and some of the other ethnic Germans in his cavalry unit pooled their resources to rent a room in a village near their post where they stored extra food because they "always had to buy extra food to survive."¹⁴² An order in January 1941 set out an official food allowance: generals 150 *lei* a day, high ranking officers 120 *lei* a day, lower ranking officers 80 *lei* a day, master sergeants 60 *lei* a

¹³⁹ For concerns about the quality of the "cauldron soup," see, Căpitän Radu Dinulescu, "Chestiuni de organizare și gospodarie în corpurile de trupa," *România militară LX*, Nr. 3 (Martie 1928), 36; Georg Grossjohan, *Five Years, Four Fronts: A German Officer's World War II Combat Memoir* (Ballantine Books: New York, 1999), 122.

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 50.

¹⁴¹ Dana Beldiman, *Armata și Mișcarea Legionară, 1927-1947* (Bucharest: Institutul Național Pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2002), 30.

¹⁴² Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 18.

day, and staff sergeants and sergeants 40 *lei* a day.¹⁴³ Privates only got 25 *lei* a day, a sum so low that reports were soon requesting that it be raised to at least 30 *lei* as “in the current situation [of high inflation] it is impossible for a man to feed himself [on that sum].”¹⁴⁴ Soldiers were expected to augment the bread and meat bought with the 30 *lei* with vegetables and greens grown by soldiers at the garrison in “military gardens.” It is not surprising that Romanian soldiers later regularly pillaged Soviet towns and villages for food when the army had difficulty just feeding its soldiers at home, much less on campaign abroad. This ubiquitous crime was still subject to punishment if an officer felt that he needed to make an example to re-impose discipline.

Corporal punishment, including flogging, was a common practice in the Romanian Army. During training officers and NCOs employed slaps, punches, or kicks to instruct or discipline. A *bâtă* – a small club or stick – was commonly used if draftees did not learn quick enough. Those training officers or NCOs who were especially brutal were hated by draftees. Flogging was more official, employed less often, and used to punish serious infractions, such as being AWOL or for theft. It was often used to make an example to discourage similar behavior by other draftees. It was administered in a sort of ritual as the offender was bent over a table, dropped his pants, and was lashed with a belt by an NCO while the rest of the men in the unit were made to look on.¹⁴⁵ The number of lashes depended on the seriousness of the infraction (or anger of the officer) with a maximum of 25, although as little as five might be meted out. Regulations required a doctor to be present to be sure things did not get out of control and not cripple or kill the soldier.

¹⁴³ Fond MR: CM, dosar 56, f. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., dosar 56 bis, f. 496, f. 332.

¹⁴⁵ After describing the process one veteran called flogging “Antonescu’s mistake,” see, Ciornei, Iași, 2010.

Corporal punishment remained common during the war. Officers employed flogging for a range of infractions endemic to armies on the front like desertion, looting, and rape.¹⁴⁶ They also still informally hit soldiers for less serious errors. Sergeant Evsevie Ionescu recorded a case in July 1942 when he was slapped fourfive times by the unit veterinarian who caught him tiring out the already overtaxed horses after having overloaded a cart against regulations.¹⁴⁷ In another passage from 1942 he succinctly describes the nature of corporal punishment in the Romanian Army and relationship to army hierarchy that applies equally to peacetime and wartime. “During the march I was insulted by a superior and I was listened to by an inferior, this conforming with military rank and indiscipline, [if] the orders are not executed by the soldier exactly, [then] without insults [being effective] it is a case for striking [him].”¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

The social structure of the army changed significantly in the century following the establishment of a modern army by the Russians in the Romanian principalities after 1830. These changes particularly affected the social exclusivity of the officer corps. The aristocratic culture of the officer corps was initially fostered by the practice of selecting officers from the Romanian nobility begun under the Russians. Although the social composition of the officer corps changed, the aristocratic culture in the army did not weaken, on the contrary, the officer corps consciously strengthened its aristocratic identity as the century progressed. The officer corps successfully inculcated aristocratic culture into the non-nobles (military sons and peasants) who were attracted to a career in the army; in part, because its aristocratic culture offered them

¹⁴⁶ In this case soldiers had raped a 10-year-old girl, see, Vasile Scârneci, *Viața și moartea în linia întâi*, 129.

¹⁴⁷ Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 106.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 139.

social status and power they lacked in civilian life. For peasants the army was a means of social mobility. The army was far less successful in attracting officer candidates from the very small urban middle class who did not find army life or the aristocratic culture of the officer corps attractive. The modernization of the economy and the expansion of the state bureaucracy offered them much more attractive career opportunities in the growing cities of *fin de siècle* Romania. For them the army was seen as a step down in social status. Soldiers continued to be taken from the peasantry through this entire period as Romania remained an agricultural society with a small urban workforce. Thus, it resembled a nineteenth more than a twentieth century army.

The aristocratic identity of the officer corps hindered the development of professionalism in the army and contributed to poor leadership and management of soldiers who were treated like serfs, regularly abused physically, and used as labor by the officer corps. The economic realities of the interwar Romanian economy exacerbated the situation. Soldiers did very little soldiering during their short two years in the army because much of their time spent on leave, laboring as agricultural workers, tending the post's garden, or working on various construction projects – uniforms alone could not create professional soldiers. These weaknesses negatively affected the army's efficiency in combat on the Eastern Front after 1941. Nonetheless, during the nineteenth century the Romania had developed a relatively effective army that could mobilize a remarkably large number of men for such a small, impoverished country. Its soldiers' lack of training was exacerbated by material and equipment shortages. Therefore, when the Romanian Army went to war again in 1941, the officer corps continued to trust in the spirit of their soldiers to make up for its many weaknesses.

CHAPTER III

NINETEENTH CENTURY NATION BUILDING, IDEOLOGY, AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

In the titanic struggle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during the Second World War, the motivation of the Romanian Army as a Nazi ally has been ignored, marginalized, and misrepresented. Historians have argued that Romanian soldiers lacked motivation to fight beyond the borders of *România Mare*. This chapter will argue that while Romanian society did not adhere to a fascist ideology rooted in scientific racism like Nazi Germany, it did have its own potent worldview that coincided with fascism in many ways and motivated Romanian soldiers in the challenging campaigns on the Eastern Front, namely: nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. These ideologies bound officers and enlisted men together to forge strong unit cohesion, made the Romanian Army more effective in combat, and motivated troops to fight well beyond the national borders of Romania. Unfortunately, they also contributed to the mass participation of Romanian soldiers in carrying out atrocities against Jews during the war.

Military historians have developed different theories to explain soldiers' motivation to fight. John Lynn believes that soldiers' motivation is based on three basic interests: coercive, remunerative, and normative. Coercion uses or threatens direct physical punishment to force soldiers to fight, remuneration uses material reward (land, pay, or booty) to entice, and normative uses symbolic and psychological rewards or punishments to persuade. Lynn argues that the French Revolution introduced a fundamental change in normative interest because "the prime motivation of volunteers and conscripts was perceived to be their concern for the nation's

welfare.”¹ Thus, the nation took precedence over the life of an individual soldier. This shift in normative interest occurred slightly later in Romania than in Western Europe, but a powerful nationalism had developed by the end of the nineteenth century. This chapter will show that the Romanian Army relied on soldiers’ normative interest based on defending the nation, buttressed by other powerful ideologies that grew more radicalized in the interwar period, to motivate them in combat. These same ideologies were the basis of atrocity motivation too. This is not to argue that coercion or remuneration played no role in motivating Romanian soldiers. Lynn points out that any soldier in any army at any given time is motivated by a combination of these interests, and extrinsic motivating factors like coercion and remuneration will be examined in Chapter VIII, but neither acted as the primary interest undergirding the motivation of Romanian soldiers on the Eastern Front. During the Second World War, Romanian soldiers fought against Soviet “Judeo-Bolshevism” for what they believed was the good of *România Mare*.

The conventional wisdom currently holds that coercion was the primary motivator of the Romanian soldier on the Eastern Front, however, this idea is based on assumption or anecdote and not detailed research. The recent opening of Romanian archives and publication of firsthand accounts make this position no longer tenable. The misrepresentation of Romanian soldier’s motivation began before the war in the Soviet Union. Red Army political commissars told their men that the “imperialist bourgeois-landowning class” in Romania exploited the peasantry and following Marxist dogma they prophesied that Romanian soldiers would refuse to fight, and start a revolution, if war broke out. Obviously, Romanian soldiers did fight after 1941, prompting the

¹ John A. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-1794* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 24.

Soviets to claim that Romanian soldiers were only fighting due to German coercion – with two Germans behind every Romanian forcing them to fight.² British journalists reporting from still neutral Romania between 1939 and 1941 reinforced the idea of German coercion – going so far as to describe the arrival of the German Military Mission in 1940 in the terms of an occupation.³ During 1943, diplomats of the Antonescu regime began to quietly spread arguments in neutral capitals that Romanians was forced to keep fighting on the Eastern Front because of the threat of German occupation.⁴ Coercion, however, fails to explain Romanian soldiers' motivation. First, it ignores the fact that Romanian soldiers enthusiastically participated in Operation Barbarossa in 1941 and the ethnic cleansing of Romanian and Soviet territory of Jews during 1941-1942. They were not forced into the conflict. Second, the Wehrmacht spread itself increasingly thinly as the German Army advanced into the USSR, so the Germans did not have sufficient forces to coerce the Romanians had they had wanted. By 1943-1944, the Romanian Army could have abandoned the war much earlier than it did. Finally, Romanian officers who used physical coercion liberally on the front put their lives at risk. If in peacetime the use of slaps, punches, kicks, and beatings was common on the parade ground, in wartime the situation was very different. Since the mid-nineteenth century, firepower required soldiers to be spread out on the battlefield and could not be closely supervised by officers, so during battles they relied on soldiers' intrinsic motivation. While on the front, physical punishments were still used in the rear to enforce discipline, but

² Pavel Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin văzută de români*, (Bucharest: Editura militară, 2006), 36, 39.

³ German soldiers were described as an “avalanche” or “flood,” see, Clare Hollingworth, *There’s A German Just Behind Me* (London: The Right Book Club, 1943), 180; the British journalists portrayed Romanians sympathetically and as anti-German at heart while labeling Antonescu a German stooge, see, A. L. Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler and Lupescu* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1942), 217, 271.

⁴ This cynical defense of the Antonescu regime has proved long-lasting and very influential, see, Dinu C. Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War (1939-1945)* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2000), 282.

soldiers were less willing to submit to abusive officers. Romanian soldiers had to be intrinsically motivated to fight and if they were not the Romanian Army would have collapsed regardless of any attempts by Romanian officers or German units to force them to fight.

Physical discipline did not disappear in wartime, both informal slaps and official flogging continued to be common, but arbitrary physical abuse was less pronounced on the front than on the training field. Officers or NCOs who had been especially brutal or sadistic during training often requested a transfer once the unit was ordered to the front, fearing for their life. Moreover, recent interviews with veterans suggest that so long the reason for flogging or beating seemed legitimate they were accepted most Romanian soldiers on the front.⁵ Therefore, while coercion played a role – as it does in every modern military – it was to discipline soldiers during training or in the rear, not to motivate in combat and most assuredly not to motivate to commit atrocities. One must find other reasons to explain why Romanian soldiers fought so committedly alongside their German comrades and carried out widespread atrocities against Romanian and Soviet Jews.

Since the Second World War sociologists have focused on the primary group to explain the motivation of soldiers and their effectiveness in combat, but the primary group also played a central role in the motivation of soldiers to carry out atrocities.⁶ The primary group is a small number of soldiers in a larger military unit who form tight-knit bonds with each other. These bonds increase the cohesion and effectiveness of the unit overall as soldiers fight not only for

⁵ A former sergeant major asserted that “if there was one [flogging] a year it was a big deal” and that NCOs were worse than officers about striking soldiers, but he claimed that after the German Military Mission arrived the NCOs abused soldiers less. A soldier who was absent without leave for more than three days was considered a deserter, but if the soldier returned before that “you took your beating and that was it,” see, Halic, Bucharest, 2009.

⁶ Browning touches on the dynamic of primary groups in committing atrocities, but he does not focus on how they shaped the willingness of soldiers to commit atrocities. He does show that soldiers felt the need not to push all the “work” of killing on comrades and if they avoided it could be ostracized, Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 65-68, 85-87.

abstract ideas, but also for their friends in the primary group.⁷ Nevertheless, ideology played an important role in reinforcing primary groups formed by Romanian soldiers on the Eastern Front. Soldiers can develop stronger primary groups if they share things in common, such as language, religion, social origins, or ideology. Romanian soldiers who shared similar ideological beliefs, culture, and prejudices. Furthermore, nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism not only bound together primary groups horizontally, but also vertically, linking soldiers with officers to make class difference less divisive, especially on the front. Combat motivation and, unfortunately, atrocity motivation of Romanian officers and soldiers can be explained in part by the formation of strong primary groups that were bound tightly by a consensus on the perceived threat of Soviet communism to the nation. This consensus was based on long-term underlying factors, which this chapter explores, and materialized after the events of 1940.

The creation of *România Mare* contributed to the radicalization of ideologies in interwar Romanian society. The state enfranchised the Romanian peasantry and promised them progress and privileges as citizens of an ethnic Romanian nation, but soon Romanians saw this dream of national unity under multiple threats. These perceived threats to *România Mare* were internal, both minorities (above all Jews) and corrupted (“Judaized”) Romanians, as well as external, the revisionist states of the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Bulgaria who coveted the territories that Romania had annexed in 1918. These fears contributed to the rise of far-right political parties focused on King, Nation, and God that used populism to attack the state. Far-right groups, such as LANC, and later fascist groups, the Legionary movement the most successful, promised that they would root out the internal threat of Jews, minorities, and “kike-ized” civil servants to keep

⁷ Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 30.

the nation strong enough to fend off the external threats. The interwar period, culmination of the nineteenth nation-building project in Romania, prepared Romanians of all classes to be ready to join in Nazi Germany's anti-communist crusade after 1941.

The introduction of universal male suffrage in 1924 created the conditions for a surge of populism that pushed politics increasingly to the right during the interwar period and allowed the rise of fascism in Romania.⁸ In her seminal work on Romanian interwar nation building, Irina Livezeanu argues that the rhetoric of *România Mare* focused on the Romanian peasant because they were the “lowest common denominator” linking all the newly annexed territories, with their ethnically diverse populations, to the Old Kingdom of Romania. Peasants “became the symbol of the nation and the ally of the state.”⁹ The state enjoined peasants to become educated and join the ranks of the middle or working class, but the domination of cities by minority populations threatened this nationalist dream. Thus, while a yawning social gap continued to exist between the peasantry and the urban elite, it was bridged by the rhetoric of building *România Mare*. The uncomfortable fact that nearly a third of the population, an even greater proportion in the cities, of interwar Romania was made up of minorities made the coalition between Romanian elites and peasants even more important and contributed to the radicalization of interwar ideologies. Jews were singled out by both state institutions and right-wing populists as the scapegoat for the social and economic ills that continued to confront the nation during the interwar period.¹⁰

Scientific racism was not a significant motivating factor among the Romanian rank and file. These racist ideas and theories were popular among a small circle of academics and some of

⁸ Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 42-43.

⁹ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 10-11.

¹⁰ Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 77.

the middle-class elite, however, unlike the other ideologies that will be examined in this chapter, theories of eugenics or racial hygiene do not appear to have penetrated down to ordinary peasant soldiers.¹¹ Romanian soldiers had more sympathy towards Slavic peoples than German soldiers. Nazi ideology, based on decades of elite debates about eugenics that had reached the mainstream in German society, categorized Slavs as *Untermenschen*, or “sub-humans,” unworthy of life.¹² Instead, Romanian rhetoric of “holy war” reinforced sentiments of solidarity with Slavic groups based on common Eastern Orthodox religious faith. Romanian soldiers generally treated Soviet civilians and POWs – except for Jews – less brutally than did German soldiers. Conditions in Romanian-occupied Transnistria were markedly better than in German-occupied Ukraine.¹³ The Romanian Army still treated Soviet civilians harshly at times, especially against those who were accused of being partisans, but primarily citing military necessity.

This in no way denies the existence of racism among Romanian soldiers. Gypsy soldiers faced strong racial bias and discrimination in the Romanian Army, and more generally in society, but most Romanians did not believe in a racial hierarchy similar to that which undergirded Nazi ideology. The Antonescu regime included a few eugenicists in high government positions that

¹¹ For details on the interwar Romanian eugenics movement, see, Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Marius Turda and Paul J. Weindling, ed., *Blood and Homeland: Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeastern Europe, 1900-1940* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007); Marius Turda, ed., *The History of East-Central European Eugenics, 1900-1945: Sources and Commentaries* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); granted some leaders in the Antonescu regime, and a few officers, spoke vaguely of “the Slav threat” or “people of the steppe” and saw the Soviets as an “Asiatic” threat to European civilization, see, Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 79, 86.

¹² Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 6, 111-112, 154-155.

¹³ For the classic comparative examination of German and Romanian occupations, see, Alexander Dallin, *Odessa, 1941-1944: A Case Study of Soviet Territory under Foreign Rule* (Iași, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998), 255-256, 263-264; Romanian officials did not suffer from German *Ostrausch*, or the intoxicating effects of working far from home in a region inhabited by what they considered subhuman Jews and Slavs, see, Charles King, *Odessa: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 226.

favored anti-Gypsy policies. In a propaganda book printed in 1941, Antonescu indicated his own hostility towards Gypsies when he promised that Jews who had “clandestinely” entered Romania would be placed in camps and forced to work “because only this way we will force them to leave [the country],” and not just “kikes” but “all the others – Greeks, Armenians, and Gypsies.”¹⁴ He later tried to deliver on this promise in mid-1942. Anti-Semitism incorporated some aspects of scientific racism. Nevertheless, when defining a Jew in anti-Semitic legislation in 1940, despite scattered references to “biological criteria” and “blood,” the laws continued to be based primarily on religious criteria.¹⁵ The lack of racial ideology, however, did not inhibit Romanians from enthusiastic collaboration with the Germans in implementing the “Final Solution.”

This chapter addresses the long-term factors that motivated Romanian soldiers to fight and commit atrocities during the Second World War. Romanian society was predisposed to take the actions that it did following 1941, especially after the events of 1940 that will be covered in Chapter V, because of nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. The interwar liberal-democratic governments, the royal dictatorship of King Carol II of 1938-1940, and the military dictatorship of the Antonescu regime during 1940-1944 all followed these popular social currents. Richard J. Evans argues that Nazi propaganda in Germany was so successful because it “mainly won over people who were already inclined to identify with the values that the [Nazi] Party claimed to represent.”¹⁶ Romanian fascism won adherents for the same reason. Carol II and Antonescu both kept the Legionaries out of power, but both dictatorships were successful in doing so because they inoculated themselves by adopting more radical positions demanded by a

¹⁴ Ioan Scutru, ed., *Pe marginea prăpastiei: 21-23 ianuarie 1941, Volum 1* (Bucharest: Editura Scripia, 1992), 130.

¹⁵ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 19-23; Romanians differentiated between assimilated and unassimilated Jews, so culture, not race was the key factor, see, Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of the Ukraine*, 6-7.

¹⁶ Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 449.

society shifting ever further to the right. The *Conducător* ruled because he had the support of Romanian society. Romanian soldiers fought, and murdered, alongside the Wehrmacht during the Second World War because they believed in Romania's "holy war," which was based on long-term factors that had deep roots in nineteenth-century Romania.

Nationalism

The traditional narrative highlights nationalism as a factor, but paradoxically in order to prove an *absence* of motivation among Romanian soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front. The conventional argument has been that Romanian soldiers were only motivated to regain national territory and that once they liberated northern Bukovina and Bessarabia – lost to the Soviets in 1940 – they lacked any motivation to take the fight deeper into the Soviet Union.¹⁷ This only makes sense if one ignores the other important factors motivating Romanian soldiers: religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. The conventional argument doubles down by claiming that Romanian soldiers were more interested in fighting Hungary – for northern Transylvanian – than fighting the Soviet Union. This assertion does not stand up to scrutiny either. It rests on the assumption that Romanian officers and soldiers lacked the ability to prioritize the much greater Soviet threat over the lesser threat of Hungary. Regardless, historians have continued to assert that Antonescu alone had the strategic vision to prioritize the defeat of communism over war with Hungary and had to force Romania to keep fighting in support of Nazi Germany.¹⁸

Only a few senior officers became reticent about the size of the Romanian commitment to the Eastern Front in early 1942, but Antonescu easily sidelined them because most officers, and

¹⁷ The first significant figure to make this argument was Erich von Manstein in his memoirs, and has been repeated ever since, see, Manstein, *Lost Victories*, 208; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 61; Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 83.

¹⁸ For an account that portrays the conflict as "Antonescu's war," depicting him as almost singly responsible for going to war in 1941 and continuing it after 1942, see, Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 1-5, 8, 69-71, 84-88.

soldiers, believed that the USSR was the primary threat to Romania and had to be defeated at all costs. Indeed, the Romanian Army prioritized the Eastern Front until 23 August 1944. Soldiers knew that if they did not defeat the Red Army that northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, which had just been liberated through the shedding of their blood, would be lost. Furthermore, the Soviets just might annex more Romanian territory if the Axis lost the war. Moreover, officers repeatedly promised soldiers that the sacrifices they made while fighting in the east would eventually lead to the restoration of northern Transylvania in the west. They believed Nazi Germany would do so if they contributed more than the Hungarians. Additionally, troops encountered Soviet ethnic Romanians (Moldovans) as far east as the Caucasus who they saw as long-lost countrymen that needed to be liberated from “the Bolshevik yoke.” Romanian soldiers were highly motivated by nationalism and not just for the first few weeks of war, it continued to sustain combat motivation in the ranks during combat deep in the Soviet Union for the next several years.

Romanian nationalism began to take shape in the early nineteenth century around the same time as the Kiselyov reforms.¹⁹ It first took root among the educated bourgeois elite and boyars, especially in Wallachia where many boyars sent sons to be educated in abroad, usually in Paris. The nationalism that developed in Romania, and in Southeast Europe more generally, was centered on Romantic ideas about ethnicity rather than on Enlightenment ideas of citizenship.²⁰

¹⁹ Some historians see the uprising of Romanian *panduri* lead by Tudor Vladimirescu in 1821, part of the Greek War of Independence, that resulted in the end of Phanariote Greek rule and the return of Romanian princes to the thrones of the principalities as the first major nationalist rebellion, but the rapid collapse of the uprising seems to belay this argument, see, Florescu, *The Struggle against Russia in the Romanian Principalities*, 98-100.

²⁰ German romanticism dominated the development of nationalism in the Balkans, see, Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), 69-70; R. Chris Davies, “Historical Truth and the Realities of Blood: Romanian and Hungarian Narratives of National Belonging and the Case of the Moldavian Csangos, 1920-45,” in ‘Regimes of Historicity’ in Southeastern and Northern Europe, 1890-1945: Discourses of Identity and Temporality, ed. Mishkova, Diana, Balázs Trencsényi, and Marja Jalava (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 338-339.

These romantic ideas focused on the supposed purity of folk language and culture, elevated the peasantry as the national ideal, and emphasized a mystical connection to the land – which Jews supposedly lacked. A century of nation building followed. Romanian serfs’ exposure to these nationalist ideas was relatively limited before their emancipation in 1864, but nationalism grew rapidly among the peasantry in the 50 years between emancipation and the First World War.

In the 1890s, a series of education reforms and changing attitudes of peasants towards the value of education that increased literacy helped bolster nationalism. The development of print culture is central to spreading nationalism because it provides the means to create an “imagined community” beyond one’s own immediate community based on a shared language, history, and culture.²¹ Spiru Haret’s *fin de siècle* education reforms contributed to the spread of nationalism from urban elites to rural peasantry through his program of village school construction, training rural teachers, and publishing of periodicals with useful information geared for peasant readers. His efforts resulted in a spike in rural literacy; jumping from 15 percent in 1899 to 33 percent in 1912.²² While peasants initially resisted efforts to enforce universal education they soon came to appreciate the value of education, especially for sons since as future husbands and fathers their parents expected them to have the skills of literacy and basic mathematics to succeed in business dealings in the growing capitalist market or in interactions with the state. Daughters, however, were not expected to need these skills as wives and mothers and their education suffered, so the

²¹ For the classic discussion of the importance of “print-capitalism” in the development of the imagined community of the nation, allowing the spread of nationalism, see, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London, New York: Verso, 2006), 36-38, 43-46.

²² Hitchins, *Rumania*, 171.

1930 census reported that 69 percent among men were literate but only 45 percent of women.²³

Therefore, by the interwar period, young peasants drafted into the army were more literate than ever before and thus more exposed to nationalist ideas undergirding the normative interest that the army depended on to motivate soldiers in combat.

While nationalism could bind social classes together it could also set them at odds if the different classes had conflicting priorities while both claimed represented the nation. During the second half of the nineteenth century Romanian urban elites told the peasants that they were the embodiment of the nation and inadvertently triggered the development of a peasant nationalism that ran parallel to bourgeois nationalism. Village teachers taught peasant youths that they were the members of a great nation, officers lectured their men that they were fulfilling a duty to the nation through military service, and politicians claimed their authority to lead in the name of the nation. The Romanian language, the language of the peasants, was exalted over the old imperial languages (Ottoman or Greek) by national poets, the most celebrated being Mihai Eminescu. All these efforts were perfectly in line with the romantic beliefs of bourgeois nationalists, but while nationalists hoped that peasants would take their rhetoric to heart and support them in their cause, they did not expect the peasants to use nationalism to pursue their own goals. Peasants could wield nationalism in their own interests just as the middle class did. When the Romanian nation, represented by the peasantry, seemed to be suffering at the hands of the social elite, then conflicting visions of the goals between the social classes for the nation set Romanian peasants

²³ Ben Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986), 267, 271-275, 279; Dimitrie Gusti, ed., *Enciclopedia României: Volum I* (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1938), 144.

against the Romanian elite. A sign of this divide was a series of local peasant revolts in 1888, 1889, 1894, and 1900 resulting from the onerous conditions in the countryside.

This dissonance resulted in a national peasant uprising in 1907. It began as a local revolt in northern Moldavia against unfair rents and had strong anti-Semitic overtones as peasants first attacked Jewish middlemen, who collected rents for absentee boyar landowners, and local Jewish merchants, to whom many peasants were indebted. This local revolt quickly became a national uprising against the state as a peasant Jacquerie spread south and west to Wallachia. There were fewer Jews in Wallachia, so while anti-Semitism was a motivating factor, it was secondary to the economic policies of the state and the boyar elite. Peasants rampaged through the countryside burning boyar manors and tried to seize control of towns or cities as the Romanian elite became the primary target of their anger. Peasants blamed boyars and the bourgeoisie – in league with Jews – for exploiting the nation.²⁴ The Conservative government fell, replaced by a Liberal one that quickly turned to violence to suppress the revolt. The state employing reliable cavalry and artillery regiments, fearing to call up infantry regiments who might join fellow peasants, whose soldiers fired on mobs leaving many thousands dead and wounded.²⁵ This was the nadir of elite-peasant nationalist relations. Once calm had been restored the Liberal government enacted some half-hearted reforms to redress the plight of the peasantry, but it took the crisis of the First World

²⁴ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 167-169; Roberts, *Rumania*, 3-4; Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 193-194; boyars, especially in Moldavia where the Jewish population was larger, used Jews as middlemen (called *arendași*) to draw up contracts and collect rents from peasant tenants. Boyars and Jews seemed to be allied. A similar phenomenon developed Galicia, see, Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 195.

²⁵ The number of dead remains a debated. The socialist press claimed 11,000, but official records 2,000-2,500, see, Petre Otu, *Mareșalul Alexandru Averescu: militarul, omul politic, legenda* (Bucharest: Editura militară, 2009), 59.

War to finally force the Romanian elite to enact reforms that significantly improved the situation of the peasantry and assured their support for the defense of *România Mare*.

The Peasant Uprising of 1907 shook the kingdom to its foundations and the memory of it influenced the actions of Romanian leaders in 1940 and 1941. The uprising was a key formative experience for many who later became senior officers during the Second World War, including Antonescu. He was then a young cavalry lieutenant and dispersed a mob of 2,000 peasants that were marching on the city hall of Galați by ordering his troopers to fire on them; for his actions he received a medal and a personal commendation from King Carol I.²⁶ In 1940, as retreating soldiers carried out anti-Semitic violence, the General Staff under King Carol II feared a possible repeat of a peasant uprising against the state for its failure to defend *România Mare*. A year later when popular violence against Jews west of the Prut again broke out in pogroms and massacres, the Antonescu regime worried it might spin out of control. Both Carlist and Antonescu regimes took measures to keep it from spreading in Romania for fear of a repeat of 1907.

Romanian elites complained that peasants lacked enough national consciousness, but they simply did not recognize that peasant nationalism had different goals.²⁷ The fact that Romanian peasant soldiers remained committed to the nation during the First World War powerful evidence of the strength of nationalism among the peasantry by the early twentieth century. During 1916, the Romanian Army lost 39 percent of its soldiers killed, wounded, or captured; all of Wallachia and some of Moldavia were occupied by the Central Powers.²⁸ The conditions in unoccupied

²⁶ Accounts disagree on whether Antonescu ordered his troopers to fire into the crowd or over their heads, but General Pantazi believed that 20-30 were killed or wounded, see, Pantazi, *Cu Mareșalul până la moarte*, 13.

²⁷ For an example of elite complaints about peasants lacking national sentiment, see, Roland Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 11.

²⁸ Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 170.

Moldavia, the monarchy evacuated with the Liberal government and set up a wartime capital in the provincial capital of Iași, were terrible. The small territory soon overcrowded with surviving soldiers, refugees, and a million Russian troops and all exacerbated by a typhus epidemic.²⁹

There was concern after the February and October Revolutions in Russia during 1917 that Romanian soldiers would follow the example of Russian soldiers and refuse to respect military hierarchy, orders, or discipline.³⁰ The brutal repression of 1907 uprising was only a decade in the past and Romanian leaders greatly feared that the peasant soldiers would listen to Bolshevik propagandists encouraging them to overthrow the monarchy as part of the world revolution. On 5 April 1917, to ensure the loyalty of the rank and file of the Romanian Army, King Ferdinand I announced in a speech to soldiers on the front that they would be given land after the successful conclusion of the war.³¹ In addition to land reform, perhaps the most important issue to peasants, the government promised universal male suffrage and true equality before the law. This speech helped convinced soldiers to remain loyal to their officers and allowed the Romanian Army to successfully carry out the campaigns of 1918 and 1919 that created *România Mare*.

During 1918, the Romanian Army fought several anti-communist campaigns. The government used the army to protect the monarchy, try to leverage a better peace treaty with the Central Powers in May 1918, re-enter the war on the side of the Allies in November 1918, and defeated “Red Budapest.” First, Romanian troops secured Iași in late-1917. Then they disarmed and escorted Russian soldiers out of Moldavia during 1918 – although there were several pitched

²⁹ There were an estimated 500,000 cases of typhus between February and June 1917 alone, see, Ionuț Isaia Jeican, Florin Ovidiu Botiș, and Dan Gheban, “*Typhus Exanthematicus* in Romania during the Second World War (1940-1945) Reflected by Romanian Medical Journals of the Time,” *Clujul Medical* 88, no. 1 (2015), 83.

³⁰ Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 266.

³¹ Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi, volumul II: Ferdinand I*, 39.

battles with Russian soldiers who refused to be disarmed.³² The opening shots of Romania's first anti-communist campaign had been fired. The Romanian Army occupied Russian Bessarabia on 23 January 1918, taking advantage of an armistice with the Central Powers, acting more like a conqueror than a liberator. It suppressed revolutionaries inspired by the Russian Revolution.³³ Lenin's new Bolshevik regime condemned Romania and severed relations with Iași; beginning over two decades of fraught Romanian-Soviet relations that culminated in the Soviet ultimatum of 1940. A new Conservative government in Iași tried to leverage the Romanian Army to obtain a better peace treaty with the Central Powers, threatening that Romania would fight on alone if the conditions were too onerous, but failed. Romania signed the humiliating Peace of Bucharest in May 1918, but four months later Bulgaria collapsed, prompting the German Army to withdraw from occupied-Romania. Romania declared war on Germany again on 10 November 1918, a day before the armistice on the Western Front, and quickly annexed Bukovina and Transylvania. In 1919, a war broke out with Hungary and the Romanian Army marched on Budapest to put down a newly installed Bolshevik regime there and cemented its claims to *România Mare*.

The annexed provinces of *România Mare* had different levels of national consciousness. Nationalism was strongest among *ardeleni* in Transylvania. This was the result of decades of nationalist local activism and opposition in the Hungarian parliament by the Romanian National Party in response to Magyarization policies adopted by Budapest after the *Ausgleich* of 1867.³⁴ Nationalism was fairly strong in Austrian Bukovina, again due to Austro-Hungarian nationality

³² Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi, volumul II: Ferdinand I*, 46; Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 268-270.

³³ For details on the occupation of Bessarabia, see, *Ibid.*, 278-281.

³⁴ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 222-223.

policies during the fin de siècle.³⁵ Romanian nationalism was weakest in Bessarabia due to the tsarist policy of Russification implemented after 1812.³⁶ Many *basarabeni* (most of whom self-identified as Moldovans) had been sympathetic to Russian revolutionary rhetoric in 1917, and were disappointed in Romanian rule, explaining a lack of hostility towards the Soviets in 1940.

The state began a policy of Romanianization to integrate these provinces into *România Mare*.

Romanianization especially targeted cities in the annexed provinces because they were dominated by minorities. Romanians made up just 58.6 percent of the urban population in 1930, compared to 71.9 percent of the total population, and they made up even less of the populations of cities in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania.³⁷ Romanians, whether peasants coming to find factory jobs to escape poverty or students in overcrowded universities aspiring to a middle-class lifestyle, resented the domination of cities by minorities. Bucharest distrusted the loyalty of minorities and resented their economic power. Interwar Romanian economists became obsessed with the idea of creating a Romanian middle class to replace the minority urban population and politicians embraced the idea.³⁸ Student nationalist activists became increasingly more radical, organizing demonstrations and popular violence against minorities, especially Jews. Jews lived in all the new provinces and were a ubiquitous urban presence in all towns and cities, described recently as “a kind of elite-urban common denominator” that was soon targeted by right-wing populists.³⁹ All minorities were disliked, but special animosity was reserved for Jews.

³⁵ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 51-56.

³⁶ For an examination of the success of Russification, see, Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, 93-97; Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), 41-51.

³⁷ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 10.

³⁸ For a detailed examination of these economists, see, Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to “Romanianization,”* 8-11.

³⁹ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 12.

After 1918, the Romanian Army adopted the moniker *Armata de Intregire*, or “the Army of Integration,” to take credit for founding *România Mare*. The Romanian Army was committed to more than simply defending borders, the state wanted to use it to aid in the Romanianization of new territories. While nationalists had described the army as the “school of the nation” since the unification of the principalities in 1859, this role took on a new importance as the state hoped to use the army to turn *ardeleni*, *bucovineni*, and *basarabeni* into Romanians. In a speech to a conference of officers in 1927 a colonel declared, “The army is the school of the people and forms the foundation on which is built the national edifice.”⁴⁰ The renewed identification of the army as an instrument of nationalist progress – rather than just a pillar of the state supporting elite interests and the status quo – raised the army’s prestige and helps explain why after 1940 Romanians trusted in a military dictatorship under Antonescu for the salvation of *România Mare*.

During the Second World War, the Romanian Army press trumpeted nationalism to the ranks. Every issue of *Sentinela* had a small map of *România Mare* with the “lost territories” of 1940 blacked out. After 1941 the eastern provinces of Bessarabia and Bukovina were restored to the map, but northern Transylvania (and southern Dobrogea lost to Bulgaria) remained blacked out to remind soldiers of their goal. Romanian soldiers join an offensive war against the Soviet Union, but they always perceived it as a defensive war that had begun in 1940. It was clear to all that they were fighting for the return of all of *România Mare* and understood that if they wanted to hold onto northern Bukovina and Bessarabia they had to destroy the Soviet threat once and for all. Furthermore, once “Judeo-Bolshevism” was destroyed, they believed northern Transylvania

⁴⁰ Colonel C. Cepleanu, “Educațunea Națională (Conferința ținută ofițerilor din regimentul ‘Mihai Viteazul Nr. 6’ în ziua de 16 Februarie 1927),” *România militară* LIX, Nr. 9 (Septembrie 1927), 25.

would be returned by the Germans.⁴¹ At the burials of slain soldiers, particularly those in the Mountain Corps whose ranks were filled with *ardeleni*, companies swore oaths to the dead that they would only return home from the front through northern Transylvania.⁴²

Romanian nationalist claims to Soviet territory in the east cannot be ignored. Historians have accepted disingenuous statements made by Romanian diplomats during the Second World War of Bucharest's alleged total disinterest in annexing Transnistria.⁴³ There were nationalist dreams of expanding the borders of *România Mare* further east to bring *transnistrieni*, the largest population of ethnic Romanians, into the national fold. American historian Charles Upson Clark, aided by Romanian funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote a propagandistic history of Romania in 1922 that included a map with the border of ancient Dacia stretching east to the Bug, conveniently including Odessa.⁴⁴ After 1941, numerous articles about the discovery of ethnic Romanian (Moldovan) villages in the USSR to stirred nationalist sentiments.

It should be clear that Romanian nationalism was a powerful ideology that could and did motivate soldiers to fight beyond the interwar borders of *România Mare*. Soldiers recruited into the army were primed to make sacrifices for the restoration of territory and perhaps even expand it due to the nationalist rhetoric they imbibed. It also made them intolerant of those they saw as threats or traitors to their goal that contributed to the bloodshed of innocents. As the war turned against the Axis, nationalism remained important as Romania again came under threat of being

⁴¹ Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvania Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 67-75.

⁴² Scârnceti, *Viața și moartea în linia întâi*, 309.

⁴³ The main reason the Antonescu regime said it did not want to annex Transnistria was because it assumed that the Germans hoped to trade northern Transylvania for Transnistria, see Giurescu, *Romania in the Second War*, 166-167.

⁴⁴ Dacia was a kingdom in classical antiquity that dominated Transylvania, eventually conquered by the Romans, see, Charles Upson Clark, *Greater Romania* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922), folded map insert; the Romanian origin story focused on the inter-mixing of Romans and Dacians, which cause consternation and much intellectual hoop-jumping by the few Romanian eugenicists, see, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 67-70.

occupied, especially because the knowledge of Romanian crimes after 1941 contributed to fear of Soviet reprisals, which will be examined in Chapter X. Romanian soldiers fought for further annexations in the east, the liberation all ethnic Romanians, the defense of the nation, and above all the “re-integration” of the provinces lost in 1940 to restore *România Mare*.

Religion

Religion was one of the most important factors in motivating Romanian soldiers on the Eastern Front, yet it is hardly acknowledged in histories of the war, despite the open and close cooperation between the army and the Romanian Orthodox Church.⁴⁵ The Romanian Orthodox Church wielded great influence during the interwar period. The patriarch, Miron Cristea, was a member of the three-person regency that ruled Romania during 1927-1930 before the restoration of Carol II, and when the king declared a royal dictatorship in February 1938 the patriarch served as the king’s prime minister until his death in March 1939. Miron, and his successor Nicodim Munteanu who was patriarch until 1948, were nationalists, ardent anti-communists, and publicly anti-Semitic in their speeches. In fact, as prime minister Patriarch Miron initiated the first series of anti-Semitic laws that stripped 225,222 Jews (more than a third of all Jews) of citizenship and began the process of depriving them of their rights.⁴⁶ The church and army developed strong ties during the interwar period and priests played an important role in legitimizing the “holy war.”

⁴⁵ Deletant is one of the few Anglophone historians to mention “the religious overtones redolent of a holy war between Christianity and Communism” common in wartime writing and reportage, but does not examine this phenomenon in depth, see, Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 16; a few edited volumes of primary documents in Romanian have appeared that celebrate the patriotic contribution of Romanian Orthodox chaplains during the war, see, Manole, *Armata și Biserică*; or Gheorghe Nicolescu, Gheorghe Dobrescu, și Andrei Nicolescu, ed., *Preoți în tranșee: 1941-1945* (Bucharest: Fundația General Ștefan Gușă, 1999); only very recently has a monograph been published that attempts to review the interwar and wartime actions of the church that contributed to the Holocaust and the post-war whitewashing of the Romanian Orthodox Church’s past in Romanian memory, see, Ion Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 20.

There are a few possible explanations for this religious blind spot in the historiography.

The role of the Orthodox Church (or any church for that matter) in the Holocaust is inherently controversial and this is especially true in the case of Romania where Orthodox Christianity still plays a central role in national identity. General ignorance of Eastern Orthodoxy probably also plays a role, especially among English-speaking military historians. In addition, the Cold War complicated any examination of the Romanian Orthodox Church's role in the Holocaust because anti-communist histories emphasized communist persecution of believers.⁴⁷ This post-war focus on the victimization of the church obscured the role the church played in supporting the Carlist and Antonescu regimes' anti-Semitic policies and Romania's "holy war" against "godless communism." Ironically, the Romanian Communist Party also avoided dredging up the nastier aspects of the church's wartime past. The communists decided to co-opt the church and bring it under their control. After Patriarch Nicodim died in 1948, under suspicious circumstances, the "Red Patriarch" Justinian Marina took his place and collaborated closely with the communists. Therefore, it was not in the interest of the Romanian Communist Party to harp on the Holocaust, especially when the state imposed a religious harmony policy after the 1960s that mandated the patriarch and chief rabbi to express unified support for the communist state.⁴⁸ For these reasons, until recently, the role of religion during the war and Holocaust has been sidelined.

The activity of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Second World War remains opaque because church archives remain closed to researchers. Though the church archives are unavailable to shed light on the internal workings of the Patriarchate or the Orthodox Mission in

⁴⁷ Legionaries actually reinvented the movement as a persecuted "spiritual" movement in the context of the Cold War, rewriting its history in Communist prisons and in exile abroad, see, Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 240-243.

⁴⁸ Popa, *The Romanian Orthodox Church and the Holocaust*, 72-73, 99, 101-102.

Transnistria during the war, official church periodicals from the time are available.⁴⁹ The official journal of the Military Bishopric during 1940-1944 was *Arma Cuvântului*, or *The Weapon of the Word*. Additionally, the records of the Military Bishopric with reports from regimental chaplains are accessible in military archives. These documents reveal the important role played by army chaplains that included sermons, ceremonies, conferences, and conducting propaganda – passing out newspapers, leaflets, or prayer books filled with nationalist prayers to God for victory to the soldiers. These chaplains provided legitimacy to Romania’s “holy war.” Officers and soldiers were encouraged to see themselves as Christian “crusaders” fighting against the godless menace of “Jewish-Communism.”⁵⁰ The spiritual work of the Romanian Orthodox Church and frontline chaplains motivated the faithful in battle against the Soviets and helped justify the destruction of “atheistic” communists and “satanic” Jews.

As nationalism took hold during the nineteenth century it penetrated the local Orthodox clergy. As each new Balkan kingdom declared independence from the Ottoman Porte, a new national Orthodox church split off from the old Greek Orthodox Church under the thumb of the Ottoman sultan in Constantinople.⁵¹ The new Romanian kingdom worked to create a national Orthodox church under its control.⁵² The nationalization of the Orthodox Church made it more legitimate to Romanian peasants – many of whom had worked as serfs on church lands before emancipation and had resented its position supporting serfdom. The Romanian language was elevated to the level of a sacred language equal to that of Greek or Slavonic. These efforts had

⁴⁹ For a brief overview of the Romanian Orthodox Mission’s activities, see, Dallin, *Odessa*, 162-164.

⁵⁰ It was so common that it was used in intelligence reports, see, Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin văzută de români*, 111.

⁵¹ Leustean, *Orthodoxy and the Cold War*, 13.

⁵² In 1872 a law created an Electoral Collegium allowing the state to select nationalist clergy to church leadership, see, Lucian N. Leustean, “‘For the Glory of Romanians’: Orthodoxy and Nationalism in Greater Romania, 1918-1945,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 35, no. 4 (August 2007): 718.

little impact across the frontier in Bessarabia where the Orthodox faithful (Moldovan and Slav alike) continued to view Romanian as *limba prostimei*, or “the language of simple people,” not fit for use in the holy liturgy.⁵³ Regardless, the emergence of a national Orthodox Church in Romania boosted the prestige of the nation, state, and army among the faithful.

The Orthodox Christianity of Romanians became a central part of the Romanian national identity. The Romanian Orthodox Church fully supported the decision to enter the First World War alongside the Entente to liberate Transylvania from the “Magyar yoke.” Some priests even donned uniforms and fought on the frontlines. After the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the local *ardeleni*, Orthodox and Uniate, welcomed the Romanian Army with joy as the nationalist dream was realized. On 28 May 1919, Miron Cristea, then the Bishop of Caransebeș, the Transylvanian diocese of the Romanian Orthodox Church, symbolically blessed the creation of *România Mare* and the “sacred unity of all Romanians” in a ceremony at the grave of Michael the Brave.⁵⁴

The Bolshevik seizure of power shook the Eastern Orthodox world as Moscow suddenly became the capital of an atheist state and the Romanian Orthodox Church stepped in to take over its role as the largest Eastern Orthodox state. Romanians were horrified by tales of anti-religious activism and violence in the Soviet Union across the frontier; those living on the Dniester, which now formed the Soviet-Romanian border, watched as the crosses of churches were removed and replaced by communist stars on the opposite bank. Romanians now saw themselves the primary protectors of the true faith of Eastern Orthodoxy. The Romanian Orthodox Church was raised to the status of a Patriarchate; representatives from the Constantinople, Jerusalem, Serbia, Greece,

⁵³ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 100.

⁵⁴ Leustean, “For the Glory of Romanians,” 720.

Bulgaria, Poland, and the Russian diaspora patriarchates attended the enthronement of Miron as patriarch on 1 November 1925.⁵⁵ The church's position as protector of Orthodoxy was greeted with enthusiasm by Romanians, although it was seen as an upstart church by many in Bessarabia and Ukraine – during the Romanian occupation of Transnistria most Eastern Orthodox faithful (both Moldovan and Slav) never saw the Romanian Orthodox Church as a suitable replacement for the Russian Orthodox Church.⁵⁶ Such close proximity to the Soviet Union deeply affected the church leadership and the lay faithful in Romania, many of whom saw the Soviet Union as a tool of the anti-Christ or a sign of the end of days. During the interwar period, Romanians of all Christian faiths believed they stood as a Christian bulwark against communist atheism.

Religion was not just an important motivator for the pious peasantry, but also for the less religious urban population. Despite a decline in the religiosity of Romanians, especially among those living in urban areas who often only attended church twice a year at Easter and Christmas, religion became more important to Romanian intellectuals and educated elites in defining their national identity during this same period.⁵⁷ The sudden inclusion of a large number of minorities within the new borders of *România Mare* challenged the century-long project aimed at creating an ethnic nation-state, triggering a debate on how central Eastern Orthodoxy was to Romanian national identity. The annexed provinces brought Catholics, Greek Catholics, Protestants neo-Protestants, and Jews into the nation; Romanian Orthodox Christians comprised just 72.6 percent of the population after 1919 – compared to 91 percent before the war.⁵⁸ All of these minorities,

⁵⁵ Leustean, “‘For the Glory of Romanians,’” 723-724.

⁵⁶ Older Soviet citizens in Odessa, who grew up with Russian Orthodoxy, would remark during the Romanian occupation that the Romanian priests “are not the right kind of priests,” see, Dallin, *Odessa*, 166.

⁵⁷ Leustean, “‘For the Glory of Romanians,’” 727-728.

⁵⁸ Sabin Manuila, ed. *Recensământul general al populației României, Vol. II* (Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial, 1938), XXIV.

including Jews from Wallachia and Moldavia who had been denied it before 1916, were granted citizenship and equal rights. This threatened not only to change Romanian citizenship but also Romanian identity. Nationalist intellectuals opposed changing the definition of national identity. Nae Ionescu, a philosopher of religion, declared in a public letter that while it might be possible that minorities could become “good Romanians” in the sense of being respectable citizens, it was impossible that they could never be “real Romanians” because they were not Eastern Orthodox.⁵⁹ Ionescu was just one of many intellectuals who continued to stress the importance of religion to national identity during the interwar period, and later many of them were attracted to the fascist Legionary movement and its brand of mystical Romanian Orthodox nationalism.⁶⁰ Thus, while the urban bourgeoisie was less religious than the peasantry – often also more cynical towards the Antonescu regime’s propaganda during the Second World War focused on “holy war” – religion still played an important part in their identity as Romanians.

Orthodoxy was also a central pillar of army identity, reinforced by the Military Bishopric of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Military Bishopric remained rather ineffectual under its first two bishops, but with the appointment of Partenie Ciopron in 1937, it asserted a greater role. Ciopron, a little-known figure in the army virtually ignored by historians, was appointed on 8 October 1937 and, unlike his predecessors, was relatively young, just 41. Moreover, he was a combat veteran of the First World War who had been wounded on the front as a “soldier priest.” While a strict taskmaster, he was known as a hardworking religious leader, and supported the army without reservation. In a speech he gave when he was appointed bishop he declared that,

⁵⁹ Part of a debate with his Catholic counterpart at the University of Bucharest, see, Roland Clark, “Nationalism, Ethnotheology, and Mysticism in Interwar Romania,” *The Carl Beck Papers*, no. 2002 (September 2009), 17.

⁶⁰ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 122, 128-130, 186, 188-189.

On the front, with weapon [in hand,] I threw out the enemy; from today onwards, with the weapon of the word of the gospel – supported [*secondat*] by the military priests – I will preach, from one corner of the country to the other, to the Romanian soldiers: faith in God, faith and obedience to the King, love of the fatherland, [and] unconditional discipline.⁶¹

During his tenure Ciopron expanded the number of military priests from 30 in 1937 to 108 by 1943, one chaplain per regiment, making sure that each regiment that left for the front did not lack confessional support.⁶² These priests held officer rank (Ciopron himself was a brigadier general) and were kept extremely busy conducting services, burying slain soldiers, and visiting the wounded. While the Romanian Orthodox Church lent its official support to the “holy war,” Patriarch Nicodim personally donated his monthly salary to the army during the war, the clergy of the Military Bishopric had direct influence on the motivation of soldiers on the front.⁶³ Priests legitimized Romania’s “holy war” and emphasized supposed connections between Judaism and communism in their sermons. Additionally, chaplains incorporated propaganda into “national-patriotic-religious” sermons with topics like: “the holy duties of the soldier,” “reifying love and devotement to the country through faith in God,” and “the spirit of sacrifice for one’s nation [neam].”⁶⁴ The activity of these chaplains on the Eastern Front is notable because they and their Christian rhetoric played a role in legitimizing the war as a “crusade” after 1941.

The religious identity of Romanian soldiers significantly influenced their treatment of Soviet citizens, many of whom were Russian Orthodox. Romanian Orthodox soldiers viewed Slavs much more ambiguously than German soldiers, often with pity or solidarity; Protestant or

⁶¹ Manole, *Armata și Biserică*, 181.

⁶² Alesandru Duțu, Florica Dobre, și Leonida Loghin, *Armata română în al doilea razboi mondial, 1941-1945: dicționar enciclopedic* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedica, 1999), 89.

⁶³ Leustean, “‘For the Glory of Romanians,’” 733.

⁶⁴ SIA, Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1568, dosar 260, c. 18.

Catholic Germans lacked this shared cultural connection. Romanian soldiers were shocked by the desecration of churches and icons they found in the Soviet Union. The memoirs and journals of soldiers are filled with admiration for the beauty of Russian icons, brought out from hiding by peasants, and the sincerity of the Slavic faithful.⁶⁵ At times an almost evangelical fervor seems to have gripped the Romanian Army as it advanced into the Soviet Union.⁶⁶ Unlike Germans, who saw themselves as racial “supermen” conquering *Lebensraum*, or “living space,” from the Slavic “sub-humans” for the benefit of the German *Volksgemeinschaft*, or “racial community,” Romanians viewed themselves as liberators of the oppressed from Soviet oppression, including religious freedom for Eastern Orthodox brethren.⁶⁷ This does not mean that Romanian soldiers refrained from committing crimes against Soviet citizens – unfortunately, plunder, rape, and murder were not uncommon – nonetheless, Romanian soldiers were markedly less brutal towards Soviet citizens than German soldiers. Romanian and Soviet Jews (and “fanatical” communists), however, were placed outside this Christian community and targeted for destruction.

When the Antonescu regime announced the invasion of the Soviet Union, Romanians soldiers, regardless of class origins, enthusiastically embraced the call for a “crusade against communism.” On the frontline of Christianity, they had felt threatened by the menace of “Judeo-Bolshevism” for several decades and anticipated a final showdown that would culminate in the destruction of atheist communism alongside their German allies. The close connection between

⁶⁵ For icons, see, Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 17; for Slavic piety, see, Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 96; Scârneci, *Viața și moartea în linia întâi*, 123.

⁶⁶ So much so that German observers believed that the Romanian priests acted more like “Romanian propaganda units” and claimed that they were “forcibly” baptizing Ukrainian children, see, Dallin, *Odessa*, 161-162.

⁶⁷ Ciopron declared in the first issue of the official journal of the Military Bishopric after the invasion that the army crossed the Dniester into the Soviet Union proper in part because the “liberty of the great Russian people was not yet restored,” see Partenie Ciorpon, “Ziua Dreptății,” *Arma Cuvântului II*, Nr. 5-7 (Mai-Iunie-Iulie 1941), 2.

national identity and religious faith made the loss of “holy” Romanian territory even more keenly felt. The anti-Semitic rhetoric of Romanian Orthodox clergy over the years and the anti-Semitic policies enacted by the patriarch as prime minister between 1938 and 1939 helped set the stage for the crimes committed against the Jews east of the Prut after 1941.

Anti-Semitism

The influence of anti-Semitism in the Romanian Army during the war has largely been ignored in nationalist military histories, which focus narrowly on army operations, but has a central role in Western histories of the Holocaust in Romania. An important purpose of this work is to integrate these two narratives to demonstrate that Romania’s “holy war” cannot be properly understood isolated from the events of the Holocaust perpetrated by Romanian soldiers, as well as vice versa, that the Holocaust in Romania and Transnistria cannot be fully understood in isolation from the campaign at the front. The two, combat and atrocity, were inextricably linked. Therefore, it is necessary to understand how widespread anti-Semitism was in Romanian society during the interwar period and how deeply intolerance was rooted in the hearts of most Romanian officers and soldiers who joined in Operation Barbarossa.

Modern anti-Semitism built upon a long anti-Jewish tradition in Romania. This anti-Jewish bias was based on religious differences and Christian hostility of Medieval Europe.⁶⁸ In Romanian folklore, peasants imagined “the Jew” as a godless, even demonic, being because the devil could supposedly influence Jews more easily than Christians who were divinely protected by baptism.⁶⁹ Moreover, Jews were attributed satanic talents and the ability to mislead and cheat

⁶⁸ For an examination of Medieval anti-Judaism and Christianity, see, Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Holocaust: A History* (New York-London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 4-10.

⁶⁹ Andrei Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew: Antisemitic Stereotypes in Romania and other Central-East European Cultures*, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press: 2009), 315-319.

the trusting Christian. Other stereotypes described Jews as intelligent and deceitful.⁷⁰ This anti-Jewish bias made it easy for Romanian anti-Semites in the nineteenth century to stereotype Jews as economic exploiters, particularly as capitalism extended into Eastern Europe and Jews seemed to profit the most from its economic and social changes. There was a surge in reported cases of blood libel, the myth that Jews needed the blood of a Christian child to make matza for Passover, in Eastern Europe after 1881 depicting Jews as literally draining life from Christians.⁷¹ Pogroms occurred with increasing regularity, such in 1899 when university students in Iași attacked Jews on the street and vandalized Jewish shops. Anti-Semites mustered new economic arguments in their political attacks on Jews.⁷² Jews were blamed for all the ills of society and portrayed as an obstacle to national progress as Jews occupied key positions in finance, commerce, and industry. These polemics poisoned Jewish-Christian relations, especially in times of economic hardship, such as after the First World War and during the Depression.⁷³ Politicians encouraged peasants to blame “Jewish speculators” for their financial hardships, scapegoating Jews for the failure of the state to deliver on promises for a better life after the sacrifices to create *România Mare*. The fact that most Jews, whether eking out a living in rural shtetls or in working-class slums of cities in eastern Romania, were also suffering from crippling poverty during the interwar period was ignored by Romanians. They were convinced that “cunning” Jews were cheating Romanians of the country’s wealth and destroying the nation. In 1930, as the Depression began to really bite

⁷⁰ Ibid., 228-234.

⁷¹ This myth originated in medieval Catholic Europe and came to Orthodox Europe only in the late nineteenth century, see, Helmut Walser Smith, *The Butcher's Tale: Murder and Anti-Semitism in a German Town* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 91-133; newspapers sensationalized purported cases of blood libel that often contributed to the outbreak of pogroms, like the one in Chișinău in 1903, see, Edward H. Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1992), 30-34.

⁷² Dwork, *Holocaust*, 16.

⁷³ Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 84.

into the economy, the state passed a law requiring traders (mostly Jews) to forgive the debts of clients (mostly Romanian peasants) that hurried the collapse of Jewish-owned businesses.⁷⁴ In August 1937, Patriarch Miron publicly attacked Jews as “parasites,” pronouncing that, “One has to be sorry for the poor Romanian people, whose very marrow is [being] sucked out by the Jews. Not to react against the Jews means that we go open-eyed to our destruction.”⁷⁵

Inspired by intellectual developments elsewhere in Europe, some Romanian anti-Semites also began to employ racial arguments against Jews. Nicolae Paulescu, the discoverer of insulin, argued that Jews were a degenerate race because their demonic spiritual nature manifested itself physically in intellectual and biological inferiority. As Minister of Health and Social Protection in 1926, he issued a report that claimed that Jewish men were immoral, had much higher rates of venereal disease, and were a danger to Romanian society because they spread disease. Paulescu was also convinced that Jewish men impregnated poor Christian women forced into prostitution who were further impoverished by the need to raise mixed-raced children. In *The Lechery of the Kikes*, a pamphlet based on his ministerial report published several years later, Paulescu warned Romanians that using the nefarious means of venereal disease and racial miscegenation Jews planned “to exterminate us.”⁷⁶ Scientific racism became more common among the educated middle class during the interwar period, but remained less influential among peasants.

⁷⁴ Michael Stivelman, *The Death March* (Rio de Janerio: Editora Nova Frontiera, 1997), 76.

⁷⁵ The translated quote is found in Paul A. Shapiro, “Faith, Murder, Resurrection: The Iron Guard and the Romanian Orthodox Church,” in *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, ed. Kevin P. Spicer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 150.

⁷⁶ Horia Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul lui A.C. Cuza în politica românească* (Bucharest: Institutul “Elie Wiesel,” Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012), 166-170.

Anti-Semitism permeated all levels of society and bound peasants and elites together.⁷⁷

The Romanian state passed a series of anti-Semitic laws between 1866 and 1918 restricting the rights of Jews, periodically tried to expel them, and turned a blind eye to popular anti-Semitic violence. Romania became notorious for its treatment of Jews, so much so that at the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 the Great Powers forced Romania to adopt a minority clause in its constitution, but discrimination continued as politicians found ways around it.⁷⁸ The state avoided awarding citizenship to Jews and the constitution restricted naturalization of Jews on a case by case basis, even then it required special dispensation by the king or a parliamentary vote, so just 529 Jews became citizens before 1913. The only exception was special legislation that granted citizenship to 883 Jewish soldiers who fought in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.⁷⁹ This suggested to assimilated Jews that patriotic military service might offer a path to eventual acceptance.

Jews answered the call to serve their country in the First World War, but their experience was ambiguous at best. During the war they faced discrimination, accusations of treachery, and even violence; but at its conclusion they appeared to have overcome the worst, proven their loyalty, and would finally be accepted as Romanians. Approximately 25,000 Jews served in the army during the First World War. Jews fought on the front lines and worked as sorely needed doctors, who exposed themselves to deadly diseases and enemy fire while treating wounded near the front line. However, Jews were never fully accepted by the Romanian Army. For example, the professionals who served as army doctors were not allowed to wear any insignia of officer rank on their uniforms.⁸⁰ Later, under the Antonescu regime, Jewish veterans who did not serve

⁷⁷ This was not unique to Romania, see, Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village*, 133.

⁷⁸ Pioneering of minority protection, see, Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 5.

⁷⁹ Iancu, *Evrăii din românia*, 196-197, 187.

⁸⁰ Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, xi.

on the frontline had their veteran status revoked because anti-Semites argued that the supposedly cowardly Jews had escaped to the rear to avoid the dangers of combat.⁸¹

In addition to cowardice, Romanian soldiers accused Jews of treachery. Spymania swept through the ranks of the Romanian Army after the disastrous defeats of 1916 forced the army to retreat to Moldavia, and officers and soldiers blamed treasonous Jews for undermining the war effort.⁸² Jews were accused being spies and many of them were tried and executed by military courts on flimsy evidence.⁸³ During (and after) the war, Jews were accused of enthusiastically collaborating with the German authorities in occupied Wallachia because they were “foreign” and sympathized with German culture. The Romanian Army used similar arguments to blame its embarrassing retreat from eastern Romania in 1940 on Jews, but this time associating Jews with Soviet communism. Jewish doctors in uniform were assigned a Romanian guard to prevent treasonous activity. Propagandists and intelligence officers created anti-Semitic material that reinforced soldiers’ anti-Semitism. Romanian anti-Semitism in the First World War laid the groundwork for the anti-Semitic violence carried out by soldiers during the Second World War. After 1919, patriotic assimilated Jews added the names of sons killed in battle to those of the Jewish fallen in the Romanian War of Independence (the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878) inscribed on ceremonial plaques outside the entrance to synagogues in Bucharest. Jews finally became citizens, but by 1922 it already appeared that Jewish dreams of acceptance were in vain.

The following years saw an outbreak of anti-Semitic violence, beginning in Romanian universities among disgruntled students who resented competition from Jewish students. The

⁸¹ Ibid., 111-112.

⁸² Spymania was not unique to Romania and the Russian case was similar, see, William C. Fuller, *The Foe Within: Fantasies of Treason and the End of Imperial Russia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 173.

⁸³ Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 84.

“Generation of 1922” boycotted universities in an attempt to force the establishment of a quota system to limit the number of Jews (and other minorities) permitted to attend university.⁸⁴ The students soon turned to intimidation and violence: shouting down professors in class for teaching Jews, carrying weapons on campus, and finally attacking, beating, and even murdering Jews – sympathetic juries acquitted many of the murderers.⁸⁵ These student activists spread violence across Romania without any real fear of serious consequences as they organized demonstrations. In Bessarabia student activists got into fights with Jews who were members of the socialist *Bund* or Zionist groups and willing to meet violence with violence.⁸⁶ Local police usually declared the Jews to be the aggressors, and even accused Jews of provoking the anti-Semites so that Jews had examples of abuse to report to make the local authorities look incompetent or embarrass the state internationally.⁸⁷ In December 1927, student activists launched a pogrom in the Transylvanian city of Oradea, beating Jews, destroying Jewish property, and burning Torah scrolls in the street. The authorities sent in the local regiment to restore order, but the military cordon did not end the violence because officers and soldiers sympathized with the mob and mostly just watched. They intervened only if things got out of hand or seemed to threatened Christians or their property.⁸⁸

Anti-Semitism was a powerful ideology adopted by almost all political parties, but it was taken to new extremes by the far-right groups during the interwar period. One of the first was *Liga Apărării Naționale Creștine* (LANC), or the League of National Christian Defense, formed

⁸⁴ This policy was called *numerus clausus*, see, Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 243.

⁸⁵ Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 28-31, 57-58.

⁸⁶ The *Bund* was the Jewish socialist party. The anti-Semitic Romanian authorities conflated it with Communism. Some Romanian historians still do, see, Pavel Moraru, *La hotarul românesc al europei: din istoria siguranței generale în Basarabia, 1918-1940* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2008), 154.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 163-167; Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 91.

⁸⁸ Lucian Nastasa-Kovacs, ed., *Pogromul itinerant sau decembrie antisemita: Oradea, 1927* (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România “Elie Wiesel,” Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2014), 74-76.

by the noted law professor Alexandru C. Cuza at the University of Iași. He became a mentor to the right-wing student activists of the “Generation of 1922,” including the future fascist leader Corneliu Codreanu. Cuza’s rhetoric mixed old anti-Jewish rhetoric of the “satanic people” with new ideas of scientific racism.⁸⁹ LANC was a single issue party lacking a platform other than anti-Semitism, nevertheless, it proved able to attract a large portion of the electorate, especially in Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Moldavia where Jews were most numerous and the economy was most depressed following the First World War.⁹⁰ LANC ultimately failed since the other major parties offered broader political platforms in addition to anti-Semitic rhetoric to attract voters.

It should be emphasized that there was no monolithic “Semitic” group in *România Mare*. European Jewry was incredibly diverse with assimilationists, traditionalists, socialists, Zionists, liberals, conservatives, Hasidim, urban, rural, Sephardic, and Ashkenazi – just to name a few of the various forms of Judaism.⁹¹ This diversity was especially evident in Romania, which had perhaps the most diverse population of Jews in Europe after the First World War.⁹² The Jews in the Old Kingdom of Romania were divided between assimilated (Romanian speaking) Jews of mostly concentrated in Bucharest and various Moldavian cities and Orthodox (Yiddish speaking) Jews dispersed in rural shtetls, especially in Bukovina. The annexation of Russian and Austro-Hungarian territory brought further diverse communities of Jews. The former Hapsburg lands contained assimilated (German or Hungarian speaking) Jews and rural Satmar Hasidic (Yiddish

⁸⁹ Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul lui A.C. Cuza în politica românească*, 173-180.

⁹⁰ For election results of 1926 and 1931 broken down by region, with stronger showings in the eastern provinces of Romania, see, *Ibid.*, 107, 134-135; Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 71-75.

⁹¹ For an overall portrait of interwar European Jewry, see, Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe before the Second World War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

⁹² Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 173.

speaking) Jews, while Bessarabia brought more shtetl Jews along with urban (Russian speaking) Jews that included both middle-class professionals and workers. In relative numbers, the Jewish population of Romanian remained small after the formation of *România Mare* in 1918, just 4.0 percent, but in absolute numbers it tripled, from 239,967 to 728,115.⁹³ This increased acted to rekindle *fin de siècle* anti-Semitic hysteria about a “Jewish invasion.” Anti-Semites inflated the number of Jews, claiming a million or more lived in *România Mare*, and called for “the complete elimination of the kike element in the country.”⁹⁴

The Bolshevik revolution added a new element to anti-Semitism in the interwar period as Jews, especially in Bessarabia, quickly became closely associated with communism. For many Romanians, the “godless” Soviet Union was viewed as the new homeland of “the Jew.” Right-wing groups also began denouncing “Judeo-Bolshevism” in their speeches. Army intelligence reports during the interwar period argued that all Bessarabian Jews were dangerous communist sympathizers, responsible for all left-wing agitation, and could not be counted on to be loyal in a future conflict with the Soviet Union.⁹⁵ In 1939, senior officers pushed to preemptively intern all “proven” threats identified by intelligence, but the Carlist General Staff declined to do so.⁹⁶ The officer corps blamed the failure to lock up “Jewish-Communists” for the chaos during the retreat from eastern Romania in 1940, so the Antonescu regime ordered all Jewish men in Moldavia to be intern leading up to the invasion in 1941 due to the threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism.”

⁹³ Iancu, *Ebreii din România*, 150; Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 10.

⁹⁴ Before the First World War anti-Semites claimed that 500,000 Jews (or more) were in Romania and that more were sneaking across the border from Russia. They simply increased the number after 1918 to conform with their paranoia, see, Iancu, *Ebreii din România*, 148; Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 194; Bozdoghină, *Antisemitismul lui A.C. Cuza în politica românească*, 95.

⁹⁵ Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 78.

⁹⁶ All “suspects,” who were proven to be dangerous to the state, and foreign nationals were to be identified and then interned, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar, f. 4, 15-22; in Tecuci there were rumors an officer’s wife was a spy (allegedly for Elena Lupescu) because she spoke Hungarian in private and Legionaries might try to shoot her, f. 10.

Anti-Semitism was already deeply engrained in Romanian society before the First World War and it only grew more radical during the interwar period. Romanian soldiers recruited into the army brought this bigotry with them and also had officers who held similar beliefs, so when a crisis threatened Romanian soldiers of all ranks were already predisposed to see Jews as a threat. Anti-Semitism, especially when mixed with anti-communism, proved to be a powerful motivator for both officers and soldiers, uniting them across class lines in a “holy war” against the USSR. The close association of Jews, especially those in eastern Romania after 1940, with communism led to their eventual destruction in 1941.

Anti-Communism

Anti-communism, more commonly known as anti-Bolshevism in the 1920s and although the term was gradually replaced in the 1930s both terms were still used interchangeably during the Second World War, rapidly permeated Romanian society. Historians have not explored anti-communism in the Romanian Army in any real depth, at best they mention offhand that officers were anti-communist.⁹⁷ This ignores the importance of anti-communism in soldiers’ motivation during 1941-1944. In a sense, anti-communism was the mid-wife of *România Mare* because in the confused aftermath of the Russian Revolution the Romanian Army fought a series of border conflicts against a myriad of revolutionary groups (Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and nationalists of all stripes) in Bessarabia, which continued well into the 1920s, and a major campaign against the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. While officers developed strong anti-communist sentiments, the widespread aversion to communism that also quickly penetrated down to the rank

⁹⁷ Axworthy’s oft-cited work mentions officers’ anti-communism, but claims it was “limited” and not “universalist,” see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 61; Romanian historians have begun to stress anti-communism but focus on the post-war persecution of officers and not its role in wartime motivation, see, Florin Șperlea, *De la armata regală la armata populară: sovietizarea armatei române, 1948-1955* (Bucharest: Editura Ziua, 2003).

and file soldiers during the interwar period that cannot be ignored. While peasant soldiers may not have been well-educated, they understood in practical terms that communism represented an existential threat to their way of life. Therefore, this section will demonstrate that both officers and soldiers were bound together by anti-communism and it motivated them in combat and to commit atrocities on the Eastern Front, particularly against “Jewish-Communists.”

Romanian soldiers were a reliable force against the new Bolshevik threat. Shortly after the creation of the Moldavian Democratic Republic in Bessarabia in December 1917, its leaders invited the Romanian Army to occupy the region because of growing chaos and violence caused by revolutionary groups.⁹⁸ Romanian troops maintain law and order in Bessarabia until it joined Romania in April 1918. As the Romanian Army occupied Transylvania during December 1918-March 1919, it had to suppress an uprising of revolutionary peasants supported by a Bolshevik force of 2,000-3,000 men in Bessarabia around the city of Hotin on the border with Russia. On 11 January 1919, the small garrison in Hotin was overrun with reports of Bolsheviks atrocities against Romanian soldiers and civil servants.⁹⁹ Reinforcements soon arrived, retook the city, and carried out bloody reprisals against civilians suspected of being Bolsheviks. In a foreshadowing of the brutal anti-partisan warfare after 1941, General Headquarters ordered that all Bolshevik forces “will not be counted as organized troops. Consequently, these bands will not enjoy the laws that apply in war to regular troops. All will be treated without mercy, completely and

⁹⁸ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 271-273.

⁹⁹ This description by Constantin Kiritescu in a history of WWI published in 1934 gives a good example of anti-Communist propaganda. “All along the Dniester, from Atachi to Hotin, the victims of the Bolsheviks offer the terrified onlookers a spectacle out of a Dantean vision. Bodies of hanged Romanian soldiers dangling from the branches of trees or telegraph poles.” Quote reproduced in Marin C. Stănescu, *Armata română și unirea Basarabiei și Bucovinei cu România, 1917-1919* (Constanța: Ex Ponto, 1999), 231.

radically exterminated.”¹⁰⁰ The Romanian occupation of Transylvania allowed Bolsheviks to seize power in Budapest. Béla Kun’s Hungarian Soviet Republic promised to defend all territory claimed by Hungary and called on help from Lenin’s Red Army in Russia, threatening Romania with a two-front war with Bolshevism. A Hungarian attack on 15 April 1919 tried to preempt an invasion being planned by the Romanian Army, Romanian forces soon broke through to advance on the Tisa, where they halted to await political developments in Paris and military events to the north where Hungarian forces were fighting a small Czechoslovak army. The Red Army seized Odessa and threatened to invade Bessarabia during May-June. On 17 July, the Hungarian Army attacked Romanian forces on the Tisa, the Romanian Army gleefully counterattacked, crossed the Tisa, and quickly advanced on “Red Budapest,” which fell on 3 August. Béla Kun fled and the Romanian Army occupied Budapest until March 1920.

Following these campaigns, anti-Bolshevik rhetoric was already well-developed in the Romanian Army. General Gheorghe Mărdărescu, named Supreme Commander of all Troops in Transylvania in 1919 and commanded half of the estimated 48,000 Romanian soldiers involved in the campaign against the Hungarian Soviet Republic, proclaimed in his 1921 account of the war that, “Anarchy and terror, enthroned in Hungary by [the Magyar Bolshevik regime], ended under the knee of the Romanian Army that brought, through its action, the reestablishment of the previous rights of Magyar citizens, assuring the order, wealth, life and honor of all.”¹⁰¹ Similar rhetoric was employed during the Second World War after the invasion of the USSR. Now with

¹⁰⁰ Otu, *Mareșalul Constantin Prezan*, 279.

¹⁰¹ General Gheorghe Mărdărescu, *Campania pentru desrobirea ardealului și ocuparea budapestei (1919)* (Baia Mare: Editura Marist, 2009), 180-181.

the western border secured, the Romanian Army refocused its attention on the eastern border and for the next decade repelled a series of small incursions by Bolshevik forces.

Romanian nationalism encouraged ordinary soldiers to see communism as an evil foreign ideology.¹⁰² The promises of the Liberal government of Ion Brătianu, as well as the actions of “Peasant King” Ferdinand I and “Mother of the Wounded” Queen Marie during the First World War, further won support from the peasantry who looked forward to a better future in *România Mare*.¹⁰³ Some observers believed that the mere promise of land reform was enough to buy the peasants loyalty, but whatever the reason (or reasons), Romanian peasants remained loyal to the state and did not heed revolutionary Bolshevik rhetoric during 1917-1919. Soon, the nascent anti-communism of Romanian peasants was reinforced by waves of refugees escaping from the Soviet Union who brought stories of privation and death under the Bolshevik regime.

There were two major waves of refugees from the USSR during the interwar period. The first was between 1918 and 1925, as tens of thousands fled the chaos and violence of the Russian Civil War and communist persecution following the victory of the Bolsheviks. Bucharest soon boasted a sizable White Russian émigré community. After a period of relative calm, a second exodus of desperate refugees began flooding across the Romanian-Soviet border between 1930 and 1934, fleeing persecution and famine in Ukraine.¹⁰⁴ Stalin had led the Communist Party in enacting policies of collectivization and de-kulakization in 1929, which used violence to force

¹⁰² A report by a Major G. Lucasievic on 10 March 1918 already claimed that Romanian peasants were less susceptible to “Russian communist theories” than the local Slavic population of Bessarabia. His wording is a bit ambiguous (he could be associating Communism with Russians or just with the geographic region), but the hostility to Bolshevism is already clear, see, Stănescu, *Armata română și unirea Basarabiei și Bucovinei cu România*, 40-41.

¹⁰³ Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi, volumul II: Ferindand I*, 39, 33.

¹⁰⁴ Alexandru-Murad Mironov, “And Quiet Flows the Dniester: Life and Death on the Romanian-Soviet border, 1918-1940,” in *Arhivele Totalitarismului* 19, no. 3 (2011): 39.

peasants onto collective farms called kolkhozes and requisitioned grain needed to export to sell to fund the rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union. These brutal tactics used by the Soviets created conditions that resulted in a mass famine that killed millions of Soviet peasants.¹⁰⁵ The famine was not a remote event for Romanian peasants, as it was to civilians in Western Europe who could minimize or ignore the catastrophe, because it occurred just over the border in and the famine hit Soviet Ukraine particularly hard. A wave of starving refugees trying to escape the famine and Soviet power risked the dangerous crossing into Romania.¹⁰⁶

The Soviet-made famine in Ukraine demonstrated to Romanian peasants just how much a threat communism was to their way of life and threatened their dream of *România Mare*. These refugees, many of whom were Soviet Moldovan peasants, brought with them stories of violence, loss, starvation, and even cannibalism. The refugee crisis became most acute during the winter of 1931 and according to a contemporary report, “shootings [by Soviet border guards] took place every night [on the Dniester], dead and wounded are found daily, because the flight from the U.S.S.R. continues without interruption since the moment the Soviets came to power.”¹⁰⁷ On 4 March 1932, the issue of organizing relief for *transnistrieni* (Soviet Moldovans) who were still in Ukraine suffering from the famine was debated in the Senate.¹⁰⁸ The fate of Soviet peasants was well-known in throughout Romania. Bessarabian German Immanuel Weiss remembered,

I knew how the communists treated their people. We were so close to the Russian border that news from Odessa came over. I remembered a family by the name of

¹⁰⁵ Kulak was a term for well-off peasants applied to any peasant who opposed Soviet power, see, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution, New Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 125-126; probably 3.3 million dead, see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 53.

¹⁰⁶ A Romanian functionary in Bessarabia in 1932 told a British visitor that at least 100,000 refugees had entered Romania by then, see, Donald Hall, *Romanian Furrow* (London: Bene Factum Publishing Limited, 2007), 164.

¹⁰⁷ Moraru, *La hotarul românesc al europei*, 106.

¹⁰⁸ One of the members of the senate even considered the idea of attempting to negotiate a population transfer “that through the League of Nations, persons who want to cross into the Soviet Union will be exchanged for those who desire to abandon the ‘Soviet paradise,’” see, *Ibid.*, 108-109.

Hein escaped over the Dniester...The Soviets took everything away from the farmers...We had heard how the people over there had nothing to eat. If they had a garden, the Soviets took even that away. People were reduced to eating soups made from cowhides or sheepskins and from leeks growing wild.¹⁰⁹

Consequently, while Romanian peasants may not have understood Marxist-Leninist theories, they understood that communism meant losing one's land and animals by violence, being forced onto a kolkhoz, and probable starvation. Additionally, the fact that Romanian peasants had just received land after the First World War made them anxious not to have it taken away. As one Transylvanian peasant told a British journalist in June 1940, "We chose Germany because we hate and fear Bolshevism and want to continue to have our own plots of land to till."¹¹⁰

Anti-communism pervaded state, army, and society in Romania.¹¹¹ The local Romanian Communist Party was reviled, in large part because most members were ethnic minorities – Jews were especially overrepresented in its ranks, but also many Hungarians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, and Russians – but especially since the party, following the party line from Moscow, supported the break-up of *România Mare*.¹¹² The USSR never recognized the annexation of Bessarabia by Romania. Instead, the Soviets created the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924 with the aim of trying to attract *basarabeni* from across the border to the Soviet cause. It also presented the specter of a future Soviet republic formed from Bessarabia and even Moldavia seized from a dismembered *România Mare*.¹¹³ The threat of a war with the Soviet Union loomed over Romania throughout the interwar period. The Romanian Army had to routinely suppress

¹⁰⁹ Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 28.

¹¹⁰ Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, 40.

¹¹¹ Rebecca Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany, 1936-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 4-6, 103.

¹¹² The most industrialized parts of Romania were in Transylvania and most workers were minorities, see, Dennis Deletant, *Romania under Communist Rule* (Iași, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1999), 12-15.

¹¹³ Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 95.

Bolshevik-inspired revolts in Bessarabia, such as the Tatarbunar uprising of ethnically Russian and Ukrainian peasants in 1924, and the province remained under martial law for most of the interwar period.¹¹⁴ There were several war scares in Romania and numerous border incidents, both real and imagined, with the Soviets. The threat finally became real when the Soviet Union demanded northern Bukovina and Bessarabia or face invasion in 1940.

The Romanian Army's participation in the invasion of the USSR in 1941 only reinforced anti-communism in the ranks as officers and soldiers experienced the "communist paradise" of Soviet propaganda firsthand. Soldiers pitied the terrible conditions faced by Soviet peasants. A few Romanian officers were impressed by the extent of the industrialization of agriculture that the Soviet policy of collectivization had accomplished, such as tractors and other industrial farm equipment or impressively large American animal breeds on the kolkhozes. Nevertheless, most Romanian soldiers were convinced that the average Red Army soldier hated communism and was forced to fight with a "pistol to their neck" held by fanatical communist political commissars that were supposedly mostly Jews.¹¹⁵ The Romanian army press highlighted real and fabricated Soviet atrocities in newspapers to reinforce fear and hatred of communism, reinforced by rumors of Romanian POWs being murdered by Soviet soldiers, stories readily believed by soldiers.

Communism presented a common threat to officers and soldiers alike, both to society and to the very existence of *România Mare*. Communism threatened the to the social position of the

¹¹⁴ Romanian authorities insisted that uprisings were caused by Soviet provocateurs or spies while Soviet authorities claimed there they were spontaneous uprisings on local initiative. After the Tatarbunar revolt, in addition to those killed over 3,000 were arrested and tried in military courts, see, Moraru, *La hotarul românesc al europei*, 69, 75.

¹¹⁵ For an example of "pity and compassion" for Soviet citizens, see, Ezechil, *La porțile infernului*, 28; for an example of admiration of the kolkhoz, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moartea în linia întâi*, 131; army propaganda reinforced this belief, readily believed by most soldiers, see, Wilfried E. Ott, "De ce rezista bolșevicii?" *Soldatul* (Bucharest, România), 30 Septembrie 1941, 2; "Armata bolșevică," *Sentinela* (Bucharest, Romania), 19 Martie 1944, 2; the quote comes from, Scârneci, *Viața și moartea în linia întâi*, 153.

officer corps that officers from boyar and military families felt was their right, and that peasant officers had struggled to obtain through decades of work, training, and sacrifice. Therefore, the Soviet threat was as much a personal threat as it was an ideological one. Additionally, peasants had a clear example of what they could expect under Soviet power due to the Ukrainian famine, and greatly feared collectivization. Therefore, when the USSR shattered the sanctity of *România Mare* in 1940, officers and soldiers were anxious to take revenge and more than ready to assist Nazi Germany in trying to destroy the Soviet state. Anti-communism was a powerful motivation in combat against the Red Army and in committing atrocities against Romanian and Soviet Jews.

Fascism

If nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism was not enough motivation, there was another ideology that motivated many Romanian soldiers during the Second World War that combined all the above into a potent cocktail – fascism. Romania had one of the largest fascist movements in Europe during the interwar period, the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and many members, former members, and sympathizers fought on the Eastern Front. The very success of the fascist movement in Romania was due to the strength of these other ideologies in Romanian society. Fascism fed off and reinforced nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism and appealed to individuals from all social classes: peasants, boyars, intellectuals, priests, bourgeois professionals, civil servants, workers, and army officers. Yet, while fascism had wide popular appeal, it failed to successfully compete with the major political parties – the Liberal and National Peasant parties – at the ballot box because the traditional parties radicalized their own platforms in response to pressure from the far-right populists. Additionally, when the Legionaries came close to being brought to power in a coalition with the National Peasant Party,

King Carol II used the state to crush the Legion. Therefore, while fascism was not a primary motivator for Romanian soldiers it played a role in radicalizing the army on the Eastern Front.

Romanian fascism is one of the few subjects to attract significant interest from Western scholars in recent decades. The historiography of Romanian fascism got its start in 1970 when Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, a Jew from northern Transylvania that fell under Hungarian occupation in 1940 and who was deported to Auschwitz in 1944, wrote a comparative history of Hungarian and Romanian fascism.¹¹⁶ As Holocaust history became mainstream in the following decades, Romanian fascism moved from near obscurity to a niche field. German scholars dominated it until the fall of Communism, aided by access to a wealth of Romanian materials held in German archives, and in 1985 Armin Heinen published his seminal work on the Legionary movement.¹¹⁷ Once archives in Romania became accessible a steady stream of new research was produced by Anglophone scholars culminating in Roland Clark's recent significant contribution. Romanian researchers, previously discouraged from studying Romanian fascism, have begun to produce serious scholarship, such as Dana Beldiman's work on Legionary-army relations. Romanian fascism and its first leader Corneliu Codreanu remain a controversial subject in Romania today, as indicated by the recent publication of two biographies on "the Captain."¹¹⁸

The Legion of the Archangel Michael, a small group founded in 1927 by the law student and ultranationalist activist Corneliu Codreanu, grew to a mass movement within a decade and

¹¹⁶ His seminal work was republished in a second edition, see, Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others* (Iași, Oxford, Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 2001).

¹¹⁷ His work was recently translated into Romanian, see, Armin Heinen, Legiunea "Arhanghelul Mihail," *Mișcare social și organizație politică*, trad. Cornelia și Delia Eșianu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006).

¹¹⁸ An apologist popular biography, see, Tatiana Niculescu, *Mistică rugăciunii și a revolverului: Viața lui Corneliu Zelea Codreanu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017); and a critical scholarly biography by a German scholar, see, Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: Ascensiunea și căderea "căpitanului"* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2017).

contributed to the radicalization of society and politics in Romania. At its height, the Legion had 272,000 members, and many more supporters or sympathizers. In comparison, the Romanian Communist Party never had more than 5,000 members, and its membership dropped drastically after the Soviet ultimatum of 1940 stripped away Romanian territory to approximately 1,000.¹¹⁹ In 1930, Codreanu created the Iron Guard, a paramilitary group, within the Legion; at the time and until recently many referred to the Romanian fascists as the Iron Guard, but the Legionary movement is more correct. After violent electioneering, Iron Guard was outlawed by the state in 1933, but the Legionary movement continued to organize its election campaigns under the thin guise of a legitimate political party *Total pentru Tara*, or Everything for the Country, officially headed by a hero of the First World War General Gheorghe Cantacuzino – scion of princely boyar family. The Legionary movement's greatest political success was after the Depression in 1937, when it obtained almost 16 percent of the vote. The popularity of the Legion prompted King Carol II to increasingly embrace more radical right-wing and anti-Semitic policies through the 1930s, so the Carlist regime would not lose favor with the Romanian public.¹²⁰ The suppression of the Legion in 1938 practically destroyed it and only briefly revived in 1940-1941.

The Romanianization policies pursued by the state fostered rise of fascism in Romania.¹²¹ A group of ultranationalists coalesced who were not content to settle with creating a Romanian middle class by slowly pushing out bourgeois minorities and advocated a nationalist revolution instead. They planned to “cleanse” the country of its minorities, especially Jews, and to “purify” the nation of Romanians who were communists, selfish aristocrats, or corrupt elites. These

¹¹⁹ For relative members, see, Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 1; Deletant, *Romania under Communist Rule*, 24, 26-27.

¹²⁰ For a section on “The Ebbing of Democracy, 1930-1940,” see, Hitchins, *Rumania*, 416-425.

¹²¹ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania*, 13-21; Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 7-8.

ultranationalists rejected liberalism as “foreign” or “Judaized,” condemned political corruption, and were prepared to use violence to achieve their goals.¹²² Many Romanians were attracted to the Legionary movement and its rhetoric about the need to create a “new man” as part of a fascist revolution that would purify Romania.¹²³ Legionaries saw the army as a tool of the corrupt state and defender of the status quo, especially since the Romanian Army was used to suppress right-wing violence. Right-wing demonstrations often resulted in confrontations between activists and soldiers, although violence was usually avoided.¹²⁴ Legionary criticism of the Romanian Army, however, was muted because of its prestige and Codreanu hoped to find allies in its ranks.

The Legionary movement was born from the anti-Semitic student movement in 1922 and took anti-Semitism to new extremes. Legionaries introduced the new idea that Jews were both capitalist exploiters and communist sympathizers, and despite the obvious contradiction in these positions many Romanians readily accepted these new accusations. The Legionaries argued that all communists were Jews, as Codreanu explained, “When I say Communist, I mean Jew.”¹²⁵ In their worldview, Moscow was run by Jews and Legionaries harped on about the threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” or as Codreanu put it in his earthier language popular with peasants and workers, “kike-communism.” The Legion matured at a time when the Nazi Party was solidifying power in Germany, Hitler’s success presenting a new model to follow, and inspired Codreanu’s efforts. The early tactics of the Legionaries were street brawls, intimidation, murder, and assassination.

¹²² Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 7, 9-11.

¹²³ Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *For My Legionaries* (York, SC: Liberty Bell Publications, 1990), 221.

¹²⁴ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 47, 52; for an account of a clash between students and soldiers in the Transylvanian city of Cluj during a demonstration, see, Grosu, *Memorile unui ofițer de informații*, 112-114.

¹²⁵ Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 374.

After 1933, it turned towards electioneering and propaganda to win popular support at the ballot box, aiming to be brought to power legitimately.

At a time when Romanian diplomats were trying to balance foreign policy between the weakening international League system and the growing power of revisionist Nazi Germany, the Legionaries openly supported a pro-Axis foreign policy. In 1937, Codreanu said, “I am against the Little Entente. I am against the Balkan Entente and I have no attachment to the League of Nations in which I do not believe. I am for a Romanian foreign policy with Rome and Berlin. I am with the states of national revolution against bolshevism.”¹²⁶ The Legionary movement was as concerned with the threat of the Soviet Union as it was with domestic “kike-communism” and identified the Soviet Union as its “satanic” homeland. Communism at home and abroad needed to be wiped out according to the Legionary movement.

Many Romanians were attracted to the religious mysticism of the Legionary movement. The Legionaries believed that the Romanian nation required a redemptive rebirth that could only occur through the power of Eastern Orthodoxy; the Legion itself was named after the Archangel Michael who defeated Satan.¹²⁷ Legionary rhetoric became popular with many village priests. These local priests and their families were often nearly as poor as the peasants in the village and shared their hostile attitudes towards the “Judaized” state and corrupt clergy in Bucharest.¹²⁸ Some priests were ultranationalists, a few joined the Legionaries and many more sympathized

¹²⁶ Quoted in Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany*, 33.

¹²⁷ Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 64–65; during the short-lived National-Legionary State the Romanian Orthodox Church easily accommodated itself with Legionary rhetoric and proclaimed the coming destruction of “Satan,” see, Costache I. Paiu, “Patronul legionii,” *Arma Cuvântului I*, Nr. 6-7 (Octombrie-Novembrie 1940), 22.

¹²⁸ In Eastern Orthodox Christianity priests are not required to take a vow of celibacy. Priests are divided between “white” married clergy and “black” celibate monks, see, Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 291.

with it.¹²⁹ The Romanian Orthodox Church never really felt threatened by the Legionaries and priests or theology students who became Legionaries could still have successful careers in the church. The Romanian Orthodox Church was more than sufficiently nationalistic, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist to absorb ultranationalist or fascist priests.

Young men joining the army would likely have had some exposure to Legionary ideas. Whether from sympathetic priests, student activists, or from the “captain” himself – Codreanu rode through villages in the countryside in the style of a *haiduc* leader (these bandit chiefs were celebrated in folk tales as a sort of Balkan Robin Hood) to spread his message and win peasant votes. Legionary rhetoric was popular and attracted members from all classes. Nevertheless, the state, army, church, and traditional political parties offered Romanians many other outlets for their nationalist, religious, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist convictions, thereby limiting the Legionaries’ success. When the elections of 1937 seemed close to putting the Legionaries into a position where they might be brought to power through a coalition government with the National Peasant Party King Carol II decided to violently suppress it. In a manner of months, the Legion was reduced from a mass political movement to a small terrorist organization.

The influence of the Legionary movement on the atrocities committed against Romanian and Soviet Jews by the Romanian Army after 1941 was indirect because of its repression by the royal dictatorship created in 1938. The Legion had a brief period of resurgence after September 1940 when the National-Legionary State was established under the joint rule of Antonescu and the new fascist leader Horia Sima, but the Legion was again repressed by Antonescu, using the Romanian Army, after a Legionary rebellion in late January 1941. This cemented Antonescu’s

¹²⁹ Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 190-193.

hold on power through a military dictatorship. Despite the Antonescu regime's surveillance, persecution, and repression of Legionaries deemed a threat to the state between 1941 and 1944, as well as Legionary antipathy towards Antonescu, many Legionaries, ex-Legionaries, and Legionary sympathizers served in the Romanian Army on the Eastern Front.

After 1941, Legionaries conscripted into the Romanian Army had to hide or change their political convictions, but most found it relatively simple to fit into army culture and could pursue interwar goals of ethnic purification, alliance with Nazi Germany against "Judeo-Bolshevism," and even territorial expansion.¹³⁰ Legionaries (and followers of LANC called *Lanceri*) in the ranks of the Romanian Army were a contributing factor in the outbreak of anti-Semitic violence by soldiers during the army's retreat from eastern Romania in 1940, and rapid radicalization of anti-Semitic violence when the army returned to liberate northern Bukovina and Bessarabia in 1941. Beginning in 1942, hundreds of Legionaries served on the front in battalions formed from political prisoners and soldiers sentenced for various crimes with the possibility of rehabilitation. The officers who commanded these rehabilitation battalions greatly valued the motivation of the Legionary soldiers who fought at Stalingrad, in the Kuban bridgehead, in Crimea, and in defense of Romania. Therefore, while fascism was not a primary motivator for Romanian soldiers during the Second World War, it did cast a long shadow that influenced the army's actions after 1941.

Conclusion

When the Romanian Army invaded the Soviet Union in 1941 nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism motivated the soldiers to fight and to commit atrocities. Peasant

¹³⁰ Roland Clark, "Fascists and Soldiers: Ambivalent Loyalties and Genocidal Violence in Wartime Romania," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 31, no. 3, (Winter 2017): 411-412.

conscripts brought these beliefs with them into the army where both regular and reserve officers, with the help of regimental chaplains, reinforced them through patriotic speeches and education. Two decades of right-wing populism, radicalized by fascist activism, unintentionally prepared Romanian peasants to enthusiastically participate in Hitler's war of annihilation. These factors motivated Romanian soldiers in combat against the Red Army and committing atrocities against Jews and communists during the invasion in 1941, but when the Wehrmacht failed to destroy the Soviet Union Romanian soldiers remained motivated (even as morale waxed and waned) to fight and commit atrocities through 1944. Therefore, while the Romanian Army was not motivated by racial or class ideology like either of the primary belligerents, it was still motivated by powerful ideologies that sustained officers and soldiers on the Eastern Front.

It should be emphasized that while anti-Semitism was prevalent throughout Romania, the Antonescu regime only completely unleashed it against the Jews of eastern Romania east of the Prut. Antonescu believed in "orderly" Romanianization of Jewish property and businesses and wanted to find a way to rid Romania of its Jewish population, but he also feared the chaos and anarchy of popular anti-Semitic violence. On 18 September 1940, Antonescu promised Wilhelm Filderman, a Jewish community leader in Bucharest, after taking power that "if [Filderman's] coreligionists do not sabotage the government, neither directly nor behind the scenes, politically or economically, the Jews will not suffer."¹³¹ Ironically, the *Conducător*'s anti-Semitic bias had him convinced that the Jews were so influential politically and powerful economically that they could derail his regime, so he believed the state to move slowly with the Romanianization of the

¹³¹ Wilhelm Filderman, *Memoirs and Diaries, Vol. 1: 1900-1940*, ed. Jean Ancel (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and Tel Aviv University, 2004), 36-37.

economy and hoped to find a way to force Jews to emigrate abroad to remove them physically. Crucially, his promise did not include Jews then under Soviet occupation in northern Bukovina and Bessarabia that Antonescu held responsible for the humiliation of the Romanian Army in 1940. Nevertheless, despite Antonescu's promise, Jews suffered persecution and violence at the hands of Legionaries between September 1940 and January 1941 with whom he shared power in the National-Legionary State. Legionary police attacked Jews and looted Jewish property while Antonescu watched, frustrated with the disorder and worried it might trigger a Jewish boycott of the economy, but unwilling to intervene on behalf of Jews.

He only halted the violence after the Legionary rebellion, but he still did not hold true to his word to Filderman. Romanianization continued under the Antonescu regime along the lines advocated by interwar Romanian economists, Jews would be squeezed out once Romanians with the skills to replace them were found or trained, and then gotten rid of through forced emigration. During 1941-1944, the state targeted Jews west of the Prut for "legal" expropriation of property, special taxes, and forced labor; for a brief period in 1942 it began preparing for the deportation of Jews to German death camps in Poland. Yet, as harshly as the Antonescu regime treated the largely assimilated Jews west of the Prut it was less severe than the treatment meted out to less assimilated Jews east of the Prut in eastern Romania and Transnistria.¹³² In 1941, inspired by the anti-Semitic violence initiated by soldiers and civilians in eastern Romania, the Romanian Army legitimized their actions and then the Antonescu regime chose to "cleanse the terrain" of Jews in northern Bukovina and Bessarabia through mass deportations to the east.

¹³² Culture, not race, determined treatment, see, Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of the Ukraine*, 6-7.

Romanian soldiers were highly motivated on the Eastern Front. The Antonescu regime could not have fought the war or carried out mass deportations of Jews east of the Prut in eastern Romania to ghettos and camps in Transnistria without the support of soldiers, gendarmes, elites, civil servants, peasants, and workers. After 1941, nearly all Romanian society supported the “crusade against communism.” The long-term causes were nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism, but it was the events of 1940 that unified the country behind Antonescu.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICS OF THE INTERWAR ROMANIAN ARMY

This chapter will examine the politics of the Romanian Army between 1922 and 1939 to prove that the assumed pro-Western sympathies of the officer corps were skin deep at best and show that Antonescu was as much a politician as a soldier who managed to position himself near the reins of power. Previous histories of the politics of the interwar Romanian Army are few, limited to a technical focus, and either avoid addressing later wartime crimes or openly apologist. The extent to which the Romanian Army participated in Hitler's war of annihilation in the USSR can be best understood in the context of officer corps' mentality and its politics. While the army maintained a veneer of apolitical neutrality, the officer corps was as roiled by interwar Romanian political changes the same as society and played an important role in supporting an increasingly authoritarian monarchy. The officer corps largely remained immune to the lure of the Legionary movement but sympathized with many of its beliefs, as illustrated by its support of anti-Semitic policies enacted by the royal dictatorship after 1938. After 1940, the officer corps embraced the military dictatorship of Antonescu, hoped for a war against the USSR alongside the Wehrmacht, and once war broke out officers legitimized and expanded anti-Semitic violence.

The primary account of the politics of the interwar Romanian Army is Larry Watts' semi-biographical history focused on Antonescu. In this study Watts depicts interwar army politics as a binary clash between professionalism and traditionalism – identified with Antonescu and Carol II respectively.¹ Watts unfairly places most of the blame for the army being ill-prepared for war

¹ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 17-20, 44-53, 75-98.

in 1941 on corrupt politicians, claiming that the state failed to provide the army with the funds, materials, and weapons it required. He also, inaccurately, describes Antonescu as an apolitical and professional modernizer opposed by incompetent senior officers in league with the morally bankrupt monarch. In truth, Antonescu exploited the debates on army reform to launch his own political career. His monograph on the wartime Antonescu regime, Dennis Deletant focuses on Antonescu's anti-Semitism and his responsibility for the Holocaust in Romania, which Watts' apologist narrative avoided.² Despite his more critical perspective, Deletant still accepts Watts' depiction of Antonescu as an apolitical military profession, regardless of the fact that he sought political influence and eventually wielded dictatorial power.³ To attribute his seizure of power to simple circumstance, luck, or fate (although contingency undoubtedly played an important role) without also taking into account the general's political acumen is mistaken. Finally, due to his later importance Antonescu has loomed large in histories of the interwar period, decidedly more so than his actual activities and influence in the Romanian Army at the time merit. This chapter will broaden the scope to the politics of the Romanian Army to show that the state did all it could to provide the funds that senior officers asked for, there was little disagreement about the need to modernize, and that the officer corps' politics were deeply conservative.

² Watts' book ends in 1940 with only a short afterward on the war years. He claims that, "Another of Antonescu's unsung, and even more frequently denied, successes was his de facto protection of the Romanian Jews under his control from the systematic murder of the Final Solution," see, *Ibid.*, 345; Deletant basically picks up where Watts left off with a generally apologist account of Antonescu's wartime regime, but focusing on the Holocaust. He argues that Antonescu "was aware of the implications of the 'Final Solution' for the Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe...and made his own particular contribution to the solution of the 'Jewish Problem' by deporting Jews from Bessarabia and Bukovina to Transnistria," see, Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 1.

³ Deletant often uncritically quotes Antonescu, for example when Antonescu told Hitler in a June 1941 meeting that he "was neither a politician nor diplomat. He was born a soldier and wanted to die one." The irony of this statement (Antonescu was acting as both a politician and a diplomat as dictator and had been a diplomat in Paris after the war and active in politics since 1934) seems to have been lost on the author, see, *Ibid.*, 70.

Antonescu was not a progressive, apolitical, professional soldier; in fact, he embodied the traditional social mores and semi-professionalism of the officer corps. While he may have had a competent operational mind, as some claim, he clearly exploited political connections to advance his career as deftly as any empty-headed salon general. Born into a distinguished military family in the city of Pitești in 1882, Antonescu's father was an officer who married into a modest boyar family. Two of his three uncles were also officers. Dumitru Antonescu was a general (with red hair like his nephew) and Ilie Antonescu was a colonel. Although both men died prematurely – Dumitru from an illness and Ilie from a wound suffered in combat in 1916 – but they encouraged their nephew to pursue the family vocation and helped advance his career while a junior officer.⁴ After finishing primary education, Antonescu studied at the School for Military Sons in Craiova before attending officer training school and receiving a commission as a 2nd lieutenant in 1904. Antonescu's family connections soon came in handy as Colonel Antonescu, and his step-father's – his father had divorced his mother and she had remarried – brother Colonel Baranga were both royal adjutants who presented their nephew to King Carol I and Crown Prince Ferdinand.⁵

Due to these connections, Antonescu was easily accepted into the Special Cavalry School in Târgoviște, which set him on the fast track for promotion.⁶ His first post was in the Danube port city of Galați with the 1st *Roșiori* Regiment, where he later fended off a peasant mob during the Peasant Uprising of 1907. In the following years, he attended the Superior School of War in Bucharest, special General Staff command courses, and by 1913 he was already a captain on the staff of the IV Corps under General Prezan. Now Lt. Colonel (soon Colonel) Antonescu made

⁴ Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 1, 5.

⁵ He met with the king and crown prince after passing his exams, see, *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶ Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler and Lupescu*, 14.

his reputation in military circles during the First World War working under General Prezan, who commanded Fourth Army in 1916 before being promoted to Chief of the General Staff (in charge of General Headquarters) in 1917, planning operations. In 1919, Antonescu traveled with Prezan to attend the Versailles Conference. Soon after royal patronage landed him a plum assignment as the Romanian military attaché to Paris (expanded to include Brussels and London, although he mostly stayed in Paris, primarily to negotiate arms deals) between 1922 and 1926. Antonescu had not been the first choice. Initially, the French had selected another officer proposed by the Romanians for the post in 1920 because the French military attaché in Bucharest reported that while “[e]xtremely industrious, [and] of great military worth,” Antonescu was also “extremely vain,” “chauvinistic,” and “xenophobic,” so he would not aid closer Franco-Romanian military relations. The French military attaché spoke from wartime experience when as chief of staff of the French Military Mission he interacted daily with Antonescu and the two had clashed often. The French advisors often did not hide contempt for Romanian officers, causing resentment and conflicts between the allies during the war. The French military attaché assumed that Antonescu would probably not show “any sign of gratitude for the services made by France.”⁷

As this short biography shows, Antonescu was the embodiment traditional army society. He was a graduate of the elite cavalry school, an arch-conservative, an elitist, an ultranationalist, and a patron of the monarchy. He was also an anti-Semite. Antonescu once failed an officer candidate, who had been doing well in his exam, after he discovered that the candidate’s mother was Jewish.⁸ Historians have emphasized his supposedly “rabid” anti-Semitism and “extreme”

⁷ Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 38; Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 187-188.

⁸ He boasted about this in a Council of Ministers meeting, see, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 119-120.

xenophobia, mainly to try to place all the blame for the Holocaust in Romania on his shoulders, but his attitudes were rather unremarkable in the officer corps. It was instead his acerbic speech, volatile temper, and blunt manner that set him apart from other officers and worried the French military attaché. Furthermore, he held the same unprofessional attitudes as most army officers. Antonescu also was not a political novice who just happened to be in the position to take power in 1940. He was a competent politician who used his relationship with the monarchy to advance his political career in the 1930s, becoming a nationally known figure after the Škoda Scandal in 1933, and courted the far right to increase his influence. Antonescu is not the focus of this work, but he played a central role in the decision to go to war, created the situation in which Romanian soldiers perpetrated atrocities against Jews, and personally ordered the deportation of Jews from eastern Romania and later Odessa – that resulted in more massacres. Therefore, it is necessary to show Antonescu for who he was during the interwar period, not an apolitical military reformer, but instead an opportunistic right-wing politician with a military background.

Antonescu was not the only general turned politician in the interwar period. The first was General Alexandru Averescu, a cavalryman who command Second Army during the First World War, who made the transition from military to civilian sphere to become prime minister in 1918, 1920-1921, and 1926-1927. Averescu was reputed to be the most gifted operational mind in the army in 1916 and his role in the battles of 1917 was glorified in the press, making him extremely popular.⁹ Averescu quit the army to enter politics after the armistice was signed with the Central Powers. In April 1918, he formed *Liga Poporului*, or the People's League, a right-wing populist

⁹ In reality, Averescu's slapdash "Flămânda Maneuver" in 1916 trying to cross the Danube was an abject failure and an example of "strategic adventurism." He disobeyed General Headquarters orders to halt Second Army's attack in July 1917, part of the Kerensky offensive, when the Russians collapsed further north. Averescu's decision resulted in useless casualties and exposed his army, see, Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 81-89, 206-209.

group, soon renamed *Partidul Poporului*, or the People’s Party.¹⁰ The People’s Party’s rhetoric included a heavy dose of anti-Semitism that accused the Liberal Party of being in the pockets of corrupt Jews; LANC and the Legion later used similar rhetoric. Averescu’s People’s Party had great success in 1920, obtaining nearly 45 percent of the vote, and brought the general to power. He proved a mediocre politician and disappointed the peasantry because his liberal policies did not match his populist rhetoric, so they turned to Iuliu Maniu and his National Peasant Party.¹¹ Averescu set an example that other politically ambitious officers tried to follow later.

The Politics of the Officer Corps

The officer corps itself was not politicized. During its brief history the Romanian Army remained firmly under the control of civilian leaders – boyar oligarchs (Conservative or Liberal) and the monarchy – and did not develop a tradition of trying to seize political power. Romanian civil-military relations were very good through the First World War, primarily because state and army goals coincided: military expansion, modernization, and special privileges for the officer corps. Pliable salon generals bent to the will of Ion Brătianu who dominated *fin de siècle* politics in Romania. The absence of civil-military conflict continued through the interwar period.

The Romanian Army’s limited involvement in politics is illustrated by the “Stere Case.” On 27 March 1930, three generals publicly walked out of a commemoration for the unification of Bessarabia with Romania because of the presence of Constantin Stere. Stere was a leader in the recently elected National Peasant government and disliked by officers for several reasons. First, and foremost, during the First World War he had been anti-Entente during neutrality, preferring

¹⁰ The league attracted a hodgepodge of former members of the defunct Conservative Party, intellectuals, former officers, and veteran soldiers who had served under the general, see, Otu, *Mareșalul Alexandru Averescu*, 257-258.

¹¹ Averescu tried to come to an understanding with the Liberals, see, Hitchins, *Rumania*, 396-397, 407-409.

war against Russia to free Bessarabia, and remained behind in German-occupied Wallachia and collaborated. Second, Stere's *fin de siècle* peasant populism, called *poporanism*, which opposed socialism, advocated for peasant voting rights, and supported peasant co-operatives was deemed too close to socialism for officers' comfort.¹² The generals' walkout stunned the county. The Liberal opposition used it to discredit the National Peasant government, arguing it was alienating the army and creating the conditions for a military coup, so Maniu had to dismiss Stere.¹³ The fact that such a small act of protest by senior officers was so shocking shows just how rarely the Romanian Army openly participated in politics. Yet the Romanian Army's lack of politicization does not mean that individual officers did not hold political beliefs.

The majority of officers were politically conservative: monarchists, nationalists, and anti-communists. Yet historians have mistakenly fixated on the Francophilia of the Romanian elite to paint officers as liberal. According to conventional wisdom, the Francophilia of the officer corps impeded Romanian relations with the Germans during the Second World War because of their deep commitment to the liberal-democratic values of Western Europe, however, there were no signs of republicanism or even a strong commitment to liberalism in the officer corps during the interwar period.¹⁴ There is a great difference between enjoying a trip to Paris, speaking French at a party, or preferring French *haute cuisine* to traditional Romanian fare and believing in liberal democracy, secular tolerance, or the rule of law. While some Romanian officers attended French military schools, there is little proof that time in France inclined any to adopt republican political

¹² For details on Stere's development of *poporanism* before the First World War, see, Hitchins, *Rumania*, 72–75.

¹³ Scurtu, *România în timpul celor patru regi*, volum III: Carol II, 64–65.

¹⁴ Deletant again uncritically quotes Antonescu when he describes the Romanian elite as "Francophiles," see Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 86–87; Axworthy claims that training in France made officers pro-French "and by extension pro-Western," but offers no evidence to support this claim, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 60.

ideals. In fact, the French Army's officer corps held conservative and aristocratic values, which French politicians of the Third Republic saw as antithetical to republicanism and argued that the French Army as “an alien body within the state.”¹⁵ Thus, it is doubly unlikely Romanian officers were liberalized while training in France. The Dreyfus Affair, a notorious scandal centered on the punishment of a Jewish officer – Alfred Dreyfus – unjustly accused of military espionage by the French Army, divided France between Dreyfusards, those who believed in his innocence, and anti-Dreyfusards, those convinced of his guilt, in 1894-1906. Romanian officers’ Francophilia leaned more towards the France and values of the anti-Dreyfusards (many of whom later joined the Vichy regime): tradition, honor, clericalism, militarism, discipline, and anti-Semitism.¹⁶ The fig leaf of Francophilia, so often invoked by Romanian diplomats during the Second World War, and by historians since, in an attempt to win Western sympathy against the Soviets and to prove Romania was only a “reluctant” ally of Nazi Germany, falls away when one acknowledges the murderous policies against Romanian and Soviet Jews carried out after 1941.

The Romanian Army discouraged political discussion in the ranks, nevertheless, soldiers still held political convictions and formed different factions within the army. Regular officers or NCOs had long been restricted by law from voting in elections. After the royal dictatorship had outlawed all political parties in 1938, 2nd Lieutenant Manolescu recalled that senior officers tried to muzzle political debate among all soldiers, especially middle-class reserve officers who were more likely to be sympathizers of the Legionary movement, but spirited debates continued in the ranks. “Politics were officially banned,” he wrote, “but unofficially we grouped together and

¹⁵ Ralston, *The Army of the Republic*, 3.

¹⁶ Ruth Harris, *Dreyfus: Politics, Emotion, and the Scandal of the Century* (New York: Picador, 2010), 3, 7, 11.

formed little cells of legionaries or socialists; little cells of nobodies, dominated by cadet X, Y or Z in accordance with the galvanizing effect of their personalities.”¹⁷ Manolescu was one of the few socialists in the officer corps and was persecuted by other officers for his left-wing beliefs.¹⁸ During the 1930s, two important factions formed in opposition to each other within the officer corps, Carlists and populists. A third faction, militarists, consolidated power after the other two factions were discredited between June 1940 and January 1941.

The Carlist faction developed in the late 1920s and consisted of officers who supported the restoration of the Crown Prince Carol and later, when he became King Carol II in 1930, his drift towards royal dictatorship. Carlism was not limited to the army but was a wider political movement that attracted supporters from the political elite of all parties, the middle class, and the peasantry who looked for a strong leader in the difficult years of the Depression.¹⁹ Crown Prince Carol renounced his claim to the throne in 1925, in favor of his four-year-old son Mihai, because he wanted to divorce his wife (fulfilled in 1928) and continue an affair in exile with his mistress. Officers’ attraction to the exiled prince is not obvious at first glance because he had a checkered military past at best. During the First World War, Prince Carol had crisscrossed the front visiting regiments to encourage the troops, however, he deserted his post in August 1918 to elope and got married in secret in German-occupied Odessa.²⁰ The incident was hushed up by the government,

¹⁷ Manolescu, *Permitted to Land*, 8.

¹⁸ “My life became a misery. Lieut.-Colonel Procop had his eye on me. Since the day I had spoken so freely approving of Codreanu’s death I became his sole object of persecution. Everybody in the regiment noticed it, and the other officers imitated him. Instead of consolation or tacit sympathy, I got cold looks, harsh commands, and the worst jobs. For hours I had to drill with my platoon...I could hear the ranks grumble...worse of all was the fact that even the soldiers took liberties with me,” see, *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁹ Scurtu, *România în timpul celor patru regi: Carol II*, 67.

²⁰ His lover was Jeanne Marie Valentine “Zizi” Lambrino, who being the daughter of a Romanian boyar family, was not a suitable match for the crown prince who was meant to marry into one of the other European royal families. For a (sympathetic) account of Carol’s First World War antics, see, Paul D. Quinlan, *The Playboy King: Carol II of Romania* (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1995), 30-46.

the marriage quickly annulled, and a meeting of the monarchs, politicians, and generals placed him under 75 days arrest in a remote monastery.²¹ After 1919, the prince suppressed his playboy lifestyle long enough to marry Princess Helen of Greece in 1921 and quickly sire a son before his infatuation with Elena “Magda” Lupescu, daughter of assimilated Jewish converts to Christianity who was utterly unacceptable as a match for the crown prince, resulted in his exile. Yet despite these scandals, Carlist officers supported the prince’s return because they saw in him the chance for a young and dynamic ruler who would provide the stability and strong leadership that they believed Romania needed. Moreover, many senior officers, including Antonescu, had invested much time and effort into building a relationship with Crown Prince Carol expecting it to pay off in promotions and prominent positions once he was king. The prince’s exile was a major blow to these ambitious officers who now hoped that his restoration would benefit them as well.

Carlism gained followers after 1925 because many thought his exile unfair and political crisis was followed by economic crisis. King Ferdinand I, despite his wartime reign and grand moniker as “King Integrator,” was neither charismatic nor very popular, moreover, he was easily dominated by Ion Brătianu, the venerable leader of the Liberal Party, and more embarrassingly was outshone by his charismatic wife Queen Marie.²² “Poor Fritz” had a weak personality and after 1925 he was also physically weak from cancer. Brătinau feared that Prince Carol might try to reclaim the throne and anticipating Ferdinand I’s death, the prime minister pushed through a special act on 4 January 1926 that reaffirmed Mihai as the only legitimate heir to the throne and that a regency would rule until he came of age, which Brătianu expected to control. Following

²¹ Quinlan, *The Playboy King*, 43-44.

²² Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 5.

Ferdinand I's death on 20 July 1927, the regency – composed of Prince Nicolae (Carol's weak and immature younger brother), Patriarch Miron, and President of the High Court of Justice Gheorghe Buzdugan (a trusted, if aged, Liberal) – began to rule for the six-year-old King Mihai I, but Brătianu unexpectedly died soon after and in his absence the Liberal Party soon fractured, removing his guiding influence and making the regency ineffectual.²³ Carlist sympathies in the army, and society in general, grew under the unpopular regency. Brătianu's death also removed a major obstacle to the return of the exiled prince. In 1929, the death of Buzdugan and the Wall Street Crash both greatly weakened the fragile regency. After a failed first attempt in May 1928, with public opinion strongly supporting the return of Carol and the political parties divided, the exiled prince took advantage of the chaos to organize his restoration.²⁴

The Carlist faction dominated the Romanian Army from the restoration of King Carol II on 8 June 1930 to his abdication on 6 September 1940. The monarch patronized his favorites in the army and Carlist senior officers closest to the king joined the camarilla that formed around him. Carol II's camarilla of politicians, industrialists, boyars, and officers who used the king as a patron to obtain favors and profited from corruption in exchange for subsidizing the king's lavish lifestyle.²⁵ Most of the officer corps did not benefit so directly from royal patronage, however, Carol II offered the stability to that authoritarian-minded officers believed that Romanian society needed in the political and economic turmoil of the time. They also hoped that the king would

²³ Scurtu, *Istoria românilor celor patru regi, volumul II: Ferdinand I*, 162, 155; Liberal Party leadership passed to his brother Vintilă, who died in 1930, and then their younger brother Gheorghe, see, Hitchins, *Rumania*, 413, 384.

²⁴ For details on his first attempt, halted by alert British authorities, see, Quinlan, *The Playboy King*, 92-94; Ivor Porter, *Michael of Romania: The King and the Country* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2005), 26-27.

²⁵ Deleant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 41; some revisionist historians have recently tried to describe members of the camarilla as lobbyists, see, Mihaela Camelia Ilie, "Processing the Political Image of a King: An Overview of the Interwar and Communist Discourse about Carol II of Romania," *Revista de Științe Politice* 47 (2015), 207-208.

patronize the officer corps by helping obtain the funds that they believed the Romanian Army required, including subsidies for officers' special privileges.

Very few officers were attracted to a small populist faction in the Romanian Army. The populist faction was made up of officers disillusioned with the corruption and status quo politics of the Old Kingdom and believed that the creation of *România Mare* offered society a chance to reform. Many of the populist officers were junior officers or reserve officers who believed that the Romanian Army needed to be reformed and improved too. These officers gravitated towards the various populist leagues and parties that multiplied after the adoption universal male suffrage. These populist officers supported Averescu's People's Party and then Maniu's National Peasant Party in the 1920s, sadly disappointed by their poor performance when in power. The populist faction briefly believed in the promise of Carlism. King Carol II's rule, however, proved another disappointment to the populist officers turned to the Legionary movement as it grew in strength in the 1930s. While populist officers sympathized with the Legion, they did not usually join the Legionary movement or the All for the Country Party because officers believed that they should be apolitical and participation in politics was officially restricted by army leadership. Therefore, most Legionary officers were junior reserve officers unrestrained by culture or law.

Carol II loved the pomp and circumstance of the military, but he could offer little to its officers because his restoration marked the beginning of the worst period of the Depression in Romania between 1930 and 1933. During these years the army's budget was slashed drastically – in 1932 alone it was reduced by over half – and for a time Romania's military expenditure was the lowest in Europe.²⁶ Also, the king's camarilla quickly made his name a byword for greed,

²⁶ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 47.

corruption, and self-interest. Major Ernest Urdăreanu, who acted as the gatekeeper to the king, was the most notorious Carlist officer. He was a “a typical cavalry officer,” who could speak flawless French, but was not very bright or well-read; he also was conniving, unscrupulous, and ambitious. Urdăreanu managed to worm his way into a position as a royal adjutant in the palace and profited from the camarilla who showed him with gifts in exchange for access to the king.²⁷ Carol II’s reputation for corruption is probably exaggerated because it benefited contemporaries (and later historians) to blame him for all the problems of the 1930s, nonetheless, the monarch’s reputation supplied the Legionaries with plenty of materials for attacks against his corruption.²⁸ Madame Lupescu, the king’s “Jewish” mistress who followed him from exile, soon became the object of profound hatred among the far-right populists. They believed her baleful influence was corrupting the monarchy and undermining the nation.²⁹ A few populist officers came to believe they should employ the violent tactics of the Legionaries to save the crown from corruption.

Legionaries tried to attract populist officers to their movement. Dana Beldiman believes that ideology was the primary reason why a few, mostly young, officers joined the Legion and cites commonalities between Legionary and army values: discipline, respect of hierarchy, spirit of sacrifice, swearing oaths, patriotism, monarchism, Romanian Orthodoxy, anti-communism, and military organization.³⁰ Additionally, she emphasizes the idealism of junior officers who were disgusted with the perceived hypocrisy of senior officers that they believed were more

²⁷ Quinlan, *The Playboy King*, 148.

²⁸ Unflattering stories about Carol abound. The most vulgar were about his supposedly insatiable sexual appetites, but these stories seem based less in fact than in interwar tabloid journalism, Legionary propaganda, and Communist era anti-monarchy propaganda, see, Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804-1999* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 443; Robert D. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History, New Edition* (New York: Picador, 2005), 85-86; Ilie, “Processing the Political Image of a King,” 212-213.

²⁹ Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler, and Lupescu*, 73; Quinlan, *The Playboy King*, 143.

³⁰ Beldiman, *Armata și Mișcarea Legionară*, 33.

motivated by self-interest and opportunism than patriotism and honor.³¹ Beldiman, however, misses a material motivation for populist officers. In the uncertain economic conditions of the Depression, few junior officers could look forward to promotion, increased pay, or more power. Therefore, the motivation of populist officers who became Legionaries was probably not purely ideological, if it had been far more officers would have joined than did. The egalitarian rhetoric of the Legionary movement promised an end to patronage and corruption in favor of merit. This would create new opportunities for frustrated junior officers by removing supposedly corrupt (or “Judaized”) officers from positions of leadership. The red-haired Antonescu was surrounded by rumors about his ethnic origins because in Romania red hair was traditionally associated with Jews.³² Later in 1941, when Legionaries and Antonescu were vying for power, the Legionary press accused Antonescu of being a “Jew-lover” under the control of a “Judeo-Masonic plot” who was delivering the country into the hands of “satanic elements.” He hurriedly refuted these accusations in propaganda booklet printed to defend his anti-Semitic credentials.³³

Despite a few superficial similarities between the values of Legionary movement and the Romanian Army only a few officers chose to join the Legion. Most had joined the army because they were either from the social elite, or else aspired to join it, thus they so were opposed to the egalitarian rhetoric of the Legionaries. Furthermore, most officers saw the Legionaries as immature hooligans creating chaos, in contrast, the officer corps identified itself as the defender

³¹ Beldiman, *Armata și Mișcarea Legionară*, 29.

³² Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler and Lupescu*, 14; in traditional folk superstition “men who had red hair and beard and/or freckled faces were called ruddy men. It was believed that ‘they are Jews,’ or that they are descended of them,’ or that ‘they have their traits,’” see, Oișteanu, *Inventing the Jew*, 59-61.

³³ Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 65; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 57; for Antonescu’s refutation of these accusations and defense of his firm, if gradual, Romanianization policies, see, Scurtu, *Pe marginea prăpastiei*, 129.

of order and stability.³⁴ Antonescu believed that the Legionaries were amateurish and naïve. In the margins of an army intelligence report on the Legion that included an excerpt from a speech by Codreanu refusing to create a detailed political program, which the Legionary leader touted as an antidote to party politics as usual, Antonescu harrumphed, “Not serious. It is not possible to improvise the program of the simplest family farm in a single night, let alone that of an organism as vast as the modern state.”³⁵ Legionaries were considered a threat and populist officers were kept under close surveillance by military intelligence. Only a few retired generals (openly) and junior regular or reserve officers (secretly) joined the Legionary movement, so they had limited influence in the Romanian Army. Only for a brief period between September 1940 and January 1941 during the National-Legionary State did officers court the Legion more seriously.

The militarist faction took shape between July and September 1940 when Carlist officers were discredited after abandoning Romanian territory without a fight and lost their patron after the king abdicated. Militarist officers coalesced around Antonescu. His political maneuvering during the interwar period had placed him in the position to seize power from Carol II, although the 19-year-old king Mihai I who succeeded his father (for a second time) technically remained the head of state. Antonescu began his political career as a Carlist and was appointed by the king as Chief of the General Staff in the wake of the Škoda Scandal in 1933, but he quickly came into conflict with Carol II and broke with him by 1934.³⁶ The general turned to right-wing populism next to aid his political ambitions. Antonescu hedged his bets, courting a number of right-wing populist groups, primarily the National Christian Party – a fusion of LANC and (Transylvanian

³⁴ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 38; Scurtu, *Pe marginea prăpastiei*, Vol. 1, 20.

³⁵ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 144.

³⁶ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 118.

poet) Octavian Goga's National Agrarian Party organized by Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg in 1935 – and the Legionary movement.³⁷ These contacts soon bore fruit. Antonescu became Minister of Defense in Goga's short two-month government before Carol II declared a royal dictatorship in 1938 and fired him.³⁸ Antonescu's Legionary connections paid off two years later during in the crisis following the Soviet ultimatum when, in a desperate bid to save his position on the throne, Carol II turned to him to form a government acceptable to the Legion. Instead, the general was able to force the king to abdicate and declare the National-Legionary State.

The National-Legionary State soon proved compromised as Antonescu came into conflict with the Legionaries over the issue of immediate fascist revolution or continued law and order. During September 1940-January 1941, Antonescu and like-minded militarist officers feared the egalitarian rhetoric of the Legion and subsequent chaos Legionaries caused carrying out their goals that they believed threatened to cripple the state at a time when the General Staff needed to be preparing for war. When the Legion tried to seize power in a spontaneous and disorganized uprising in late-January 1941 they were quickly defeated by the army. The Legionary uprising was presented as a rebellion against the legitimate rule of Antonescu who offered order, stability, and the restoration of *România Mare*. To further discredit them, Antonescu also began to lump Legionaries and Communists together as a threat to the established social order.³⁹ The militarists

³⁷ Rebecca Haynes, "Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State, September 1940," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 77, no. 4 (Oct. 1999), 705.

³⁸ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 163; at the time Carol II also stated that, "This is the last attempt [to cooperate] with this unstable and ambitious man," see, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 120.

³⁹ The Antonescu regime cited the "parallelism of methods on procedures between Legionarism and Communism." This may have been the beginning of the popular relativizing of the Legionaries and Communists that is common in anti-Communist totalitarian narratives, see, Scurtu, *Pe marginea prăpastiei*, Vol. 2, 64; Antonescu believed those migrating from the village to the city (especially Gypsies) as representing the poorest and laziest of the countryside, and he believed that the working class (whether Legionary or Communist) were a danger to the security of the state, see, Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor consiliului de miniștri guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, Vol. II, 181.

began to imagine an even greater role for the army in society and politics after January 1941 and Antonescu effectively ruled Romania through a military dictatorship until August 1944.⁴⁰

The army had not planned on taking control of the state during the interwar period, but when Antonescu seized power he quickly convinced the officer corps that he was only doing so out of necessity to save Romania and they backed his military dictatorship. Antonescu talked of his position as *Conducător* as being forced on him by destiny, speaking of himself in messianic terms.⁴¹ This feeling was shared by many officers because democracy, the monarchy, and even the Western Powers seemed to have failed. Romanian officers felt that they must abandon their traditional apolitical ideal and reluctantly bear the burden of leading the state in a time of great crisis. The nation now stood exposed to the whims of the Soviet Union and the Romanian Army seemed to be the only institution left to defend it. The officer corps fully supported Antonescu because officers believed that he would not only maintain order, but also purify the nation and redeem *România Mare* through a war against the USSR alongside the Wehrmacht

Interwar Romanian Politics

Democracy was never very strong in Romania. During the nineteenth century, political control was exercised by a boyar oligarchy, whether under the Liberal or Conservative party, that ruled over the peasant majority who mostly could not vote. The king decided when to call for a new government that then organized the elections in its favor. The Liberal Party dominated by courting the support of the more numerous “little boyars” and the bourgeois elites by promising liberalization, modernization, economic development, and extending voting rights to propertied

⁴⁰ The militarization of Romania affected all parts of society and economy, see Hitchins, *Rumania*, 479.

⁴¹ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 69, 81-82.

elites. The Conservative Party drew its support from the “great boyars” whose power was rooted in massive landholdings and fought a delaying action against Liberal ascendency. The violent repression of the Peasant Uprising of 1907 by the army under the Liberals showed the thinness of the veneer of democracy in Romania.⁴² The end of the First World War radically changed the political landscape because the Conservative Party collapsed – due to its pro-German attitudes, collaboration during the German occupation, and the signing of the Peace of Bucharest in 1918 – and universal male suffrage introduced true mass politics for the first time.

The introduction of mass politics initiated a new debate between two groups in Romania, described by Keith Hitchins as “Europeanists” and “Traditionalists.” The Europeanists were mostly Liberals who wanted to continue with their project of modernization and liberalization in imitation of Western Europe while the Traditionalists were right-wing populists who sought an “organic” and uniquely Romanian path to modernity based in the peasantry and Orthodoxy.⁴³ In the aftermath of the First World War a myriad of right-wing groups with Traditionalist beliefs formed: the Peasant Party, the People’s Party, the Vlad Tepeş League, LANC, and others – some lasting only a few years. The Liberal Party continued to dominate Romanian politics because of its organization, continuity, and electoral fraud, however, the Liberal Party had now become the establishment under constant attack by the growing power of populist groups.

The most successful populist group was the National Peasant Party, a 1926 fusion of the (Old Kingdom) Peasant Party and the (Transylvanian) National Party under Maniu. In 1929, it won in a landslide, obtaining just over 77 percent of the vote, which was a double victory for the

⁴² Conservatives and Liberals were united in the face of the peasant threat, see, Hitchins, *Rumania*, 94-97, 114-115.

⁴³ For an examination of this intellectual debates, see, *Ibid.*, 292-319.

populist right because it was the Liberal Party that had organize the elections. This was the first time that the party that organized the elections had lost, despite the normal political chicanery at the polling places.⁴⁴ The new National Peasant government quickly proved a disappointment, however, because once in power it acted little differently from the Liberals and proved unable to solve the problems caused by the sudden crisis of Depression that started soon after the election. In a move to buttress his failing government, Maniu decided to appeal to the upsurge in Carlism to negotiate the restoration of Carol II. He hoped that the new king would feel indebted to him and support the National Peasants against the Liberals, the party that had exiled the prince.

Carol II had other plans and sought to increase his power by associated himself with the Romanian Army. The monarchy had been a martial one since Carol I, the royal crown was made of iron from melted down Turkish guns taken after the siege of Plevna in 1877, but Carol II took militarism to new heights in the 1930s. The monarch recognized the value of militarism as a tool for domestic politics. One of his first acts, within a week of his restoration, was to make Prezan and Averescu the first marshals of the Romanian Army for their wartime leadership. He used the official ceremony in October 1930 as a public relations event to celebrate the Romanian Army in the First World War and emphasize crown's central role as head of the army in creating *România Mare*.⁴⁵ Carol II of course whitewashed his own wartime record. Carlism proved popular and its militarism won over the officer corps, which supported the king throughout the turbulent decade, and when Carol II declared a royal dictatorship he raised himself to the rank of marshal. Only a few officers in the small populist fraction within the officer corps turned against the king.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 413-414.

⁴⁵ Otu, *Mareșalul Constantin Prezan*, 344.

Populist officers were not anti-monarchy, but anti-Carlist and some came to believe that they had to take action to save the monarchy from itself. Madame Lupescu personified for many on the far right the corruption of Carol II, but the king refused to abandon her and getting in her good graces soon became the quickest way to gain favors from the king.⁴⁶ Industrialists, such as the rivals Nicolae Malaxa and Max Auschnitt (born to Jewish parents in Galați he converted to Catholicism in 1934), plied the king, his mistress, and members of the camarilla with houses, cars, cash, and other expensive gifts; Carol II skimmed large amounts from the state budget as well.⁴⁷ A few populist officers became convinced that the restoration of Carol II was a mistake because he was under the influence of corrupt Jews who were threatening to destroy Romania by undermining the Romanian Army. The continued economic crisis of the Depression had slashed the army budget, and prevented promotions, further disillusioning these populist officers.

A group of officers decided that they would take radical action inspired by the Legionary movement. Legionaries supported monarchism, but they despised Lupescu and other Jews in the camarilla and opposed the typical election chicanery that the National Peasant government had continued after taking power. During the 1933 elections, Codreanu responded by creating “death teams” to make sure the Legionary message was heard, triggering a year of electoral violence, and on 10 December newly elected Liberal prime minister, Ion Ducă, outlawed the Iron Guard. On 29 December, a group of Legionaries assassinated him in reprisal. The assassins did not try to escape and proudly declared their actions as patriotic when arrested and tried.⁴⁸ A state of siege

⁴⁶ According to one insider, “If a person approved of their relationship, he was the King’s friend; if he opposed it, he was his enemy,” see, Quinlan, *The Playboy King*, 124.

⁴⁷ Hannah Pakula, *The Last Romantic: A Biography of Queen Marie of Roumania* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 394.

⁴⁸ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 100.

was declared, and censorship increased; the Liberal government made these temporary measures permanent in March 1934 and renewed them each year.⁴⁹ The “selfless” and “honorable” act of the assassins was admired by populist officers who sympathized with the Legionaries and their anti-corruption, anti-Semitic arguments. In April 1934, eight disillusioned officers including a lieutenant-colonel, a major, and several captains led by General Victor Recup and inspired by the Legionaries planned to throw grenades at the royal motorcade, but the conspiracy was betrayed by a sergeant who overheard their plans. The conspirators were arrested, sentenced to ten years in a military prison, and fined 110,000 *lei*. At the court martial, they invoked patriotic motives, arguing they had hoped to kill Lupescu to remove her corrupting influence over the king.⁵⁰ The group was an isolated case; however, the officer corps remained a reliable ally of Carol II.

The Legionaries continued to attract a few populist officers. On 20 March 1935, retired general and First World War hero Gheorghe Cantacuzino-*Grănicerul*, under Codreanu’s urging, formed the All for the Country Party.⁵¹ The All for the Country Party became a legal cover for the outlawed Legion to return to politics and Carol II allowed it to function because he hoped to persuade the Legionaries, who were firm monarchists, to accept him and harness their popular support. As the Legionary movement grew in power Antonescu began to meet with Codreanu and other Legionary leaders between 1935 and 1937.⁵² In the 1937 elections, the king’s chosen party, the Liberals, received just below 40 percent of the vote, while the National Peasants got

⁴⁹ Miron, *Jandarmeria română în perioada interbelică*, 80-81.

⁵⁰ Quinlan, *The Playboy King*, 150-151.

⁵¹ Cantacuzino was a member of one of oldest princely families in Romania. He earned his moniker *Grănicerul* in the First World War while commanding the 1st *Grăniceri* Regiment during the bloody defensive battles in Predeal Pass in 1916. He abandoned conservative politics after the war, joining Averescu’s People’s Party and later the Legion. His name gave great respectability to the Legion, see, Heinen, *Legiunea “Arhanghelul Mihail,”* 254-256.

⁵² Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 40.

just over 20 percent and All for the Country got almost 16 percent. While the Liberal Party won, it did not reach the 40 percent benchmark required by a 1926 electoral law for a party to obtain a “premium” of an extra 50 percent of the seats in parliament designed to give the victorious party an unbeatable supermajority.⁵³ Without these extra seats the Liberals would be outnumbered by in parliament. The election results shocked Carol II who feared a coalition of right-wing groups. The National Peasants opposed Carlism, and the fact that Maniu had agreed to an electoral truce with Codreanu raised the possibility that they would form a coalition with the Legionaries and other far-right groups to form a government.⁵⁴ This possibility was even more likely because the Liberal Party was divided between anti-Carlists and Carlists, who had unified during the election but could very well split apart again after this defeat. Threatened by this far-right alliance hostile to his reign, Carol II asked the National Christian Party under Octavian Goga, a personal friend of Antonescu, to form a government, despite having only won 10 percent of the vote.

The Goga government lasted just two chaotic months before Carol II declared his royal dictatorship on 20 February 1938 and passed a new authoritarian constitution making him the *Conducător*. Codreanu was arrested for libel in April, his trial lasted three days, Antonescu and Maniu both testified on behalf of the fascist leader, but the verdict was guilty and Codreanu was sentenced to six months in prison. He was then tried for sedition soon after, again quickly found guilty, and sentenced to ten years hard labor. Codreanu did not serve it. On 30 November 1938,

⁵³ The king chose the party who would organize the elections and that party always won the votes it needed in the election to dominate the parliament, at least until 1937, see, Hitchins, *Rumania*, 419, 384.

⁵⁴ The right-wing parties (Legionaries, National Peasants, and even some right-wing Liberal splinter groups) joined in an electoral alliance against the Carlist Liberals, see, Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others*, 410; Maniu found much to admire in the Legionary movement and Codreanu personally, so this alliance was one made of similar ideology and goals, see, Rebecca Ann Haynes, “Reluctant Allies? Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu against King Carol II of Romania,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 85, no. 1 (January 2007), 132-134.

under orders from the king, he and 13 other Legionary leaders were taken from Jilava Prison to be strangled and shot.⁵⁵ The official story was that they were shot while trying to escape. The rest of the Legion came under intense state repression and remaining leaders went underground, breaking it into small, isolated factions arguing over who was the successor to Codreanu. Horia Sima emerged as the most influential and began reorganizing the Legionary movement in hiding from Bucharest.⁵⁶ Carol II got the troublesome Antonescu out of the way by demoting him from Ministry of Defense to commander of III Corps in Chișinău, the provincial capital of benighted Bessarabia and about as far from Bucharest as possible, effectively exiling him.

Nonetheless, even from afar Antonescu was a thorn in the side of the king. He toured the prisons of Chișinău, traditionally filled with leftist activists (including Zionists and Bundists) and communists, but now filled with Legionaries. The Legionaries faced difficult prison conditions; at a time when soldiers received 16 *lei* a day for food, inmates were allocated just 3 *lei*'s worth of food a day.⁵⁷ Antonescu wrote a report that publicly called for conditions for the Legionaries to be improved, much to the annoyance of Carol II, so Patriarch Miron's new government declared that the report was biased and ignored it.⁵⁸ Antonescu had III Corps taken away from him and was passed over for promotion, causing him to resign from the army. Therefore, the Legionary movement and right-wing populists had been temporarily stymied by Carlist authoritarianism.

The royal dictatorship of King Carol II did away completely with liberal democracy and Prime Minister Patriarch Miron continued anti-Semitic policies begun by the Goga government

⁵⁵ Heinen, *Legiunea "Archanghelul Mihail,"* 350-351.

⁵⁶ Horia Sima won the clandestine power struggle partly just by establishing himself in Bucharest, see, Ilarion Tiu, *Misarea legionară după Corneliu Codreanu: Dictatura regală* (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2007), 77.

⁵⁷ Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte,* 72.

⁵⁸ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation,* 121.

in an attempt to neutralize far-right criticism of the king being a “Jew lover”. The state restricted Jews from liberal professions, limited their civil rights, and stripped hundreds of thousands of their citizenship.⁵⁹ The king outlawed political parties and created *Frontul Renașterii Naționale*, or The Front of National Rebirth, a fascist-like party that many Liberals and National Peasants joined – except leaders like Maniu and Gheorghe Brătianu. As *Conducător*, Carol II appointed a government of unelected specialists, technocrats, and military officers who passed laws by fiat.⁶⁰ This is how Antonescu later ruled – royal dictatorship paved the way for military dictatorship. Carol II reorganized the youth movement he created in 1935 to counter the Legion called *Straja Tarii*, or The Country’s Guard, along Nazi lines and dissolved all others, including Scouts. The officer corps remained solidly Carlist and backed the royal dictatorship during 1938-1940.

During interwar period, the Romanian Army was used to suppress popular threats, in the 1920s these were mostly left-wing revolts in rural areas, but in the 1930s they were mostly right-wing demonstrations in cities. The Rural Gendarmerie kept order in the countryside, municipal police – reinforced in certain places by units of the Operational Gendarmerie – patrolled cities, however, when revolts or demonstrations proved beyond the ability of gendarmes or municipal police to handle soldiers had to be called in to restore order.⁶¹ The countryside of Bessarabia proved to be the most revolutionary. In Hotin and Tatarbunar, in 1919 and 1924 respectively, ethnically Russian and Ukrainian peasants inspired by Soviet propaganda and agents revolted.⁶² These uprisings were suppressed by the Romanian Army and Bessarabia remained under martial

⁵⁹ Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 28, 44-48.

⁶⁰ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 264; Hitchins, *Rumania*, 423.

⁶¹ The army continued to train the gendarmes during the interwar period and it came under military control in time of war, see, Miron, *Jandarmeria română în perioada interbelică*, 35, 46.

⁶² Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 274-275.

law until the late-1920s. Chișinău was never completely turned over to civilian administration because the city was seen as a dangerous center of communist subversion, especially because it was also major Jewish population center. The Romanian Army retained extra-legal powers that allowed it to restrict freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and other civil rights, which is why Chișinău's prisons were always filled with political prisoners.⁶³ Bucharest's ineffective and corrupt administration from Bucharest and the Romanian Army's authoritarian rule contributed to alienating minorities and many *basarabeni* (Moldovans) in the province by 1940.⁶⁴

During the 1930s, cities across *România Mare* became the scene of right- and left-wing demonstrations due to the poor economic conditions resulting from the Depression and the rise of the Legionary movement. As democracy turned towards populism and then fascism, King Carol II used the Romanian Army to meet threats to the status quo. 2nd Lieutenant Manolescu recorded that by 1938 officer cadets were being trained in “military legislation, [martial law], and so on, just in case of emergency, should the civil administration fail to deal with the growing danger of Fascism.”⁶⁵ Officers proved more comfortable using deadly violence against left-wing workers, who they feared, than against right-wing activists, with whom they sympathized.

The anti-communism of the officer corps meant that officers had few qualms following orders to suppress leftist demonstrations, even by Romanian workers in the growing industry in the Old Kingdom in Bucharest.⁶⁶ During the worst years of the Depression, the National Peasant government implemented several rounds of “sacrificial curves” [*curbe de sacrificiu*], a series of

⁶³ Mironov, “And Quiet Flows the Dniester,” 34.

⁶⁴ Marcela Vultur, “The Integration of Bessarabia into Greater Romania,” *Romanian Civilization* 3, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1994), 70-71.

⁶⁵ Manolescu, *Permitted to Land*, 8.

⁶⁶ 17.2 percent of the total industrial production was centered in Bucharest by the 1930s, see, Virgil N. Madgearu, *Evoluția economiei românesti: După războiul mondial* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1995), 97-98.

austerity measures meant to reduce government expenditure that cut salaries and pensions 10-12 percent. After three years of cuts during 1931-1933 the salaries of state employees, including CFR (state railway) workers, had been reduced by nearly 50 percent.⁶⁷ Worker discontent and communist activism grew, so a state of siege was declared in all industrial cities (Bucharest, Ploiești, Timișoara, Iași, Cernăuți, Galați) where Romania's estimated 600,000 workers lived. In January 1933, CFR workers in Bucharest found out that they not get paid unless they had proof of paying their taxes and bad weather caused many to be temporarily laid off. A communist-led union organized a series of strikes on 28 January, 2 February, and 15 February leading to more radical demands until the army was sent in to quell the workers. When communists among the workers allegedly fired at the soldiers and officers ordered them to open fire on the strikers and killed three workers, wounded another 40, and arrested 1,200 on 16 February.⁶⁸ Following this show of force, many workers began to look to the Legionaries to advocate for change.

Officers found it more problematic when they were called on to suppressed right-wing demonstrations whose ideals they shared and/or sympathized with. During the 1927 Oradea pogrom, the army was called in, but did little to protect Jews or Jewish property against the anti-Semitic mob. Since far-right students were seen by many officers as mere hooligans, not serious threats like communists, they used less violence. For example, in 1935 soldiers and gendarmes in Bucharest fired shots into the air and used their rifle butts to disperse crowds led by students

⁶⁷ Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi, volumul III: Carol II*, 148; Bogdan Bucur, "Budgetary Austerity Measures Taken by Romania during the Great Recession of 1929-1933 and Reflected in the Specialized Press of the Time," *Revista Română de Jurnalism și Comunicare* 6, no. 3 (2011), 35.

⁶⁸ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 12-13.

bent on attacking Jews and their property.⁶⁹ Such minor clashes between were common through the 1930s, but as the Legion grew more powerful they were taken more seriously by officers.

After 1938, Carlist officers backed the royal dictatorship because it seemed the best way to preserve the social status quo. Armand Călinescu, a close confidant of the king who served as Minister of Internal Affairs and later became Prime Minister after the death of Patriarch Miron in 1939, led the crackdown on the Legionary movement, including imprisonment, torture, and the murder of Codreanu and other leaders. Officers made no protest. The conservative officer corps distrusted the egalitarian rhetoric and chaotic violence of the Legionary movement and preferred a strong state under a strong leader, especially as war again threatened Europe. On 21 September 1939, a team of nine Legionaries ambushed and killed Călinescu in revenge. They were arrested and machinegunned by soldiers in the exact spot of the assassination, left in the street for days – guarded by soldiers who kept back the crowds – as a warning to not join the Legion. So long as Carol II preserved the territorial integrity of *România Mare* the officer corps would support him and his regime, but the establishment of the royal dictatorship put Carol II in a position that if anything went wrong there was no one else to blame except him as *Conducător*.

Army Budget Debates

After the First World War, the Romanian Army had new prestige and pushed for larger budgets than it had had previously. In 1916 the army had been unprepared for war, particularly regarding modern weapons, equipment, and stocks of ammunition, and was determined not to be caught unprepared again. The expanded borders of *România Mare* increased army concerns as it was exposed to three hostile and revisionist neighbors – the Soviet Union, Hungary, and Bulgaria

⁶⁹ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 37-38.

– that demanded a large, well-armed, and well-trained army in case of a war with one or all of these foes.⁷⁰ Romania now lacked a Great Power alliance to shield it as the Triple Alliance had before 1914, and gained a dangerous new ideological foe in the Soviet Union, both exacerbated the weakness of Romania’s strategic position. While the officer corps never felt like the army’s budget was large enough, particularly complaining about officer salaries, the state did all it could to provide the army the necessary funds despite Romania’s economic impoverishment.

The politicians of *România Mare* tried to construct a new system of alliances to insulate the Romanian Army from having to fight alone if attacked. The USSR was the primary threat, especially after 1929 as Stalin’s Five Year Plan expanded and mechanized the Red Army. The Treaty of Versailles had limited the size of the Hungarian and Bulgarian armies, both of which remained small, weak, and almost completely un-motorized through the interwar period and the Second World War.⁷¹ The various threats resulted in a confusing tangle of alliances. The “Little Entente,” a defensive alliance supported by France consisting of Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia aimed against Hungary signed in 1920 and ratified in 1921, was a poor substitute for a true Great Power alliance. A bilateral anti-Soviet defensive alliance with Poland was signed in 1921 after the Polish-Soviet War. In 1934, Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey joined the Balkan Pact, pledging to suspend all territorial claims against each other in favor of maintaining

⁷⁰ France or Italy had only 400km to defend while Romania had 3000km, see, General A. Gorsky, “Chestiuni militare de actualitate. Organizarea Armatei,” *România militară* LIII, Nr. 3, (Martie 1921), 243-244; “Romania is among one of the most envied [countries] and has the most enemies [surrounding it]; -- as a consequence [Romania] must be among the most prepared [countries] against any external aggression,” see, Colonel I. Teodorescu, “Intersul pe care îl poartă ‘Intelectualitatea omânească armatei,’” *România militară* LV, Nr. 7 (Iulie 1923), 635.

⁷¹ Hungary was not much of a threat with only nine brigades in 1938 compared to Romania’s 32 divisions, and its small budgets up to 1938 meant that its army numbered just 35,000, see Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 76-77 and League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book: Fourteenth Year*, 425; the Bulgarian Army was limited to 20,000 volunteers and only began to rearm after 1935 and expanded only slowly before 1941, see, R.J. Crampton, *Bulgaria*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 222, 252.

the status quo, isolating Bulgaria. Finally, Romanian diplomats put their faith in the League of Nations because they believed that the strategy of collective defense espoused by the Geneva-based organization was the best way to protect *România Mare*. Romanian officers, however, were always skeptical of collective defense, and their skepticism only grew stronger in the 1930s as the League system proved dysfunctional, weak, and began breaking down under pressure from the Axis. Senior officers advocated for budgets that would allow the army to go it alone.⁷²

Romanian military thinkers published their arguments and theories about military reform in preparation for future conflicts in *România militară*. The General Staff first started publishing its official journal in 1897, the declaration of war in 1916 halted publication of new issues until 1921. The General Staff printed issued until 1946 when the pro-communist government closed it for good. Inside its pages were debates over budgets, theory, war industry, and length of military service. All of these debates directly affected Romanian society. The Romanian Army tried its best to improve its preparation for a modern industrial war during the interwar period, but it was still unable to defend its borders by itself by 1939, a fact made clear by the events of 1940.

War Industry

After the First World War, Romanian leaders all agreed that Romania needed to develop a domestic war industry capable of producing the material required to fight a modern industrial war. The Romanian Army did not want to have to rely on imports of weapons, munitions, and equipment as they had during 1916-1919. In 1913, the army had only enough ammunition for

⁷² One officer claimed that the League system had made war more dangerous because its policy of collective defense encouraged states to mount surprise attacks, see, Maior Alex I. Tenescu, “Câteva considerații asupra războiului și în special asupra războiului viitor,” *România militară*, LXXIV, Nr. 3 (Martie 1937), 39; Zara Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark: European International History, 1933-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-4, 9-10, 132.

four days of combat.⁷³ Prime Minister Ion Brătinau, as part of the negotiations leading up to the Romanian declaration of war in 1916, demanded that the Entente supply the Romanian Army the munitions of which it was desperately short, but despite Allied efforts, it faced shortages at the end of a long supply route through Russia.⁷⁴ After 1919, the army argued that the state needed to intervene in the economy to build up vital war industries to be prepared for the next war.⁷⁵

These demands did not fall on deaf ears. In the 1920s the Liberal government developed a policy under the motto *prin noi însine*, or “by ourselves,” that prioritized the development of Romanian industry through government subsidies and protectionist trade tariffs with the goal of national autarky to escape economic subordination and dependence on the West.⁷⁶ This was a continuation of its *fin de siècle* platform that favored modernization and industrialization along Western European lines. Despite the depressed agricultural economy after the First World War, Liberals continued to favor industry over agriculture, exacerbating the weak rural economy and contributing to peasant discontent, but the nationalist rhetoric of autarky combined with military arguments proved convincing. Parliament passed legislation in 1925 on “Industrial Enterprises connected with National Defense.” It awarded contracts to expand munition factories at Copșa Mica and Cugir, with the help of British arms manufacturer Vickers, and founded the Romanian Aeronautical Industry (IAR) at Brașov, with French capital and technical support.⁷⁷ Much of the imported plant equipment, however, was left to rust beyond repair on the docks in Constanța due

⁷³ Hentea, *Brief Romanian Military History*, 112.

⁷⁴ Torrey, *Romania and World War I*, 102; Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefront in World War I*, 17-18, 183-184.

⁷⁵ “Military industry was, then [in 1916], in an embryonic state, and that private industry was unable to satisfy the needs of the army, because of a lack of preparation.” The war wrecked its industry. The army argued that the state must rebuild it with the help of “sacrifices” by the nation, see, Colonel Pascal, “Note asupra înființării unei industrie militare în România,” *România militară* LIII, Nr. 9-10 (Septembrie-Octombrie 1921), 895-896.

⁷⁶ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 365.

⁷⁷ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 46.

to incompetence and never made it to the munitions factories, which by 1933 were already in serious debt.⁷⁸ During 1920-1930 an estimated 2.3 billion *lei* were spent on armaments, but just 100 million *lei* went to new armaments produced by Romanian war industry, 1.2 billion *lei* were invested in IAR and aircraft design and production, and 1 billion *lei* spent paying for munitions and armaments ordered from the French before 1918.⁷⁹ The Romanian Army continued to rely on a supply of arms imported from France, and after 1930 from Czechoslovakia, to make up for what could not be produced locally. The General Staff struggled throughout the interwar period to provide just the small arms necessary for the large infantry army it needed to deter revisionist aggression, and was even less successful in acquiring new artillery, tanks, and motor vehicles.

The Soviet threat loomed over Romania during the interwar period. As one officer warned, “We must be on our guard, war is being prepared on the borders of the nation in the East, and the Bolshevik doctrinaires want to impose utopian ideas by the force of the Red Army, for this purpose they make every sacrifice and spend over 100 billion *lei* annually!”⁸⁰ The Soviet Five Year Plan only increased these worries, especially as the Depression crippled the Romanian economy at the same time the Red Army grew by leaps and bounds. Then the Nazis took power in Germany, accelerated German rearmament, and destabilized the European status quo, placing greater pressure on the Romanian Army to deter Hungarian revisionism (supported by Rome and Berlin). The duel threats from east and west convinced the General Staff it needed to expand the size of the Romanian Army, which in 1934 it planned to increase to 26 infantry divisions, plus

⁷⁸ Martin Thomas, “To Arm an Ally: French Arms Sales to Romania, 1926-1940,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, no. 2 (1996), 244-245.

⁷⁹ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 46.

⁸⁰ Maior N. Diaconescu, “Technica revoluționară a Bolșevismului,” *România militară* LX, Nr. 7-8 (Iulie-August 1928), 131.

cavalry and artillery regiments. The decision to maintain such a large army, relative poverty of Romania, and the lingering effects of the Depression meant that there was little left over for an extensive rearmament program that the General Staff also knew was needed.⁸¹ Nonetheless, it began to rearm, hoping that the French would deliver arms and subsidize most of the bill.

Beginning in 1935, the state annually increased the army budget because the League was weakening, Europe was rearming, and the economy was improving. Senior officers continued to argue for more investment in war industries because “even the small and agricultural countries seek to establish during peacetime a war industry and prepare their private industry, to be able to adapt quickly to produce the necessary material.”⁸² The breakdown of the League system caused by the Axis and the threat of revisionism meant few politicians or civilians questioned the army’s arguments for large military budgets. Parliament passed a series of extraordinary credits, part of a ten-year rearmament program, and the military budget rose to 29 percent of the total national budget in 1935 to 35 percent in 1936. Over the next three years around a third of the budget was dedicated to military expenses.⁸³ This radically altered the kind of arms deals Romania had been making with the French, which had been for military surplus or small quantities of modern arms, to large orders of high-grade modern equipment.⁸⁴ The French proved unable to provide them.

The ten-year rearmament program passed on 27 April 1935 prioritized modernization and motorization of the Romanian Army as it attempted to keep up with the European arms race. Its goal was to modernize the arms and equipment of 22 infantry divisions, three cavalry divisions,

⁸¹ Thomas, “To Arm an Ally,” 239.

⁸² General M. Skeleti, “Națiunea armată, materialul modern și specialiștii,” *România militară* LXXIII, Nr. 12 (Decembrie 1936), 9.

⁸³ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 54.

⁸⁴ Thomas, “To Arm an Ally,” 235.

three mountain brigades, and form an armored brigade.⁸⁵ In the 1920s, the military had focused on creating a Romanian aircraft industry, rather than a motor or armor industry, because aircraft were recognized as an obviously revolutionary weapon. The First World War, the Romanian-Hungarian War, and the Soviet-Polish War seemed to suggest that cavalry still had a place on the modern battlefield, especially in the expanses of Eastern Europe with limited logistical networks. A motorized army would require an extensive, and expensive, expansion of infrastructure (roads, bridges, and rail) which was beyond the ability of the state to finance.⁸⁶ During 1940-1944, the General Staff would use tens of thousands of Jewish forced laborers to improve its highway and rail network to bolster Axis logistics.⁸⁷ Investment in the aircraft industry yielded some results. By 1939, Romania possessed the largest Balkan air force and had locally produced IAR-80 fighters, but most IAR-produced aircraft were training or reconnaissance types.⁸⁸

In the late 1930s, French arms producers proved increasingly hesitant to sell arms to the Romanians. In part because Romanian credit was bad, and the French government refused to underwrite the purchases, but also because the French Army needed arms for its own program of rearmament that few arms left over to sell abroad.⁸⁹ The French Army was also skeptical that such an investment would be put to good use because they believed that the Romanian Army was hopelessly inept and unprofessional. The French also had to subsidize its more important allies

⁸⁵ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 27-28.

⁸⁶ Many Romanian roads were not much more than dirt tracks and bridges were too light and flimsy to carry even the light tanks the Romanian Army purchased, see, Statiev, "The ugly duckling of the armed forces," 223.

⁸⁷ The Ministry of Defense and CFR were the two main beneficiaries of Jewish forced labor during the war, see, Ana Bărbulescu, ed., Alexadnru Florian, ed., Alexandru Climescu, și Laura Degeratu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România: documente* (Bucharest: Polirom; Bucharest: Editura Institutului pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România "Elie Wiesel, 2013), 21, 24-25.

⁸⁸ Thomas, "To Arm an Ally," 252; Bernád, *Rumanian Aces of World War 2*, 8-9.

⁸⁹ Thomas, "To Arm an Ally," 247; Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America, and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (New York: Viking, 2014), 367; Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 401-402.

against Nazi Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Therefore, Romania shifted its procurement of armaments to Czechoslovakia. On 6 February 1936, the two states signed an agreement for 2.5 billion *lei* of armaments and soon most new weapons, approximately 70 percent, were made by Czech companies.⁹⁰ Private Czechoslovak investors helped Romania to pay for some of these military expenses.⁹¹ After 1938, however, Romania increasingly turned to Nazi Germany as a source for arms because it was able to pay in oil and raw materials that Nazis desperately needed for their growing war economy, instead of hard currency demanded by the Western Powers who were well-supplied with oil and raw materials from their colonies.⁹² Germany controlled even more of the Romanian Army's source of armaments after March 1939 when Hitler ordered half of Czechoslovakia occupied and seized the large Czech arms industry.

The Romanian Army tried to keep up with the increasingly pace of European rearmament in the 1930s. Romania's interwar army budgets were relatively substantial, much larger than its local rivals Hungary and Bulgaria and comparable to its Little Entente allies of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, but tiny in comparison with the USSR or Nazi Germany (see Table 1).

Table 1. Romanian Military Expenditure (in millions of dollars) in comparison with Southeast European states, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, 1934-1938.

Year	Romania	Hungary	Bulgaria	Yugoslavia	Germany	Soviet Union
1934	27	13	6	36	546	10461
1935	66	19	8	35	723	13882
1936	62	21	10	36	1498	17449
1937	48	25	11	42	2090	20045
1938	56	30	12	48	4675	23404

⁹⁰ Paul N. Hehn, *A Low Dishonest Decade: The Great Powers, Eastern Europe, and the Economic Origins of World War II, 1930-1941* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 263; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 29.

⁹¹ Czechoslovak investment, however, remained limited, see, Hehn, *A Low Dishonest Decade*, 264-265.

⁹² Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, 402; for details, see, Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, 74-82.

Table 1 Continued. Romanian Military Expenditure (in millions of dollars) in comparison with Southeast European states, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, 1934-1938.

Note: the US dollar equivalents are rough estimations using 1938 exchange rates (172.4 *lei*, 5.1 *pengő*, 114.0 *lev*, 54.9 *dinar*, 2.4 *Deutsche Mark*, and 5.3 rubles to the dollar respectively).

Source: Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Yugoslavian expenditures, see League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book, Nineteenth Year*, 718, 426, 215, 906; Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Yugoslavian exchange rates in 1938, see, S.D. Zagoroff, Jenö Végh, and Alexander D. Bilimovich, *The Agricultural Economy of the Danubian Countries, 1935-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955), 91; German and Soviet expenditures and exchange rates, see, Steiner, *The Triumph of the Dark*, 331, 441, 1069.

Officers' Salaries

Much of the interwar army budget went to paying officers' salaries. The General Staff had to prioritize officer salaries in its budget because the officer corps was the heart of the army without which it could not function. Draftees could be paid much less because military service was required by law, but the officer corps needed to attract qualified candidates who would make a career out of the army. Romania faced high inflation after 1919, resulting from the First World War, which made it difficult to offer salaries that could attract qualified candidates.⁹³ Moreover, low salaries threatened to demoralize those officers in the ranks who felt that their sacrifices in the war were unrewarded and envied bourgeois professionals or civil servants. The Depression ended any fear of a mass exodus of officers from the army since the economic situation of the middle class was now much worse than outside the army, and the crisis actually swelled the size of the officer corps as educated youths sought a position with steady pay.

⁹³ Tooze, *The Deluge*, 355, 361-362.

The most severe disappointment in the officer corps about salaries was during the 1920s. One general in November 1923 indignantly declared, “The officer is not paid for his work and even more than that: he is not even able to survive [*nu este nici intretinut*].”⁹⁴ He went on to describe how inflation had raised the cost of living 17 times, and complained that while the money spent on soldiers and horses had increased by 20 times that officers’ salaries had only quadrupled. He concluded by arguing that the officer corps was becoming disgusted with the army and that many were leaving the army for better opportunities elsewhere. The solution, he wrote, was to either drastically raise the wages of officers to a proper living wage or give officers special privileges. A detailed list of these privileges followed that included: subsidized food for the officer (and his family), a clothing allowance to the officer in addition to his pay (also for his family), a housing subsidy, special scholarships for officers’ children, family access to military doctors and dentists, family access to entertainment on base, a transportation subsidy, a horse subsidy, and a stipend for the “extra-military activity of the officer.”⁹⁵ Obviously this general had a vested interest in portraying the conditions in the army as bad as possible, but the post-war inflation was real and officers faced worsening conditions.⁹⁶ Captain Grosu remembered that in his artillery regiment that officers were expected to make up for short-falls in the budget from “local resources” to feed and house soldiers, which he said meant from the officer’s “own pocket.”⁹⁷ Indeed, most reserve officers left the army in the 1920s to return to civilian life, although for more reasons than pay.

⁹⁴ General Negrei, “Despre nevoile ofițerilor și modul cum ar putea fi ușurate,” *România militară* LV, Nr. 11 (Noemvire 1923), 1031.

⁹⁵ General Negri, “Despre nevoile ofițerilor și modul cum ar putea fi ușurate,” *România militară*, LV, Nr. 11, (Noemvire 1923), 1034-1038

⁹⁶ Beldiman, *Armata și Mișcarea Legionară*, 30.

⁹⁷ Grosu, *Memoriile unui ofițer de informații*, 147, 149.

Some in the General Staff feared that the officer corps was becoming backwards since it could only attract peasants to become officers, so officers' pay was prioritized.⁹⁸ Total army expenditure increased from 3,217,745,000 *lei* in 1924 to 6,253,327,000 *lei* in 1927 with much of it dedicated to paying the salaries of officers.⁹⁹ The number of officers also increased during this period from 11,379 in 1924 to 14,724 in 1929.¹⁰⁰ In 1928 the industrial spurt resulting from the Liberals' *prin noi înșine* policy sputtered out. In 1929, the faltering economy was then hit by the Depression and the army budget was slashed.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the General Staff continued to prioritize officers' pay. The 1931 army budget totaled 6,618,289,000 *lei* with over half, some 3,517,358,000 *lei* going to the pay of officers, NCOs, and civilians employed by the army. The pay of ordinary soldiers amounted to just 71,311,000 *lei*. The budget also included further funds for special allowances to subsidize officers' other personal expenses (see Table 2).

Table 2. Budget of the Romanian Army, 1931

Expenditure on Staff:	<i>Lei</i> (000's)
Pay of Officers, NCOs, and Civilians employed by the Army	3,517,358
Grants (to officers and cadets abroad)	42,257
Indemnities for representation	2,087
Temporary Staff	16,860
Allowances for food, equipment, and lighting	320,638
Pay of Men	71,311
Missions	68,857
Traveling expenses	24,000
Instruction	136,000

⁹⁸ The Roman and Tsarist empires were used as examples of imperial collapse as a result of the weakening of "culture" in the officer corps and lower classes taking leadership positions in the army, see, Colonel I. Teodorescu, "Intersul pe care îl poartă 'Intelectualitatea omânească armatei,'" *România militară* LV, Nr. 7 (Iulie 1923), 639.

⁹⁹ League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book, Fourth Year*, 746.

¹⁰⁰ League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book, Eighth Year*, 266.

¹⁰¹ Hitchins, *Rumania*, 371-372

Table 2 Continued. Budget of the Romanian Army, 1931

Expenditure on Material:

Food	1,135,052
Forage	284,578
Fuel, heating, and Lighting	232,366
Equipment	220,922
Ammunition	285,575
Engineering material and communications	20,006
Health Service	36,512
Geographical Service	969
Technical studies and experiments	2,850
Monuments, cemeteries, etc.	53,272
Office Supplies	10,783
Transport of Material	29,581
Other expenditure	79,383

Various Expenses:

Subsidies and Subscriptions	12,147
Various Incidental Expenses	13,645

State Taxation on Buildings and Motor Vehicles: 1,289

Total Ordinary Expenditure 6,618,289

Source: League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book, Seventh Year*, 771.

Captain Grosu remembered the period between 1929 and 1930 as the worst of the crisis, when his artillery regiment did not receive pay for several months, could not even feed their animals, and created “a situation of total demoralization.”¹⁰² This situation was temporary, plus officers were prioritized over soldiers and the situation improved after 1934.

¹⁰² Grosu, *Memoriile unui ofițer de informații*, 152.

Training

Interwar army budgets also affected the attempts of the army to improve the training of its soldiers. Like all European armies in the interwar period, the Romanian Army debated the importance of manpower versus technology.¹⁰³ The new technology of industrial war prompted some officers to argue in favor of a smaller army made up of long service professionals relying on new technology, firepower, and intensive training to make up for their small numbers, instead of a mass army of short service conscripts with only limited training. The threat of attack along Romania's exposed borders, plus its small industry, and its poorly educated peasant population meant that an expensive army of professionals equipped with modern technology was unrealistic. The General Staff chose to maintain a large force of cheaply trained recruits.¹⁰⁴ This required the army to prioritize the training of the officer corps who provide the professional core required for a modern army that trained the yearly contingent of new recruits, similar to the situation in the French Army at the same time.¹⁰⁵ The General Staff resisted attempts to shorten the period of military service to less than two years and successfully extended military service required by citizens by introducing pre-military training in 1935. The quality of soldiers' training, however, remained poor throughout the interwar period, with some slight improvements after 1938.

During the interwar period, senior officers identified many deficiencies in the training of Romanian soldiers and debated how to improve training, but most officers continued to treat the soldiers as they always had and neglected their training. The accepted practices of using soldiers as labor and granting soldiers extended leave greatly restricted the amount of time that soldiers

¹⁰³ Jeremy Black, *Avoiding Armageddon: From the Great War to the Fall of France, 1918-1940* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 87.

¹⁰⁴ This same debate was played out in Italy with the same result, see, *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁰⁵ Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory*, 211.

actually trained for combat and in 1933, during the nadir of the army budget due to Depression cuts, soldiers may have received as little as five months training.¹⁰⁶ The conditions endured by draftees during this time were grim: overcrowding, poor food, equipment shortages, and illness. The General Staff prioritized the officer corps and to cut costs it simply reduced the number of draftees from 171,306 in 1930 to 158,941 in 1931 and just 120,602 in 1932. Higher numbers of draftees did not return until 1937, but even than fewer than at its height in 1929 (See Table 3).

Table 3. Size of the Romanian Army and Officer Corps, 1924-1939.

Year	Officers	NCOs/Soldiers	Total
1924	11,379	135,564	146,564
1925	12,344	127,483	139,827
1926	12,293	128,483	140,776
1927	13,436	136,333	149,769
1928	14,658	170,968	185,626
1929	14,725	171,414	186,139
1930	14,387	171,306	185,693
1931	15,334	158,941	174,275
1932	15,724	120,602	136,326
1933	16,596	124,789	141,385
1934	16,478	124,921	141,399
1936	15,296	115,643	130,939
1937	14,890	149,635	164,525
1938	13,613	147,946	161,559

Source: League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book, Eighth Year and Fourteenth Year*, 266 and 717.

¹⁰⁶ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 47; Chirnoagă, *Istoria politică și militară a răboiului româniei contra rusiei*, 132.

Officers usually sent soldiers home in November, so as not to have to feed or house them during the cold winter months.¹⁰⁷ Target practice was also severely wanting. Soldiers often just had the theory of aiming explained to them and were allotted just six rounds for target practice *annually*; instead of the hundreds of rounds needed to train skilled riflemen.¹⁰⁸ Obviously, the standards of combat training did not improve significantly during the interwar years. In response to a British journalist asking about the poor conditions facing Romanian soldiers a few years later, an officer responded that “the ability of the peasant soldier to live on next to nothing does away with many of the requirements considered essential to the soldiers of Western Powers.”¹⁰⁹ This statement betrays a callousness Romanian officers’ attitudes towards their soldiers, but also illustrates the difficult position the Romanian Army found itself in because it had little choice except prioritize the officer corps over draftees during the lean economic years of the early 1930s.

Desperate find resources to equip and train more expensive cavalrymen and artillerymen (and motorcyclists), the General Staff relied the old practice of *Trupa cu schimbul*, or literally “trooper in shifts.” This system had territorials carry out military service in shifts [*schimburi*], one week of training during which the territorial was expected to supply his own food, uniform, horse (or motorcycle), and feed (or fuel), followed by three weeks off.¹¹⁰ During that time his horse (or motorcycle) would be used by other solider. At least a brigade of *Călărași* continued this practice to 1940. These territorials served twice the normal time of draftees. Since most

¹⁰⁷ General Al. Teodorescu, “In preajma novei legi de recrutarea,” *România militară* LVII, Nr. 12 (Decembrie 1925), 3-8.

¹⁰⁸ Lt.-Colonel Demetrescu Pompeius, “Contribuționi la pregătirea profesională de războiu,” *România militară* LXXV, Nr. 1 (Ianuarie 1938), 61.

¹⁰⁹ Quote taken from, Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 50.

¹¹⁰ Tudora Mugurel-Tudor și Stelian Brînzei, “Insigna ‘Trupa cu schimbul,’” Luceafărul, accessed 31 March 2016, <http://www.luceafarul.net/insigna-trupa-cu-schimbul>.

artillery was still horse-drawn there was also an *Artilerist cu schimbul*. This system allowed multiple soldiers to train using the same horse (or train in mechanics and maintenance using the same motorcycle). The army had better-off peasants (or lower middle-class families) provide the horse (or motorcycle), oftentimes minorities. Private Weiss recalled, “The state really profited from us [Bessarabian] Germans that way. Of the sixty-four in our squadron, forty were Germans and the rest were Bulgarians, Romanians, and Russians who used our horses to train.”¹¹¹ He did like that the system allowed them to spend most of their time at home to focus on farming. The army benefited from the horses (or motorcycles) the system provided, however, it is questionable how effective the training of these territorials was and in the case of mobilization there would not be enough horses (or motorcycles) for everyone. The system functioned well enough to produce one somewhat-trained and one poorly-trained cavalryman (or motorcyclist).

In addition to combat training, the army prioritized teaching personal hygiene and health to soldiers.¹¹² Personal hygiene and health are important for soldiers to be effective on the front. During the First World War, disease had ravaged soldiers and civilians in overcrowded Moldavia where tens of thousands died from disease, especially typhus. Lectures focused on preventing diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and typhus as well as combating alcoholism and venereal disease.¹¹³ The training was not just for combat, but for modernizing the countryside. Since the middle of the nineteenth century the state focused on improving the health of the nation through

¹¹¹ Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 16.

¹¹² Medic General de divizie dr. I. Antoniu și medic Lt.-colonel dr. I. Bălănescu, “Rolul armatei în educația sanitară a poporului,” *România militară* LIII, Nr. 3 (Aprilie 1921), 429-432.

¹¹³ Medicul Lt.-Colonel Bălănescu, “Privire Generală asupra higienei militare (Urmare),” *România militară* LV, Nr. 4 (Aprilie 1923), 387.

rural hygiene projects.¹¹⁴ The state saw the army as the “school of the nation” where peasants could be educated to become better citizens. As an officer put it in 1923, “The training, which you give to soldiers, must be serious, orderly, methodical and heated with the sacred fire [of nationalism], so it not only perfects the soldier, but throws light in the depths of the villages, [which] still remain in darkness.”¹¹⁵ Peasants were supposed to enter the army, learn modern ideas and practices, including personal hygiene, and take them back to the village.

This training was probably the most successful of any during the interwar period because the Romanian Army prevented any major outbreaks of disease during the Second World War.¹¹⁶ The threat of disease, however, was also used to justify the murder of tens of thousands of Jews suffering with typhus, cholera, and other diseases in 1941-1942.¹¹⁷ During the interwar period, the stigma of being bearers of disease was affixed to Gypsies and was one of the reasons used to justify the deportation of 25,000 Gypsies in mid-1942 to camps in Transnistria. The threat of typhus was used as an excuse to bar the repatriation of Gypsy survivors during 1943-1944.¹¹⁸

Civil-Military Relations

While civil-military conflict was limited in Romania during the interwar period it was not absent. The state generally acquiesced to army demands without protest, but its plan to introduce pre-military training was fiercely debated for five years before being adopted. Also, corruption scandals periodically put the army in the center of Romanian politics and damaged the reputation

¹¹⁴ For an examination of modernization efforts in the countryside focused on hygiene, see, Constantin Bărbulescu, *România medicilor: medici, țărani și igienă rurală în România de la 1860 la 1910* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2015).

¹¹⁵ Medicul Lt.-Colonel Bălănescu, “Privire Generală asupra higienei militare (Urmare),” *România militară* LV, Nr. 4 (Aprilie 1923), 386.

¹¹⁶ Jeican, “*Typhus Exanthematicus* in Romania during the Second World War,” 85, 89.

¹¹⁷ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 205.

¹¹⁸ Order Nr. 20.771 of 20 January 1943 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs prevented the repatriation of Gypsy families on the grounds that they supposedly risked spreading typhus in Romania, see, Viorel Achim, ed., *Documente privind deportarea țiganilor în Transnistria, Vol. II* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2004), 143.

of the officer corps, particularly the Škoda Scandal of 1933, however, the effects of the scandal proved fleeting and did not significantly affect the ability of the army to obtain a large budget for its massive rearmament program shortly thereafter. During the interwar period, the army won its few clashes with civilian politicians and generally succeeded in getting what it wanted.

Pre-military Training

The most controversial issue in civil-military relations during the interwar period was the debate over the need for the introduction of pre-military training, or “pre-regimental training,” as it was called while it was debated. Pre-military training was the practice of having youth fulfill some form of military service or training before the normal age of conscription at 21 in order to have draftees better prepared when they entered the ranks. The Romanian Army successfully argued for its implementation, but pre-military training had mixed results at best.

The debate over pre-regimental training was initiated by an article in the October 1929 issue of *România militară* entitled, “The Need for the Introduction of Pre-regimental Training at Home [*la noi*]” signed anonymously with the initials “A. B. C.” The author argued that Romania was falling behind the rest of Europe in the adoption of pre-military training, which it could not afford. He cited “handsome results” in Germany and Italy, whose “totalitarian” states allegedly could mobilize their entire national manpower in a short period of time in case of war, and was very worried by the adoption of pre-military service by Romania’s hostile neighbors Hungary and the USSR.¹¹⁹ The revisionist states threatening *România Mare* seemed to be preparing their

¹¹⁹ “In Hungary it is well known how things stand in [this] matter of a second army, composed of [youth groups], outside of the Magyar army, and this [second army] exists because of the obligation of the youth to respond to the summons of military officials. As for Soviet Russia the situation is even clearer: all youths are obligated to attend sessions on military training, target practice, maneuvers, campaigns, etc., and those who do not respond to the summons, which are true military concentrations, are considered guilty of avoiding military duties, exactly like

populations for war and Romania could not risk falling behind. He declared, “Our country, sooner or later, will have to fall in step with the same rhythm with all the other countries that of social, military, and general reforms.”¹²⁰ The article outlined a two-year program of pre-military training beginning at age 19. The first year, four months “national-patriotic-religious” training, would be followed by a second year of four months of intensive training in various weapons and technical skills. Training would take place one-two times a week, led by officers and NCOs provided by the regular or territorial army. The author argued that while pre-military training may seem expensive it would save money because it would reduce the length of active service to 18 months. More importantly, it was needed to prepare to defend *România Mare*.

This article triggered a firestorm of opposition in the civilian press. National Peasants believed that pre-military training would militarize the nation, reduce education (as young men would spend more time preparing for combat than going to school), damage the physical health of youths, make war more likely, and end up just becoming an extension of military service.¹²¹ The merits and details of pre-military training were intensely debated over the following years. The army’s champion of pre-military training, General Virgil Economu argued that pre-military service was “a national obligation” that was “not against the spirit, neither the soul, and even less against the physical health” of Romanian youth.¹²² On the contrary, he argued that pre-military training would actually improve the physical and moral health of the nation as youths learned to

soldiers in the regular army,” see, A. B. C., “Nevoia introducerii pregătirii preregimentare la noi,” *România militară* LXVI, Nr. 10 (Octombrie 1929), 43

¹²⁰ Ibid., 44.

¹²¹ General Virgil Economu, “Pregatirea preregimentară (Urmare),” *România militară*, LXVII Nr. 1 (Ianuarie 1930), 3.

¹²² Ibid., 7.

discipline their bodies and minds.¹²³ Pre-military training was finally introduced in 1935 by the Liberals as the international situation in Europe deteriorated. Rather than depend on collective security backed by the League or one of its other alliances, Romanian diplomats decided upon a policy of armed neutrality that required the state to maintain as large of an army as possible as a deterrent to Hungarian and Soviet threats, so pre-military training seemed a good solution.

After pre-military training was finally introduced, it proved to be almost as much of a disaster as civilian opponents had predicted, although for different reasons than they had argued. Pre-military training did not contribute to the further militarization of society because it proved fairly unpopular among the peasantry who disliked the extra burden and parents resented losing their sons' labor to training. Pre-military training took place on weekends and holidays, making it even less popular, and generally consisted of physical exercise, basic drill, patriotic speeches, and sometimes stultifying lectures on hygiene, religion, and military topics. Not all youths disliked pre-military training. Gheorghe Netejoru remembered, "Even if some complained of so much soldiering, I actually really liked the training."¹²⁴ Nonetheless, the pre-military system was poorly organized and territorial officers did not seem interested in taking their responsibility for training youths seriously. Pre-military training centers often lacked resources and equipment.¹²⁵ As in the rest of the army, corruption was common and officers in charge of pre-military training sometimes defrauded the youths they trained. There was no system in place for punishing those who did not attend, so absenteeism was common. Army leaders tried to provide incentives by

¹²³ General Virgil Economu, "Pregatirea preregimentară (Urmare)," *România militară* LXVII, Nr. 5 (Mai 1930), 4; General V. Economu, "Instructie preregimentară," *România militară* LXXI, Nr. 1 (Ianuarie 1934), 62.

¹²⁴ Netejoru, *Și eu am luptat în est*, 26; Weiss had no bad words for it either, see, Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 15.

¹²⁵ Maior Mihai Mihăilescu din M.S.M., "Instrucția pre și post militară," *România militară* LXXVII, Nr. 3 (Martie 1939), 53-54.

promising that those who fulfilled pre-military training and received a certificate of completion could be promoted to the rank of an NCO in half the normal time (one month to become a corporal or two months to become a sergeant) once they began their actual two year military service and cut six months off the end of that service reducing the length of military service to 18 months.¹²⁶ It is doubtful that pre-military training made youths more qualified to become NCOs in such a short time and only exacerbated the lack of professionalism among NCOs. Regardless, most youths turned up regularly to pre-military training because it was their patriotic duty.

Ironically, it seems the youths most interested in completing pre-military training were in fact Legionaries that senior officers did not want to be in the Romanian Army. The Legion was growing in size at the time pre-military training was introduced, and Codreanu encouraged his followers to attend (and to fulfill regular military service) in order to learn discipline and basic military skills that he believed were needed for a future fascist revolution. He also suggested that Legionaries try to become pre-military instructors so that they could recruit from among the youths required to attend the pre-military training courses.¹²⁷ This may help explain why many Legionaries, ex-Legionaries, and Legionary sympathizers were NCOs on the Eastern Front. The majority of Legionaries survived the suppression of the Legion in January 1941 by Antonescu and were mobilized for the invasion of the Soviet Union in June later that year. They contributed to the rapid radicalization of the violence against Jews carried out by the army.

¹²⁶ At the end of pre-military training each pupil received one of the three certificates: “Complete pre-military training,” “Incomplete pre-military training,” or “No pre-military training,” if the young man had missed more than 12 times (of the 40 to 50 courses during the training year) or had “an insubordinate spirit,” see, League of Nations, *Armaments Year-Book, Eleventh Year*, 710-711.

¹²⁷ Clark, “Fascists and Soldiers,” 412-413.

The Škoda Scandal

In March 1933, the army was rocked by the Škoda Scandal which revealed corruption at the highest levels in the Romanian Army to an outraged public. On 10 March, an investigation into financial irregularities led officials from the Office of the Military Prosecutor to the office of Bruno Seletzki, the representative of the Czechoslovak arms manufacturer Škoda that supplied the Romanian Army with much of its armaments, in Bucharest. There they found a bonanza of top secret Romanian military documents: correspondence, reports, ciphers, statistics, army plans, future projects, and even army personnel files of senior Romanian officers.¹²⁸ Minister of Justice Mihai Popovici and Minister of Defense General Nicolae Uică, encouraged by Prime Minister Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, who replaced Maniu as leader of the National Peasant Party, staged a cover-up and quashed the investigation. They even allowed Seletzki to return to his office and destroy a large portion of the records. Another member of the National Peasant Party, however, raised the issue in parliament on 22 March and called for an official inquiry. The Škoda scandal dominated Romanian politics for the rest of year. The inquiry revealed that for a decade Seletzki had been bribing Romanian military and civilian leaders to secure armament contracts for Škoda that were 18 to 25 percent higher than bids of other foreign and local arms manufacturers.¹²⁹

As the details of the scandal were uncovered more and more people were implicated, but it was difficult to prove guilt or innocence. The destruction of documents by Selezki allowed the Liberal opposition to turn the scandal into a witch hunt because there was no way for anyone to definitively prove their innocence, and many in the National Peasant government were accused

¹²⁸ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 61.

¹²⁹ Marius-Cătălin Preduț, coord., “Afacerea SKODA - Romania și Cehoslovacia,” EuroAvocatura.ro, accessed 1 April 2016, http://www.euroavocatura.ro/articole/189/Afacerea_SKODA_-_Romania_si_Cehoslovacia.

of selling out Romania to foreigners. General Dumitru Popescu, Secretary to the Minister of Defense, committed suicide during the investigation.¹³⁰ His suicide was widely perceived as an admission of guilt, deepened the scandal, and contributed to the collapse of the National Peasant government in November 1933.¹³¹ This scandal was a boon for Romanian industrialists Malaxa and Auschnitt, prominent members of the king's camarilla, who favored the expansion of the local Romanian arms industry because they wanted the lucrative arms contracts for themselves. Carol II and the new Liberal government decided to appoint Antonescu as Chief of the General Staff in the aftermath of the scandal with a mandate to reorganize and reform the army.

The appointment brought Antonescu national notoriety for the first time.¹³² He was well-known in the officer corps for his First World War activity, arrogance, acerbic personality, and demanding standards. After finishing his assignment as military attaché in Paris, negotiating a 100 million *franc* credit for French arms, he became head of the Superior School of War during 1927-1930.¹³³ Antonescu was notorious for extremely difficult officer exams, he was nicknamed *roșul*, or “the red one,” a reference to his thinning red hair, by officers talking about him behind his back, but distinguished himself as the only head of the Superior School of War who never gave a lecture or published on military subjects.¹³⁴ He spent much of his time looking for an important political position and for a brief period in 1928 became the Secretary to the Minister of Defense. The Škoda scandal, his reputation for incorruptibility, and the patronage of Carol II resulted in Antonescu suddenly vaulting to the head of the Romanian Army as Chief of the

¹³⁰ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 63.

¹³¹ Scurtu, *România în timpul celor patru regi, volum III: Carol II*, 150-151.

¹³² Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 61.

¹³³ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 39.

¹³⁴ Grosu, *Memoriile unui ofițer de informații*, 170; Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler and Lupescu*, 15

General Staff over more senior generals. Antonescu used this appointment to embark upon his political career that soon placed him in opposition to the king and later brought him to power.

In retrospect, the Škoda Scandal was purposefully drawn out by Liberals to discredit the National Peasant government and accomplished little except to reward the king's industrialist cronies in the camarilla with lucrative contracts. The quality and quantity of arms produced by Škoda was superior to that of local Romanian industry (whose inferior arms already benefited from protective tariffs passed by previous Liberal governments) or the post-war surplus being sold to Romania by the French at the time. Antonescu actually argued that the quality of new Škoda artillery was *too good* because it required the purchase of new modern shells, the cost of which he claimed was prohibitive as it would bankrupt the army, which he believed was as an underhanded Czech business trick meant to exploit the Romanian Army.¹³⁵ Ironically, in 1934, Antonescu resigned from his position as Chief of the General Staff over the issue of importing Czechoslovak small arms that he considered necessary for his army reform program that was blocked by the new Minister of Defense General Angelescu.¹³⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Antonescu was a typically traditional officer. Furthermore, we see that the Romanian Army was relatively successful in obtaining the funds it needed from the state to arm, equip, and train the army between the wars within the financial constraints of the country's poor peasant economy. The Romanian officer corps proved a staunch supporter of authoritarianism, held conservative political beliefs, and embraced the increasingly anti-Semitic

¹³⁵ Antonescu railed against the “useless throwing away of billions over the frontier” rather than seeing it as realistic costs of modernizing the artillery, see, Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 68; he also opposed procuring trucks built by Malaxa as “they were considered useless or not urgently needed,” see, Pantazi, *Cu mareșal până la moarte*, 66.

¹³⁶ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 39.

mood after 1938. While Romania's exposed strategic position prompted officers to support the League in trying to maintain the European status quo, they did not believe in the values of liberal democracy and were already looking towards armed neutrality to pursue their own goals.

During the interwar period there was little foreshadowing of the dominant role that the Romanian Army and the officer corps under Antonescu would come to play in the Second World War and in the Holocaust. In fact, as the defender of established social order, the army was called upon to curb the worse abuses and violence perpetrated by the right-wing populists and the Legionary movement. Additionally, while the army was political, it was not politicized. Just like any state institution, the army participated in politics within its sphere of legitimate interest, particularly to convince the civilian government to approve the budgets or enact reforms that army leaders consider necessary for national defense. There was very little civil-military conflict during the interwar period in *România Mare*. Carol II provided stability that the officer corps desired and continued to prioritize the military, maintaining the support of most the officer corps, except for a few populists. A few individuals, like Averescu, Antonescu, and Cantacuzino-*Grănicerul*, used their military backgrounds to enter politics and courted right-wing populism. Nevertheless, while the officer corps held conservative political beliefs it did not try to seriously interfere in Romanian politics. Instead, the army was content to support the social status quo when called upon, whether in response to left- or right-wing threats to the nation. The right-wing political beliefs of the officer corps, however, help explain why the Romanian Army was so committed to defeating the Red Army and perpetrated so many against Jews after 1941.

During the interwar period the primary threat to Romanian security was the Soviet Union. The Treaty of Versailles effectively neutralized the militaries of Hungary and Bulgaria, while the Red Army grew in strength. In response, the Romanian Army sought to prepare to fight a large-

scale war against its threatening neighbor. The events of 1940 proved to the officer corps that it could not do it alone and needed a powerful ally to protect its territorial integrity and help defeat the Soviet threat once and for all. Therefore, in 1941 Romania was prepared to mobilize a large infantry army with a few motorized units, a supporting air force, and led by mostly competent officers for the invasion of the USSR. The Romanian Army was willing to fight as an ally of the Wehrmacht because of the intrinsic motivation of soldiers (nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism) that contributed to their enthusiastic participation in the “holy war” against the Soviet Union to destroy the perceived threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism.”

CHAPTER V

1940: HONOR, HUMILIATION, AND OCCUPATION

On the morning of 6 January 1940, King Carol II arrived with his royal train in Chișinău to celebrate Epiphany. The city was chosen because of its proximity to the Romanian-Soviet border, part of a three-stop tour of the threatened frontiers in the West, South, and East, designed to reassure the country that the Romanian Army was ready to defend *România Mare*. The royal visit consisted of a gathering of representatives from the counties of Bessarabia, a mass religious ceremony by Romanian Orthodox clergy at the Cathedral of Christ's Nativity, and culminated in a military parade. The king's speech asserted Romania's claims to Bessarabia, expressed his solidarity with its minority population, and promised "an enemy will never be able to place even a foot on what is holy and eternally Romanian!"¹ Just over six months later, however, Carol II ordered the army to withdraw from eastern Romania without a fight. The decision humiliated the officer corps, led to Carol II's downfall, and united Romanian society against the USSR.

This chapter argues that the occupation of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia by the Red Army in June 1940 played a decisive role in Romanian soldiers' motivation after 1941 because they considered the Soviet occupation a de facto start of hostilities.² Since Matatias Carp wrote his "Black Book" in 1947, Holocaust historians have recognized the Soviet occupation of eastern Romania as an important step in the cumulative radicalization of Romanian society on the way to the atrocities of 1941. Romanian military historians largely gloss over the events of 1940 and

¹ Regele Carol II, "Cuvântarea M.S. Regelui La Chișinău," *Sentinela*, 15 Ianuarie 1940, 1.

² Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 14.

instead begin histories in 1941; during communism this was taken to an even greater extreme as histories started in 1944. Since Romanian military historians skip the events of 1940 there is no detailed account of the Soviet occupation or the Romanian Army's withdrawal. Those works on the subject focus almost exclusively on the humiliation of Romanian soldiers and civilians and their victimization at the hands of the Soviets and "Jewish-Communists."³ Political historians, starting with exiled diplomats apologizing for the Romanian alliance with Nazi Germany, have looked at 1940 more closely, but create a false equivalency between the Soviet, Hungarian, and Bulgarian occupations and focus on proving Bucharest was driven towards Berlin reluctantly.⁴ The Carlist regime used events in eastern Romania to create a myth of Jewish betrayal that the Antonescu regime continued to propagate. The General Staff helped to craft this myth to shift the blame for the humiliating retreat onto Jews that was readily embraced by bigoted Romanian soldiers and civilians. This chapter also argues that violence against Jews in 1940 was initiated from the bottom-up by soldiers, joined at times by civilians, and in a few cases enabled by mid-ranking officers. The General Staff, army hierarchy, and discipline acted as momentary breaks on anti-Semitic violence from the top-down in 1940 – especially west of the Prut River.

³ For a nationalist account that compares the events to Christ's passion, but is light on military details, see, Mihai Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor (23-28 iunie 1940): Cedarea Basarabiei și a nordului Bucovinei* (Bucharest: Compania, 2008); editors at the AMR in Pitești published a three volume edited collection of army documents on the Soviet, Hungarian, and Bulgarian occupations of eastern Romania, northern Transylvania, and southern Dobrogea (one volume for each) with limited commentary that takes all army reports at face value, so they include original anti-Semitic reports depicting Jews as communists who abused the Romanian Army during the retreat and atrocities by soldiers that are implied to be justified responses, see, Florica Dobre, Vasilica Manea, Lenuța Nicolescu, ed., *Anul 1940: Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat, Documente. Vol. I-III* (Bucharest: Editura Europa Nova, 2000).

⁴ Diplomats in exile pushed this narrative, see, Alexandru Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage: Political Memories of a Romanian Diplomat* (Iași-Oxford-Portland: The Center for Romanian Studies, 1998); recently military historians have focused on the period leading up to 1940, but primarily to defend the honor of the Romanian Army by showing why the decision to not fight the Soviets in 1940 was the correct decision and only briefly address the actual retreat from eastern Romania and they also take the army reports from 1940 about "Jewish-Communists" at face value, see, Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*; Dan Prisăcaru, *În avanpostul luptei pentru supraviețuire: Apărarea națională a României și frontul secret în vîltoarea anilor 1938-1940* (Bucharest: Editura militară, 2014).

The Soviet occupation of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia had a much greater effect on the Romanian Army than the subsequent loss of northern Transylvania to Hungary or southern Dobrogea to Bulgaria because it was much more traumatic. As painful as the loss of these other territories was, especially northern Transylvania, the army's withdrawal from them was calm and orderly, in contrast to the chaotic and embarrassing retreat from eastern Romania.⁵ There are several reasons why the Soviet occupation was worse than the others. First, the decision to give up territory without a fight in June was a greater shock than it was later in September because the Soviet ultimatum came unexpectedly, while the Second Vienna Award occurred after weeks of negotiations, which better prepared the public for the loss.⁶ Afterwards, an official explained to a British journalist why the decision to not fight in 1940 shocked Romanians.

Roumania [sic] was not prepared for territorial concessions. Everyone had made material sacrifices for the organization and equipment of the army and for fortifications...At the New Year, the King visited the West, East and Southern frontiers and declared that we shall defend them. The whole nation was convinced that, although we were surrounded by enemies who would all attack us, probably at the same time, we should not yield except after a struggle. The nation was prepared spiritually for such a fight.⁷

Second, the Soviet occupation was rapid, accomplished in just days by motorized and armored forces, whereas the Hungarian or Bulgarian army was not motorized, so later occupations were implemented only slowly in phases. Furthermore, the Romanians were able to extract conditions from Hungary and Bulgaria that prevented a repeat of the embarrassing flight from the Soviets. The slower pace allowed officers to maintain a sense of honor during the retreat as well. Captain Alexandru Ionescu Saint-Cry described the evacuation of Cluj, the capital of Transylvania, as the

⁵ In comparison to Transylvania, Dobrogea was not seen a truly Romanian province, made up mostly of minorities, and in 1940 the Romanian population was largely indifferent to its loss, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 95-97.

⁶ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 36-38.

⁷ Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler and Lupescu*, 214.

last soldiers departed he saw Romanian flags replaced by Hungarian ones across the city, “I was then overcome with a thought which I had to speak: ‘Do not worry, now we leave, but surely we will return.’”⁸ Such solemn reflection was impossible in eastern Romania as units fled helter-skelter before advancing Soviet columns and some officers besmirched the army’s honor with acts of cowardice, panic, and incompetence.⁹ Lastly, the population of eastern Romania did not respond to occupation in the way that the army expected. Some recalled sad-faced *basarabeni* asking retreating soldiers, “Who are you leaving us with?” Contemporary reports, however, indicate widespread national indifference on the part of *bucovineni* and *basarabeni* and some Romanians even joined in pro-Soviet demonstrations.¹⁰ In northern Transylvania, on the other hand, *ardeleni* organized angry, pro-war demonstrations protesting the decision to withdraw.¹¹ Local Jews became the scapegoat to explain away the pro-Soviet attitude shown by much of the population of eastern Romania and became the target for anti-Semitic violence.¹²

Perhaps the most important result of the Soviet occupation of eastern Romania was that it created the conditions for Antonescu to seize power. He understood, and shared, the feelings of anger, humiliation, and bellicosity in Romanian society – and in the officer corps particularly. Immediately after he seized power on 6 September 1940, Antonescu told the people in a radio broadcast that “we must clean [our] wounds, gather [our] strength, pick up [our] honor, and ensure the future.”¹³ His message galvanized the public and gave soldiers a new purpose, the

⁸ Vasile Bărboi, Gheroghe Ioniță, Victor Atanasiu, și Alesandru Duțu, ed., *Armata română în vîltoarea războiului* (Bucharest: Editura “Vasile Cârlova, 2002), 36.

⁹ Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler, and Lupescu*, 215.

¹⁰ Bărboi, *Armata română în vîltoarea războiului*, 37; Dobre, *Anul 1940: Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat Vol. I*, 153-154; Pelin, *Săptămâna patimilor*, 131.

¹¹ For example, a crowd of 4,000-5,000 in Cluj shouted, “We want war!” in late-August 1940 while Romanian and Hungarian diplomats negotiated, see, Dobre, *Anul 1940: Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat, Vol. II*, 124.

¹² Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 162.

¹³ Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte*, 28.

redemption of *România Mare*, which contributed to the formation of a national consensus that underpinned Romania’s “holy war” against “Judeo-Bolshevism” after June 1941.

Neutrality and Defensive Preparations

The Romanian Army began serious military preparations after the Sudeten Crisis and Munich Conference of September 1938. Already as early as 1936, King Carol II had directed his diplomats to adopt a policy of neutrality, rather than rely on the British and French who backed the faltering League.¹⁴ Central to the success of neutrality was maintaining a large army to deter invasion. Additionally, the policy of neutrality allowed Romania to court Nazi Germany, both as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union and a source of badly needed arms. At the same time, the Romanian Army embarked on a costly construction program of frontier fortifications along the exposed borders to try to further deter hostile neighbors. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact suddenly upended Romania’s balancing act between the Western Powers and Nazi Germany.

In response to increased tensions after the Sudeten crisis, Carol II ordered the Romanian Army to expand. On 19 September 1938, the General Staff decided not to release soldiers after the end of their two-year service, allowing units to be brought to full strength without needing to mobilize.¹⁵ The international situation only worsened. In February 1939, General V. Economu declared, “war has already begun. Austria and Czechoslovakia have been invaded. Although they did not defend themselves, the act of war was consummated.”¹⁶ Hungary’s re-introduction of universal military service on 15 February 1939 further increased concerns. In response, the General Staff called up soldiers from extended leave. On 21 March 1939, a week after German

¹⁴ Haynes, *Romanian Policy towards Germany*, 170.

¹⁵ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 106.

¹⁶ General V. Economu, “Războiul care vine,” *România militară* LXXVII, Nr. 2 (Februarie 1939), 3.

(and Hungarian forces) occupied rump Czechoslovakia, the General Staff believed a Hungarian invasion was imminent and received orders to partially mobilize, adding 500,000 more soldiers. The General Staff activated three armies, First, Second, and Fourth, each assigned a respective threatened frontier in Transylvania, Dobrogea, and Bessarabia. Recruiting stations were quickly crowded with more men than they knew what to do with creating confusion: peasants misread mobilization orders, overly zealous gendarmes gathered up all eligible men, and peasants flushed with patriotic fervor rushed to report.¹⁷ 2nd Lieutenant Dumitru Teodorescu, stationed in Sibiu in Transylvania, recalled, “Near midnight, the city and barracks were ‘flooded’ with reservists. A single cry stirs the city barracks, “Weapons, weapons! Give us weapons!”¹⁸ Romanian soldiers were ready to defend the borders of *România Mare*.

The General Staff accelerated the construction of fortifications on Romania’s frontiers. The first significant efforts had begun in March 1937 in Transylvania.¹⁹ On paper these defenses were impressive, a veritable Romanian version of the Maginot Line: concrete casements, anti-tank ditches, observation and command posts, protected passages, minefields, and barbed wire. For the most part, however, these fortifications remained imaginary and those sections that were finished were irreverently nicknamed “Carol’s dyke” rather than “the Carol Line,” as in official parlance.²⁰ In a disastrous misreading of the international situation the Carlist regime believed that revisionist Hungary (backed by Nazi Germany) was the most immediate threat because the USSR had joined the League of Nations in 1934 and seemed to favor collective defense.²¹ The

¹⁷ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 132.

¹⁸ Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte*, 21.

¹⁹ Prisăcaru, *În avanpostul luptei pentru supraviețuire*, 76.

²⁰ Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler, and Lupescu*, 188.

²¹ Prisăcaru, *În avanpostul luptei pentru supraviețuire*, 41.

General Staff placed its faith in a resurrected Franco-Russian alliance to secure its eastern flank. By the summer of 1940, work had progressed furthest along the western border with 316 of 510 or 62 percent of planned casements completed, compared to 127 of 1033 or just 12 percent in Bessarabia and 24 of 498 or a paltry 5 percent in Bukovina.²² It appears that a sizable portion of the funds for the fortifications was embezzled and there were reports that construction materials were sold off for illicit profit.²³ The announcement of an unforeseen non-aggression pact on 24 August 1939 between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union suddenly changed the primary threat from the western to the eastern frontier.

The German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939 followed by a Soviet invasion on 17 September plunged Europe into war and isolated Romania. Instead of royal maneuvers that fall, Carol II ordered the General Staff to fully mobilize the Romanian Army. On 6 September, the General Staff mobilized another army that was assigned to reinforce eastern Romania. Third Army, commanded by General Iosif Iacobici, guarded Bukovina. Fourth Army, commanded by General Nicolae Ciupercă, defended Bessarabia with III, X, and Cavalry corps in reserve. These forces were placed under Army Group Nr. 1 (also known as Army Group Siret), activated on 22 September under General Nicolae Tătăranu. By October an astounding 1.1 million soldiers were under arms, stretching army resources to the breaking point and triggering shortages in weapons, material, transport, and horses.²⁴ The most critical shortage, however, was officers. Therefore, the General Staff encouraged TTR sergeants, like George Crisan a 32-year-old Baptist lawyer

²² Bărboi, *Armata română în vâltoarea războiului*, 30.

²³ Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, 39; newspapers on the morning of 26 June 1940 in Bucharest carried stories of corruption and embezzlement of these funds, see, Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor*, 55.

²⁴ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 135, 132.

from Transylvania, to become reserve officers after a brief training program.²⁵ That winter the army maintained 800,000 soldiers; a massive number compared to the interwar high of about 186,000 soldiers. In spring 1940, the General Staff mobilized even more men to try to deter the Soviets from attacking, until 1.2 million soldiers were enlisted. By summer, after nearly a year of mobilization many soldiers presented a pitiable sight due to the General Staff's difficulties in feeding, clothing, and sheltering them all. After visiting Transylvania in early June 1940, a British journalist described the condition of the Romanian soldiers she saw as "appalling."

Those privates who could afford it hired beds in peasants' cottages; the rest slept in stations, in barns, in cowsheds or in the open. No facilities were provided for washing; they were nearly all covered with lice. Few outside Bucharest had complete uniforms. One would have army boots, another a cap, a third trousers, and a fourth a rifle.²⁶

She believed that the soldiers were "discontented and unhappy." In contrast, in May 1940, Army Group Nr. 1 reported that while there were shortages in food, equipment, pay, and financial aid to families, soldiers' morale was "excellent," citing good discipline, improvement in the attitude of reserve officers, and soldiers' goodwill during mobilization. Tătăranu concluded by praising a sergeant from 8th Infantry Division for breaking up a Zionist meeting of 50 Jews (and refusing to take a bribe), the 56th *Infanterie* Regiment for feeding 120 poor children and donating icons to a local church, and 8th Artillery Regiment for donating 2,500 *lei* to build a school.²⁷

The financial costs of mobilization on Romanian society was great. Since the beginning of the ten-year rearmament program in 1935, the state had levied heavier taxes on the population to pay for military expenses. These excise taxes in the form of stamps were applied to common

²⁵ Crisan, *An Amazing Life*, 115-116.

²⁶ Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, 37.

²⁷ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 277, f. 214-219.

goods to fund rearmament, IAR, and later the Carol Line.²⁸ Yet even these measures could not provide the military with enough to cover all its costs. Mihail Sebastian, a famous Jewish writer and playwright from Bucharest serving as a private in early 1940, noted officers exhibiting what he termed “military rapaciousness.” Officers expected subordinates to provide whatever the unit required, without any concern about how or with what funds, often forcing soldiers to scrounge or purchase what was required themselves. He wrote in his diary that if “the company is missing a bridle, we buy one ourselves. If there is need of three hundred plates and three hundred sets of cutlery, we buy them ourselves.”²⁹ Since the General Staff did not provide funds, officers looked to soldiers, especially Jews they assumed were wealthy, to provide what they needed.

Following orders from the General Staff, Fourth Army began to form labor detachments from minority draftees in late 1939, freeing up Romanians for training, and by April 1940 there were an estimated 70,000 minority soldiers in 63 labor detachments tasked with constructing the fortifications on the borders.³⁰ The General Staff divided minorities into three types: Category I were Romanians who were members of suspected religions (Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, Baptists, Inochentisti, Stilisti), Category II were ethnic minorities (Czechs, Poles, Turks), and category III were ethnic minorities with irredentist homelands or otherwise seen as hostile (Jews, Hungarians, Russians/Lipovans, Ukrainians, Bulgarians).³¹ Fourth army formed labor detachments from men in categories II and III – with a few NCOs from category I assigned

²⁸ Manolescu, *Permitted to Land*, 9; Hollingworth, *There’s A German Just Behind Me*, 39.

²⁹ Sebastian, *Journal*, 265-266.

³⁰ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 194.

³¹ AMR, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 53, f. 408; AMR Fond CMC, dosar 810, f. 238.

to assist regular officers put in charge.³² Not all minorities were relegated to labor detachments and those who had trained with combat or support units before 1939 stayed with their unit.

All this occurred during the so-called “Phony War” in Western Europe as Anglo-French and German forces sat inert facing each other on the Franco-German border. In Scandinavia, however, the war was far from phony and the Red Army invaded Finland on 30 November 1940. For Romanian diplomats, who believed no good could come from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and correctly suspected it contained secret protocols in regard to Bessarabia, the Soviet-Finnish “Winter War” confirmed fears that the Soviet Union was willing to use naked aggression to seize former Russian territory.³³ Bessarabia had been a bone of contention between the two countries since its annexation in 1918 and continued to be even after official relations between Romania and the USSR were finally re-established in 1934.³⁴ The Soviet Union’s anti-Romanian rhetoric became increasingly hostile after 1939. In November 1939, Romanian intelligence reported that a Soviet admiral in Riga had boasted of a coming attack on Romania after the Soviets dealt with Finland.³⁵ On 29 March 1940, Molotov announced to the Supreme Soviet that the USSR might annex Bessarabia and the Soviet press quickly began to rail against Romanian “oppression” in Bessarabia.³⁶ Romanian diplomats kept a close eye on events in the Winter War because they feared that once the Finnish Army was defeated then it would be Romania’s turn to be invaded. Nevertheless, according to the high-ranking Carlist diplomat Alexandru Cretzianu, Romanian

³² Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 33, f. 2-4.

³³ Article 3 of the Secret Additional Protocol to the Treaty of Non-Aggression Between Germany and the USSR dealt with Southeastern Europe, and specifically mentioned Soviet interest in Bessarabia, see, Geoffrey Roberts, *The Unholy Alliance: Stalin’s Pact with Hitler* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 267.

³⁴ Haynes, *Romanian Policy Towards Germany*, 4.

³⁵ Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 153.

³⁶ Chris Bellamy, *Absolute War: Soviet Russia in the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 90; Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 194.

leaders saw a “glimmer of hope” in the Winter War because of the widespread outrage the Soviet invasion created in capitals across Europe that “made us think that the Russia of Stalin had at long last been seen in its true colors, and that henceforth the Soviets could never again benefit from the trust or support of the great Western democracies.”³⁷ By this point the Soviet threat was seen as a greater threat to Romania than German-backed Hungarian revisionism.

The conclusion of the Winter War in March 1940 again put the Romanian Army on high alert. Romanian officers came to the same conclusions about the poor performance of the Red Army against the Finnish Army as the rest of Europe and viewed the Soviets with contempt.³⁸ Romanian officers’ disdain for the Red Army would make it even harder for them to accept the king’s decision in late June 1940 to abandon northern Bukovina and Bessarabia without a fight, especially when the example of Finland, with a population of less than four million compared to Romania’s over 18 million, having faced down the Soviet colossus so fresh in their minds. The Finnish soldiers were lionized in the press and held up as an example to Romanian soldiers in the official army newspaper *Sentinela* to emulate in case the Soviets invaded eastern Romania.

For 45 days, in a very small country, about which almost nothing is known, although it is not far from us, a war is being carried out that is amazing the whole world...The example of the Finns proves to the whole world that when a people is imbued with love for country and nation, any attempt to destroy it fails.³⁹

The Romanian Army, to the dismay of its officers, was not fated to win worldwide acclaim by a determined, if ultimately futile, resistance to Soviet aggression in 1940. Instead, in the wake of the Fall of France, Carol II ordered them to carry out an ignominious retreat.

³⁷ Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 154.

³⁸ Hector Bolitho, *Roumania under King Carol* (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1940), 87.

³⁹ Editorii, “Războiul din Finlanda,” *Sentinela*, 15 Ianuarie 1940, 6.

Soviet Ultimatum and Occupation of Eastern Romania

The fall of France on 25 June 1940 removed the last obstacle to Moscow's plans to seize formerly tsarist Bessarabia, and even more territory. The Red Army, which had maintained large forces near the border for months, began moving to the frontier and throughout 26 June signs of Red Army activity, such as smoke from company kitchens, camouflaged armor, and dust clouds from marching soldiers were observed by Romanian soldiers across the border.⁴⁰ At 10 pm, the long feared Soviet ultimatum was delivered by Molotov to Gheorghe Davidescu, the Romanian ambassador in Moscow, beginning a crisis that eventually toppled the Carlist regime. Although Romanian leaders had anticipated a Soviet ultimatum, unexpected and harsh terms still shocked them. Predictably Moscow demanded, "To return Bessarabia to the Soviet Union at any price," but surprisingly added, "To transfer to the Soviet Union the northern part of Bukovina, with its frontiers, according to the adjoining map."⁴¹ Formerly Habsburg northern Bukovina had not been part of the Russian Empire, and the demand surprised the Romanians (and the Germans). Furthermore, the small-scale map and the thick pencil used to draw the new border in Bukovina left the fate of many towns and villages unclear – especially in the Herța region.⁴² Finally, the Soviet ultimatum required a response in just 17 hours or war would be declared.

Any hope to delay a decision or negotiate better terms was dashed. At 4 am on 27 June, Army Group Nr. 1 was placed on alert, following plans that "our firm decision that we will fight if we are attacked must come off clearly to the Soviets."⁴³ Army Group Nr. 1 had 20 infantry divisions, 3 cavalry divisions, and 1 mountain brigade that faced the Kiev Military District with

⁴⁰ Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor*, 49.

⁴¹ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 21.

⁴² There was no clear boundary like the Prut or Danube for Bessarabia, see, Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 178.

⁴³ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 263; Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor*, 40-41.

43 infantry divisions, 3 motorized infantry divisions, 10 cavalry divisions, and 11 tank brigades; roughly three to one odds – not counting the Red Army’s massive manpower reserves or the Red Air Force’s overwhelming superiority over the Romanian Royal Air Force.⁴⁴ Despite these odds some Romanian leaders believed resistance could be successful, at least in the sense of stymying the Red Army, forcing Moscow to negotiate, and reducing Soviet demands – like in Finland. Ambassador Davidescu declared, “I do not doubt for a moment that our resistance could paralyze the Soviet forces, which rest in large part on legend and are led by incompetent ‘officers.’”⁴⁵ At a meeting of the Crown Council, however, General Florea Țenescu, Chief of the General Staff, and General Ioan Ilcuș, Minister of Defense emphasized overwhelming Red Army numbers, unfinished defenses, German pressure to accept the demands, and the threat of Hungary and/or Bulgaria invading as well – raising the specter of partition like Poland – to convince the council that the military option was unrealistic and dangerous.⁴⁶ At the next meeting, 19 voted to accept the Soviet ultimatum, with six opposing and one abstention.⁴⁷ Shortly thereafter, a message from Moscow arrived that set the start of the Soviet occupation for 2 am on 28 June 1940, demanded key infrastructure, industry, and materials not be destroyed or removed, and gave the Romanians just four days to evacuate. The Carlist regime immediately acquiesced to these demands.

The Crown Council deliberations of 27 June were secret. Soldiers remained convinced that they would fight, including General Ciupercă, who later asserted, “There was no indication, however vague, of a possible retreat.”⁴⁸ Commanders made few preparations to retreat, which

⁴⁴ Prisăcaru, *În avanpostul luptei pentru supraviețuire*, 356; Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 90.

⁴⁵ Translated by author, but quote taken from Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 266.

⁴⁶ Prisăcaru, *În avanpostul luptei pentru supraviețuire*, 358; Cretianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 180.

⁴⁷ Bărboi, *Armata română în vâltoarea războiului*, 31.

⁴⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 381, f. 289.

resulted in confusion once the last-minute decision was taken not to resist. At 2 am on 28 June, General Georgy Zhukov, then commander of the Kiev Military District, ordered the first Soviet units to cross the border, some of which opened fire on Romanian units who had not yet received orders to retreat.⁴⁹ The General Staff's order to retreat only went out at 4 am to Army Group Nr. 1. It ordered all units to rapidly evacuate Bessarabia and organize a line of defense on the Prut River, added that Cernăuți, Chișinău, and Cetatea Albă should all be evacuated by 7 pm on 28 June and surrendered an hour later by mayors (not military personnel), but beyond this the plan was vague. The General Staff instructed contact be made with Soviet commanders to coordinate movements and avoid incidents but did not say how this would be accomplished. These orders were nearly useless, so the retreat had to be improvised by commanders on the spot and resulted in chaos.⁵⁰ Additionally, battalion and company commanders with positions far forward on the frontier did not receive orders until midday or even later, and it took another two to three hours for units to begin to retreat, meaning many units did not get moving until the early afternoon.⁵¹ Lastly, while mentioning Cernăuți, the General Staff avoided mentioning the fate of northern Bukovina and confusion over the new border led to the first Romanian deaths of the war.

The news Bessarabia would be abandoned initiated a stampede. Private Weiss recalled waking up in the early morning to the noise of wagons and automobiles in the streets, "Normally it would be quiet in Ismail [a city on the Danube]. Our landlady, a Romanian officer's wife, told us, 'The Russians crossed the border. Our army had four days to clear out of Bessarabia.'"⁵² He was not the only one caught unprepared. Major Nicolae Ciobanu, a member of III Corps staff,

⁴⁹ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 270.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 271.

⁵¹ AMR Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 982, f. 116.

⁵² Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 20.

recalled that the order to retreat “fell among us like a bolt of lightning. We were not prepared for this eventuality [but] for resistance.”⁵³ Romanian units rushed to get moving west, grabbed what they could, often looted local stores, and then headed to the nearest bridge, ferry, or ford.

The Kiev Military District’s primary objectives on 28 June was to occupy the whole of northern Bukovina, the northern part of Bessarabia, make incursions all along the Dniester, and seize crossings along the Prut as it continued south. The rest of central and southern Bessarabia would be occupied in the following days. Soviet motorized formations could simply drive across the old Polish-Romanian border into northern Bukovina, but to descend into northern Bessarabia the Soviets had to organize a river crossing. A permanent bridge at Hotin was too far west and was used to support the advance on Cernăuți. As Soviet motorized formations raced to Cernăuți, two pontoon bridges were thrown across the Dniester at Moghilev and Iampo1, men and vehicles began crossing at 2 pm and soon two brigades were across. This crossing was carried out in near combat conditions with Soviet units firing on the other bank and amphibious craft employed at some places.⁵⁴ In addition to the main crossing, Red Army forces crossed at other points on the Dniester all the way down to Cetatea Albă, located near the mouth of the river spilling into the Black Sea and where communist parades started in the early afternoon. Soviet units reached Cernăuți at 5 pm as the main Red Army force advanced on four axes converging on the city of Bălți in northern Bessarabia.⁵⁵ Due to the time required to cross the Dniester there were few incidents between the two armies on the first day, but panic soon reigned in the cities.

⁵³ Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor*, 106.

⁵⁴ AMR, Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 124, f. 255.

⁵⁵ Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor*, 197.

During the afternoon of 28 June order began to break down in Cernăuți, Chișinău, and Cetatea Albă. Refugees crowded into train stations trying to escape, communist sympathizers began to demonstrate, and soldiers started to loot or get drunk, especially if officers abandoned them. The news that Soviet forces were near only worsened the situation. In Cernăuți Captain Epifanie Cozărăscu recorded, “After the lunch hour the sinister rumbling of Soviet tanks, coming closer and closer, began to be heard.”⁵⁶ In towns and cities across the region spontaneous pro-Soviet demonstrations took place. A young man scaled the Cernăuți town hall at 10:30 am to rip down the Romanian tricolor and hoist up a communist red flag; he was shot dead by a soldier.⁵⁷ At 1 pm Army Group Nr. 1 ordered a general retreat to the south, aiming for Danube crossings, because Soviet forces had already reached crossings over the Prut – in places as early as 12:30 or 2:30 pm.⁵⁸ A few times, such as the Rădăuți bridge, Soviet tanks seemed about to try to cross the Prut and were shot at by Romanian troops.⁵⁹ The last overcrowded train left Cernăuți at 2 pm. Many soldiers and civilians feared that the Red Army just might continue its advance across the Prut and occupy Moldavia as well, perhaps even the whole of Romania.

With significant Soviet forces across the border, incidents between the two armies began to multiply. There had been isolated incidents during 28 June, but no deaths until Soviet troops arrived at 4 am on 29 June in Herța. The territory around the town was part of the Old Kingdom, but it jutted north towards Cernăuți and the Soviets were not about to respect a border dating to 1775 if it fell on the Soviet side of the line drawn by Stalin in Moscow. Romanian soldiers had no idea that Herța had been signed away too. Red Army soldiers in two armored cars ordered

⁵⁶ Bărboi, *Armata română în vâltoarea războiului*, 32.

⁵⁷ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 24.

⁵⁸ Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor*, 217.

⁵⁹ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, 94.

Captain Ioan Boroș, commander of 1st Battery of the 16th Artillery Regiment, to surrender his unit. According to a witness, Captain Boroș believed that the arrival of Soviet forces in Herța was a mistake, so he and 2nd Lieutenant Alexandru Dragomir approach the Soviets accompanied by several soldiers. 2nd Lieutenant Dragomir made the mistake of firing in the air with his pistol, apparently attempting to intimidate the Soviets, prompting the Red Army soldiers to open fire, killing Boroș, Dragomir, and a private named Iancu Solomon. Ironically, the first casualties of the Romanian Army during the Second World War were two Romanians and a Jew. The events in Herța did not bode well for the rest of the Romanian withdrawal.

On Saturday 29 June, the Soviets continued to ignore “evacuation zones” established by the General Staff in an attempt to prevent further incidents and chaos. Red Army units reached Chișinău in central Bessarabia that morning. As Soviet mechanized units progressively cut off escape routes west across the Prut, the arrival of Soviet airborne troops at Bolgrad, an important railway hub in southern Bessarabia, further complicated the Romanian retreat. Romanian reports indicate that the Gudarevici Detachment, a Red Army airborne brigade with an estimated 1,200 men, landed across southern Bessarabia; some by air transport unloaded at various airfields and the rest by four-engine aircraft carrying 10-18 parachutists each dropped at low speeds in a large drop over villages inhabited mostly by Bulgarians near Bolgrad.⁶⁰ These airborne troops set up rallying points, confiscated vehicles, and advanced to Bolgrad. The sudden appearance of these airborne troops spooked General Gheorghe Atanasescu, commander of Cavalry Corps, who fled across the Danube to Galați. Atanasescu spun a tale involving “terrorist threats” in Bolgrad and

⁶⁰ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 124, f. 257.

a close escape by train with Soviet parachutists hot on his heels to justify his action.⁶¹ This story was one of many that soon turned a few isolated pro-Soviet demonstrations into a narrative of betrayal and humiliation by “Jewish-Communist” fifth columnists. An angry General Ciupercă ordered Atanasescu to return the next day to parley with Colonel Gudarevici to try to get his Soviet airborne soldiers to reopen Bolgrad for rail traffic, so the Romanians could complete the evacuation of soldiers, refugees, and war materials.

Romanian units increasingly reported attacks by communist “bands” made up of Jews, other minorities, and a few “delinquent Romanians” as the retreat entered its second day.⁶² The few confirmed cases of ambushes occurred in towns or cities. On the first day of the occupation in Socorca, a town on the Dniester near Iampol, a convoy of city buses requisitioned to evacuate civil servants and their families was ambushed, leaving behind burning vehicles and four dead. The “tragedy at Socorca” was blamed on Jews and soon became a cause célèbre that lent validity to fantastic tales of Jewish treachery spread by refugees fleeing the Soviets.⁶³ General Ciupercă, believed that in different places people treated the retreating troops differently. “The population of the cities and towns is completely hostile to us in contrast to that of the villages, [which is] sad and benevolent.”⁶⁴ While his observation is probably based on Ciupercă’s prejudice against the large Jewish and Russian populations in Bessarabian towns and cities – while in the countryside Romanians, Ukrainians, and Bulgarians predominated – urban areas were indeed more likely to be dangerous for evacuating troops as more workers who might be attracted to Soviet ideology

⁶¹ Ibid., dosar 87, f. 66-67.

⁶² Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 276.

⁶³ An investigation claimed that a number of Jewish lawyers in the city had formed a revolutionary committee that organized and ordered the ambush, but the investigation was likely biased, see, Pelin, *Săptămâna patimilor*, 219.

⁶⁴ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 277.

lived in cities or towns. Additionally, places like Chișinău had remained under martial law the longest during the interwar period, so anyone nursing a grudge because of rough treatment under Romanian rule could take out their anger on the retreating forces. Lastly, towns and cities were where Soviet soldiers or representatives arrived first and they encouraged the local inhabitants to perform social revolutionary acts targeting the retreating Romanians.

A description of the evacuation of a town is found in the semi-autobiographical account of Elvera Ziebart Reuer, an ethnic German from southern Bessarabia, based on her experiences as a young woman. On Sunday 30 June, the rumor reached her town, Arciz, that Soviet troops were about to arrive at the train station. She and a friend went to watch and found most of the Russian youths of the town already there and waving flags to welcome the Soviet soldiers. This impromptu welcoming committee also included a number of Jewish youths, while other German youths crowded nearby, watching “out of curiosity.”⁶⁵ As this was going on, Romanian soldiers were loading up carts with goods looted from German shops in the town. A train pulled into the station, met with shouts and flag-waving by the crowd, but Soviet infantry did not come pouring off the train as expected. Instead, a few partisans jumped down from a wagon, handed out rifles to some youths in the crowd, including a Jewish boy Reuer recognized, and then disappeared. Disappointed the crowd began to disperse, but as a soldier in a wagon turned a nearby corner a shot rang out and the driver slumped.⁶⁶ The two girls tried to help the wounded soldier but were roughly interrogated by a suspicious Romanian sergeant. Eventually, they were set free after the wounded soldier regained consciousness and cleared them. By the end of the day the Romanians

⁶⁵ Marjorie Knittel, *The Last Bridge: Her Own True Story, Elvera Ziebart Reuer* (Aberdeen, S.D.: Midstates Printing Inc., 1984), 52.

⁶⁶ Knittel, *The Last Bridge*, 53.

soldiers had gone. Red Army soldiers had replaced them, crowding the town's streets with tanks, trucks, and carts – they had intercepted the carts Romanian soldiers had loaded down with the looted goods, which the Soviet soldiers then kept for themselves.⁶⁷ Similar events occurred in towns and villages across northern Bukovina and Bessarabia during the withdrawal.

As they overran Bessarabia, Soviet columns that overtook Romanian units often disarmed and sometimes humiliated them before allowing those who wanted to cross the border. Officers took the brunt of the humiliation because Soviets saw them as capitalist exploiters to be punished for their crimes, in comparison they saw soldiers as the exploited downtrodden and treated them favorably hoping they would join the revolution. Soviet officers encouraged Romanian soldiers to turn against their officers, who often had their epaulettes torn off to reenacted events in the Russian Revolution.⁶⁸ This was especially humiliating to regular officers due to their concern for honor. Soon after crossing from Iampol to Cosăuti on the first day, a Red Army unit captured Captain Ioan Iepure, leading a squadron from the 3rd *Călărași* Regiment, along with a lieutenant and his men. The two officers were degraded, mocked, and spit upon by locals in the presence of Soviet officers – only a few of the officers actually participated. Iepure was so humiliated that after being released he committed suicide.⁶⁹ Captain Arnold Hansenöhrl in the 10th *Vânători* Regiment also shot himself after his company was disarmed during the retreat.⁷⁰ The suicides of

⁶⁷ Knittel, *The Last Bridge*, 56.

⁶⁸ Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 184.

⁶⁹ Pelin, *Săptămâna patimilor*, 198; honor suicide was still an ideal. Pantazi remembered that as a child his father, also an officer, read him a story from the newspaper about an officer's wife who borrowed a pearl necklace from another officer's wife and replaced the pearls with fake ones before returning them. The theft was discovered, and the officer was dismissed for the crime. Then he shot himself. After reading the story, Pantazi's father said, "He didn't have any other solution, his military honor had been stained," see, Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 3-4.

⁷⁰ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 272, f. 120; Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 982, f. 54.

both were celebrated at the time and used to inflame anger against “Jewish-Communists.” Now, Hansenhöhrl, an ethnic German, has been written out of the nationalist history of the war.

Romanian units struggling to reach the border suffered high rates of desertion, especially those with large numbers of *basarabeni* or local minorities. Private Weiss’s cavalry squadron loaded boats in Ismail on the Dniester for several days, he and other ethnic Germans in uniform found excuses to stay on the Bessarabian side of the river before deciding to desert the night of 28 June. He and eleven others sneaked out to the edge of town at dawn and then slowly crawled through a wheat field until 4 pm when it felt safe enough to stand up and head home.⁷¹ General I. Mihail Racoviță, commanding 2nd Cavalry Division, claimed that Jewish soldiers were the first to desert, implying a “Jewish-Communist” connection, although he admitted most Jews stayed in their units. Commanders quickly suspected the loyalty of *basarabeni* (Moldovans). At 6 am on 28 June, III Corps ordered that “the commanders of all regiments will order the withdrawal of ammunition distributed to Bessarabian soldiers.”⁷² They had good cause for concern. Officers promised their men that if they would be allowed to return home after successfully evacuating, if they so desired, but many *basarabeni* chose to desert – especially if overtaken by Soviet troops. One officer recalled, “All Bessarabian soldiers, who threw down their weapons, took with them all equipment with which they had been equipped, even taking carts with horses, loading the baggage of officers and soldiers from the [Old] Kingdom, they put [these things] in the carts and all left for their homes in Bessarabia.”⁷³ The loss of these carts further impeded the retreat by slowing down Romanian formations and limiting what could be evacuated.

⁷¹ Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 22-24.

⁷² Pelin, *Săptămîna patimilor*, 121.

⁷³ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 277.

Soviet propaganda tried to encourage desertion using loudspeakers, air-dropped leaflets, and mixing Red Army troops with Romanian soldiers. The efficacy of this Soviet propaganda is debatable, and most soldiers who deserted did so because they did not want to leave their homes and families, not out of sympathy to Soviet ideology. Private Weiss remembered, “We didn’t feel proud to be deserters from our country, even though Bessarabia didn’t exist anymore.”⁷⁴ When overtaken by Soviet units, Red Army officers told soldiers from Bessarabia to surrender their weapons and go home, an option most took. The soldiers of the 6th *Rosiori* Regiment, after crossing the Prut to safety, demanded to be allowed to return home or they would desert and left behind just the officers and six soldiers from the Old Kingdom.⁷⁵ The choice between nation and home was a difficult one. Lieutenant Ștefan Airinei recalled, “Every one of them, I believe, had to decide alone if they were going to remain [in Bessarabia] or cross the Prut with us....I almost physically felt the pain of my heart breaking. What historical moment was I living...that of 1812, when Bessarabia was torn [from Romania by Imperial Russia] the first time, did it feel the same then?”⁷⁶ But while Romanian officers and soldiers had sympathy for *basarabeni* and their situation, they had none for Jews from Bessarabia and never forgave their “betrayal.”

Romanian officers and soldiers immediately accused Jews for allegedly taking the most initiative in deserting, participating in humiliating the army, and collaborating with the Soviets. Vladimir Solonari recently observed that Romanian reports about the retreat reveal a division of the Bessarabian population in three groups: Romanians saddened by the withdrawal, Christian minorities who waited passively for the Soviets, and Jews who took initiative in humiliating and

⁷⁴ Wieland, *Bessarabian Knight*, 25.

⁷⁵ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, 156-160.

⁷⁶ Selections from Ștefan Airinei’s memoirs quoted in, Pelin, *Săptămâna patimilor*, 131.

attacking the army.⁷⁷ This pattern was no accident, or simply bias, but was purposefully fostered by the General Staff. In response to the Soviets claiming that the Red Army had not abused or impeded Romanian soldiers in any way and that any losses were the result of the indiscipline on the part of Romanian soldiers, the General Staff sent out an order on 8 July 1940 for all units to gather material evidence of “abuses committed against elements of the army, State, and civilian population by the Jewish and communist population under the protection, or at the urging of the army of the USSR, and even by elements of that army.”⁷⁸ Anti-Semitic officers, who were only too eager to blame Jews for their woes, wrote reports that told the biased General Staff exactly what it wanted to hear. Again and again, army reports depicted Jews as acting like Soviets “even before” the Red Army appeared: wearing red cockades, blocking trains of refugees, ripping up or spitting on the Romanian flag, destroying churches, executing officers and civil servants, and carrying out other acts of anti-Romanian terror.⁷⁹ Indeed, some Jewish youths were members of “combat companies,” groups organized since tsarist times to protect Jews and Jewish property in case of pogroms, and began sporting red ribbons. These were usually poor working-class Jews in cities who were more sympathetic to the promises of communism.⁸⁰ Some Jews joined with groups of *basarabeni* and other minorities who humiliated retreating units and organized isolated attacks on Romanian soldiers.⁸¹ These few examples triggered a growing wave of anti-Semitic violence that grew stronger as Romanian soldiers retreated west across the Prut.

⁷⁷ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 161.

⁷⁸ Fond Armata 3-a, fond 135, f. 2, 7.

⁷⁹ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, 63-64.

⁸⁰ Don Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry under Soviet Rule, 1939-1941*, trans. Naftali Greenwood (Philadelphia-Jeruslaem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 38.

⁸¹ Survivor's *Yizko* (memorial) books corroborates this, see, Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 74.

The first reports of Romanian units murdering Jews began to trickle in on 29 June. The 11th *Călărași* Regiment claimed to have been attacked outside Bălți early in the day and reported that its counterattack left “a few dead and wounded Jews,” but one has to wonder, especially in light of subsequent events in Galați and Dorohoi, if Jews were really responsible or if indeed an attack actually occurred.⁸² It is more likely they killed easily identifiable scapegoats. Romanian troops not only believed they were surrounded by “Jewish-Communist” bands, but blamed Jews for inciting local Christians against them. Red Army columns that stopped Romanian formations were soon joined by peasants, including *basarabeni*. Colonel Constantin Berlescu, commanding 6th *Roșiori* Regiment, reported peasants “gathered on the margins of the road and on the edges of the forest; as a beast lying in wait for his prey, they waited for the Soviet tanks to come and to disarm our units,” after which they seized the regiment’s materials, horses, and luggage that they then divided up amongst themselves.⁸³ Since most of the horses and carts used by the Romanian Army were requisitioned from the peasantry, peasants felt that it was well within their rights to take these things before they were evacuated and lost for good. Soldiers believed that only the presence of Soviet soldiers or “Jewish-Communists” could explain such treachery.

After repeated complaints about Red Army interference, Romanian diplomats in Moscow managed to obtain a concession from Molotov to delay the deadline for evacuation a day to noon on 3 July. General Ciupercă ordered Fourth Army to save as much material as possible and said soldiers needed to be inspired by “bold” officers. He ordered units to form strong rearguards to enforce the agreed upon withdrawal plan, gave them permission to fire on Red Army troops if

⁸² Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 280.

⁸³ The colonel’s full statement is translated and quoted in Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 163.

necessary, and demanded that “any attempt at rebellion by the population will be sanctioned as such” – meaning swiftly and brutally like the Tatarbunar revolt in 1924.⁸⁴ Ciuperca stressed that it was vital for units not to hold the new withdrawal line set for 1 July and not abandon it earlier than planned. Soviet units that approached needed to be turned back to allow time to evacuate. In some places officers were successful. 2nd Lieutenant Ion Iliescu, commanding a company of the 2nd *Dorobanți* Regiment, set up a roadblock with barbed wire and when a Red Army column tried to drive through threatened to open fire. Iliescu’s bluff and bluster temporarily halted the Soviets.⁸⁵ Such success was isolated, however, and with parachutists in the rear and motorized units able to rapidly find new routes around Romanian road blocks the chaos continued.

While Molotov may have made promises in Moscow, it did little to change the attitude of Red Army troops on the ground who continued to harass Romanian units during 30 June. Soviet airborne troops cemented control over Bolgrad, blocking most rail traffic in southern Bessarabia. General Atanasescu, slinking back under orders after his embarrassing flight across the Danube, made his way to Bolgrad to negotiate with the Soviets to let Romanian trains through. Colonel Gudarevici proved uncooperative. He said he had no knowledge of any delay in the evacuation, told Atanasescu the Romanian Army needed to hurry up, and broke a promise to allow several blocked trains to cross the border.⁸⁶ Fourth Army became increasingly worried about a possible Soviet invasion of Moldavia and began to mine the bridges across the Prut and Danube.

While General Ciuperca obsessed over keeping bridges out of the hands of the Soviets, hordes of disorganized, tired, and angry Romanian soldiers arrived west of the Prut or south of

⁸⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 309, f. 103.

⁸⁵ Bărboi, *Armata română în vâltoarea războiului*, 33.

⁸⁶ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 87, f. 87-91.

the Danube in cities with large Jewish populations. Refugees from Bessarabia streamed into the cities on the new frontier, bringing tales of Red Army and “Jewish-Communist” atrocities. They were soon further crowded with *basarabeni* and minorities, including Jews, trying to cross into Bessarabia before the border closed. Citizens in these cities expected to be the next to fall to the Soviets and viewed both arriving and outgoing refugees with suspicion. A volatile mixture.

Galați Massacre and Dorohoi Pogrom

The arrival of demoralized soldiers destabilized Moldavia and triggered a wave of anti-Semitic violence, spreading along units’ routes of retreat and railway lines, which convulsed the region between 30 June and 3 July. In many places the violence was reminiscent of traditional pogroms: beatings, looting, and destruction of property.⁸⁷ It soon became deadly. In two places Galați, located on the Danube in southern Moldavia, and Dorohoi, in Bukovina close to the new northern border, the violence spiraled out of control and hundreds of Jews were murdered. After reports of these two massacres, the General Staff ordered measures be taken to halt popular anti-Semitic violence out of fear it would trigger “true uprisings” against the state.⁸⁸ Senior officers, who were junior officers during the Peasant Uprising of 1907, remembered only too well just how quickly localized popular anti-Semitic violence could turn into a national peasant uprising. Fear, frustration, and anti-Semitism were the primary reasons for the widespread violence against Jews in Moldavia. Attacks on trains, in isolated villages, and cities were primarily initiated by soldiers from the bottom-up, only in some places did mid-ranking officers enable their soldiers’

⁸⁷ The first modern pogroms occurred in Russia in 1881, targeting property and spreading along railways, and had certain unspoken rules. While Jewish property could be destroyed, Jewish lives were spared, but usually after an obligatory beating. Only if Jews offered armed resistance did Christians murder them. Over the next three decades, however, pogroms in Russia became dealier as the old unspoken rules were discarded, see, John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 58-59, 67, 84.

⁸⁸ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat, Vol. I*, 99.

desire for revenge or civilians joined in the violence, but where they did soldiers became more murderous. The violence of 1940 foreshadowed what was to follow a year later in 1941.

There was widespread terror in Romania that the Red Army would not stop at the Prut. Gheorghe Ioniță, a high school student in Iași in 1940, remembered an atmosphere of trepidation created by rumors sweeping the city after news of the retreat from eastern Romania broke. Iași lay just 15 km from the Prut. Ioniță recalled that, “The news that the Russians crossed the border before the terms that they themselves had established aroused indignation and panic. Will they stop at the Prut? Or will they cross further to the Siret? Skepticism and fear wreaked havoc.”⁸⁹ Lurid tales of Jews raping Romanian women in the streets of Ismail, “Jewish-Communist” bands attacking refugees, Jews torturing and murdering priests, and all other kinds of alleged Jewish perfidy quickly spread. Press reports reinforced these stories and radio broadcasts as early as 29 June reported Jews organizing pro-Soviet demonstrations, throwing stones at retreating officers and soldiers, and other similar anti-Semitic polemics.⁹⁰ During the retreat, Romanian soldiers were under strict orders to avoid firing on the Red Army and provoking incidents, however, their orders did not mention civilians or stop reprisals against alleged traitors. Influenced by soldiers’ anger, some mid-ranking officers chose to succumb to their own frustrations and anti-Semitic beliefs and issued orders targeting Jews for violence, torture, and summary executions.

Most of the deadly violence was diffused in the countryside or on trains, places where the overstretched gendarmes and municipal police could not easily patrol to keep order.⁹¹ Marching through the Jewish shtetls common in Bukovina or traveling in crowded train cars soldiers could

⁸⁹ Bărboi, *Armata română în vâltoarea războiului*, 34.

⁹⁰ Dorian, *Quality of Witness*, 100-101; Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 72-73.

⁹¹ Pogroms were partly the result of a breakdown in state control. A weak state with overstretched security forces often had a hard time dealing with them, see, Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882*, xiii, 18-25.

attack and murder Jews with little chance of being stopped or held accountable by the authorities. A subsequent investigation by the Prosecutor of Suceava County in Bukovina uncovered a wave of anti-Semitic murders by soldiers: 30 June in Costănaț Jewish Private Lax Burăh was killed by two unidentified soldiers, 1 July in Șerbăuți Gendarme Sergeant Bojic shot four Jews, 2 July in Gărurani Max Rudic and Fișel Salilnger were shot by unidentified soldiers, the same day in Comănești soldiers of the 14th Infantry Regiment shot five Jews, and again the same day at the railway stop in Soloneț platform gendarmes of the 1st Military Police Company shot two Jews.⁹² Soldiers on trains targeted fellow Jewish soldiers. Despite having endured the retreat they were now seen as traitors, disarmed, beaten up, and, if lucky, turned over to the authorities at the next station. If unlucky, they were killed in various cruel ways, thrown from trains, shot, and even bayoneted – in many cases egged on by civilians.⁹³ “We have saved them from reserve duty,” soldiers joked to passengers after they threw two Jewish soldiers from a train and then shot them once the fall did not kill them.⁹⁴ For days the bodies of injured, dying, and dead Jewish soldiers, and Jewish civilians, were found along the railways of Bukovina and Moldavia. The violence traveled as far away as Transylvania, where Private Moise Pasos was found near a train station in Alba Iulia County on 5 July with a head wound because he had jumped from a train to escape being beaten by a group of soldiers from a regiment returning from Bessarabia.⁹⁵

In most cases individual or small groups of soldiers targeted isolated Jews, but when mid-ranking officers chose to act on their own anti-Semitic prejudices the scale of violence increased.

⁹² J. Alexandru, L. Benjamin, D. Brumfeld, A Florea, P. Litma, S. Stanciu, ed, *Martiriul evreilor din România, 1940-1944: documente și mărturii* (Bucharest: Editura Hasefer, 1991), 34.

⁹³ Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania*, 243; Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, f. 128, 306.

⁹⁴ Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 76.

⁹⁵ Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, 466.

Major Valeriu Carp, commanding 3rd Battalion in the 16th Infantry Division, took the initiative to order his men to round up “suspicious” Jews from the countryside of Dorohoi County as his unit retreated through Bukovina. Following a short interrogation most were summarily executed. In the village of Ciudei, soon to be turned over to the Soviets, Carp ordered eight Jews gathered in the village center be executed on 30 June. Another victim was tortured, his body was reportedly cut up into pieces, before being murdered.⁹⁶ A week later, Carp had another 34 Jews, gathered from surrounding villages in Rădăuți and Storojineț counties, shot.⁹⁷ According to one account, all were tortured before being shot, likely in an attempt to elicit confessions or as punishment for alleged treachery, and two Jewish soldiers in Carp’s unit were supposedly required to take part in a firing squad – probably to prove their loyalty by executing these “traitors.”⁹⁸ It is important to point out that Carp did not order an indiscriminate bloodbath of all Jews, rather he still required “evidence” that they were a possible fifth column threat before executing them.

The situation for Jews in cities was usually safer because authorities had more personnel, municipal police and gendarmes, which could patrol more easily. In Iași, the provincial capital and a major Jewish population center, whenever things threatened to get out of control police or gendarmes stepped in and prevented violence from turning deadly. Scuffles broke out between soldiers and Jews heading east to Bessarabia through nearby Ungheni. Soldiers believed Soviet troops were stripping *basarabeni* refugees arriving in Moldavia of their property at the border, so they wanted to confiscate all goods from Jews going the opposite direction in retaliation.⁹⁹ Jews were attacked on the street and Jewish stores looted in Iași. Fearing a pogrom, the 4th Gendarmerie

⁹⁶ Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania*, 238-239.

⁹⁷ Alexandru, *Martiriul evreilor din România*, 36.

⁹⁸ Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania*, 242.

⁹⁹ Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, f. 167.

Regiment began carrying out patrols both night and day on 4 July, so when there was an incident between soldiers and a Jewish innkeeper the following day that spread panic among the Jewish community gendarmes were on hand to quickly restored order.¹⁰⁰ The same precautions were taken in other cities, such as in Vatra Dornei on 3 July, then the location of the headquarters of the Mountain Corps, “In order to prevent possible disorder in [the city] as well as attacks against Jews.”¹⁰¹ These measures were implemented in large part due to events in Galați and Dorohoi a few days earlier when order had broken down.

The first major massacre occurred at the Galați train station on 30 June. In the days since the Soviet ultimatum the large port city on the Danube of 100,000, including about 13,000 Jews, had become crowded with refugees fleeing Bessarabia, with tales of “Jewish-Communists,” and a larger number of *basarabeni*, Jews, and other minorities trying to cross into the Soviet zone.¹⁰² Romanians viewed anyone heading east as communist sympathizers, but saw Jews as especially dangerous threats to the security of the Galați. The trains were interrupted early in the morning because Red Army parachutists had seized Bolgrad and created a backlog of *basarabeni*, Jews, and minorities at the train station that soon numbered around 2,000.¹⁰³ The station gendarme commander, concerned about security and the danger of “Jewish-Communists” who might rise up in support of a Soviet attack, ordered Jews separated from the group and marched to an empty field next to the station where they could be kept under guard until they were transported across the border. Just how many Jews were held there is unclear and reports are contradictory, but it was in the hundreds and perhaps near a thousand of men, women, and children. These Jewish

¹⁰⁰ Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, f. 39, 124.

¹⁰¹ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 53, f. 170.

¹⁰² Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, f. 15.

¹⁰³ Ibid., f. 49, 57; Fond Documentar, dosar 4087, f. 64.

civilians were left out in the open with no shelter from the sun, hour after hour, with no food or water, in an increasingly stifling June heat as the day progressed.

Finally, in late-afternoon, things boiled over. The crowd became angry, demanding to be allowed to leave or placed immediately on trains to the border, and threatened to overwhelm the cordon of gendarmes. Suddenly, a pistol shot rang out, probably fired by an officer to intimidate the crowd, but nervous guards began firing on the crowd with rifles and machineguns wounding and killing scores.¹⁰⁴ The shots created panic on the nearby crowded train platforms, a situation not helped by the fact that another officer decided that shooting his pistol in the air was the best way to calm the crowd.¹⁰⁵ As the killing progressed, some Jews broke away and escaped into the streets, but they were pursued by gendarmes who were soon joined by civilians convinced they were under attack by fifth columnists supporting Soviet parachutists. They helped track down, corner, and murder the Jews. Teodor Giugaru, a local merchant, joined in the hunt after caving in the skulls of several Jews who tried to hide in his shop with a thick stick.¹⁰⁶ After a half hour the gunfire weakened, followed by isolated shots, before subsiding completely. The first reports all described the massacre as an attempted uprising by “Jewish-Communists,” claiming that the gendarmes been fired on by armed Jews in the crowd and nearby houses. They were so alarming that the Royal Resident in Galați demanded the army send troops to restore order. Fourth Army diverted two infantry battalions – about to be sent across the Danube to suppress another alleged “Jewish uprising” reported in Reni earlier that day that was suppressed by local forces who left dozens of slain Jews in the streets – to Galați.¹⁰⁷ The exact number of Jews killed in Galați is

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., dosar 4087, f. 41.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., f. 134.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., f. 180.

¹⁰⁷ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 381, f. 299; Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, 16, 26, 56.

hard to determine. The official reports do not mention specific numbers or only suspiciously low numbers like 10 to 12, the post-war communist prosecutors claimed around 400 dead, while the day after Radio Sofia reported 280 Jews killed in a “battle” with guards.¹⁰⁸ Yet even as Radio Sofia’s broadcast went out another major massacre was underway to the north in Bukovina.

The Dorohoi pogrom broke out on 1 July. After the Soviet ultimatum this small city of 15,800 people, including roughly 5,800 Jews, was suddenly just 20 km from the new border and the Red Army. The city was an interwar LANC and Legionary stronghold with a long history of hostility towards local Jews.¹⁰⁹ That morning several Romanian units retreating from northern Bukovina crowded into the city, including the 8th Artillery Brigade and the 3rd *Grăniceri* Group – one of the four “elite” *grăniceri* formations that policed the Soviet border in peacetime – and the local 29th *Infanterie* Regiment that had many Jews. Refugees too were passing through Dorohoi, spreading stories of Jewish treachery in northern Bukovina.¹¹⁰ A few witnesses later claimed soldiers marked Christian homes with a large letter “C” in the morning, prompting local Christians to prominently display crosses or icons, but this was most likely rumor after the fact and does not convincingly prove premeditation for the pogrom.¹¹¹ It should have been a solemn day as Private Solomon, killed alongside Captain Boroș and 2nd Lieutenant Dragomir two days earlier in Herța, was being buried with full military honors in the local Jewish cemetery.

The situation in Dorohoi remained relatively calm until 2 pm when the shots of the honor guard during the burial appear to have triggered a reaction from angry and panicky soldiers. The

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., f. 13.

¹⁰⁹ Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 75; Alexandru, *Martiriul evreilor din România*, 36.

¹¹⁰ Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 76.

¹¹¹ Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania*, 239; Similar rumors among the Jewish population of eastern Romania of Cuzists applying “blue stamps” to homes or other preparations (even reports of pogroms that did not occur) were common during the interwar period, see, Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 88-89.

29th *Infanterie* Regiment sent 10 Jewish soldiers, under the command of a Christian sergeant, to act as the honor guard at the ceremony. Matatias Carp claims the shots came from the western part of the cemetery, insinuating they were fired by Romanian conspirators as a pre-arranged signal to start the pogrom, but there is no proof and his argument seems based on conjecture.¹¹² Likely, the shots fired by the honor guard for Private Solomon attracted the unwanted attention of soldiers from the 3rd *Grăniceri* Group who were unaware of what was going on. The honor guard, having completed its task, was leaving as the rest of the party went to the funeral parlor, but at the gate of the cemetery the Jewish soldiers were halted by an officer with a platoon of soldiers from 3rd *Grăniceri* Group who ordered them disarmed. It seems that finding armed Jews, regardless of being in uniform, was enough “evidence” for the officer to order their execution as probable fifth columnists – only about 10 minutes after they had acted as an honor guard for a Jewish soldier killed defending Romanian soil. Soldiers then began a frantic search for other “Jewish-Communists” in the city. They began with those in the funeral parlor whose proximity seems to have been proof enough to condemn them; the whole group – including eight women, three children, and an 80-year-old man – were shot.¹¹³ The chaos began to spread across Dorohoi as frenzied soldiers, shouting about Bolshevik infiltrators, attacked Jews, looted stores, forced their way into Jewish houses, and murdered those deemed suspicious or guilty.

This description of what occurred that afternoon is supported by the testimony of George Brăilescu-Gotlieb. As he worked in his dental office on a patient, he heard shots starting in the early afternoon, first isolated and then more frequent. Suddenly, a group of soldiers burst into

¹¹² Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania*, 240; Jean Ancel also argued an intentionalist interpretation of the Dorohoi, and later Iași, pogroms, but lacks any real evidence, see, Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 75, 445.

¹¹³ Carp, *Holocaust in Rumania*, 240.

his office and dragged him into the street, still wearing his dental coat, propelling him by blows from rifle butts to a headquarters that had been set up nearby in a Jewish school where he joined 20-25 other Jews who had been gathered for interrogation by a group of officers.¹¹⁴ Brăilescu-Gotlieb discovered they were accused of having fired on Romanian soldiers from the windows of houses. A machinegun squad stood outside, with bodies of slain Jews laying all around, waiting for the order to execute the prisoners. He was convinced they would all suffer the same fate, however, the officers ordered soldiers to first search the homes of those arrested and when “not a single trace of a weapon or something compromising” was found they were spared.¹¹⁵

Brăilescu-Gotlieb was lucky since what constituted “something compromising” could be very innocuous. Mundane items, especially radios, but also literature deemed communist, red cloth allegedly for signaling enemy planes, even a simple wire construed as an improvised radio, condemned many as “Jewish-Communists.”¹¹⁶ Some Jews were shot for just being on the street. Those who could sought shelter with sympathetic Christian neighbors. A patrol sent by the 29th *Infanterie* Regiment to investigate the disturbances nearly had its Jewish soldiers murdered, but a Captain Stino intervened to prevent further military fratricide. The pogrom raged for three hours during which time bestial crimes were carried out: ripping out beards, cutting off ears to get gold jewelry, slashing off breasts, and mutilation of genitals of victims. At 5 pm a sudden, powerful rainstorm drove soldiers off the streets to seek shelter indoors, temporarily halting the violence, but it took until late in the evening to restore order.¹¹⁷ By then approximately 200 Jews were

¹¹⁴ Alexandru, *Martiriul evreilor din România*, 37.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹¹⁷ Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, f. 126; Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 90, f. 25.

dead, although the official figure was just 52 killed and 17 wounded.¹¹⁸ Following the Dorohoi pogrom, the General Staff took measures to prevent anti-Semitic “aggressions” elsewhere.

Ironically, it was also fear of Soviet invasion that encouraged senior officers to halt the violent activity of their subordinates. Romanian leaders believed that the Soviets would use the anti-Semitic violence as a pretext to advance further into Romania because the Soviets had used a similar argument to justify their occupation of eastern Poland, citing chaos and the danger to “kindred Ukrainian and Belorussian people.”¹¹⁹ Fourth Army warned on 2 July, “In general, the army and the population evacuated from Bessarabia are expressing revolt against the Jews. More serious anti-Semitic demonstrations on the part of the army not excluded.”¹²⁰ General Țenescu ordered “severe measures to stop [anti-Semitic violence], which could have unfavorable effects in the current situation.”¹²¹ Soviet interwar nationalities policies included Jews in their “friendship of peoples,” supported the development of a secular Yiddish language and culture, and so it was not a great leap for anti-Semitic Romanians to fear that Jews were also considered a kindred Soviet people by Moscow. Additionally, intelligence reports claimed that Jews in Moldavia were trying to provoke the Red Army to cross the Prut. A 5 July police report claimed that Jews from Iași had sent a delegation to meet with a general in Soviet-occupied Bălți to

¹¹⁸ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 42.

¹¹⁹ The Soviet note handed to the Poles, which was also copied to all the ambassadors in Moscow justifying the Soviet invasion of Poland, read: “The Polish Government has disintegrated and no longer shows any sign of life. *This means that the Polish State and its Government have, in point of fact, ceased to exist...Left to her own devices and bereft of leadership Poland has become a suitable field for all manner of hazards and surprises which may constitute a threat to the USSR.* For these reasons the Soviet Government, which has hitherto been neutral, cannot any longer preserve a neutral attitude towards these facts. *The Soviet Government also cannot view with indifference the fact that kindred Ukrainian and Belorussian people, who live on Polish territory and who are at the mercy of fate, should be left defenceless.*” [Author’s italics.] Quote in Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 77.

¹²⁰ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 205.

¹²¹ Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 281.

complain that Jews were being shot in Iași and urge him to occupy the city, but he turned them down – supposedly citing the fact that the Romanians had already complied with Soviet demands and there was no justification for further occupation.¹²² Nevertheless, Romanian leaders worried that if anti-Semitic violence continued to spread disorder throughout Moldavia and the state lost control that the Soviets would take advantage of the situation to invade.

Almost as if to punctuate these fears of a Soviet invasion, a skirmish occurred midday on 2 July at Giurgiulești. Fourth Army had established a defensive bridgehead in the town, located on the other side of the river from Galați, to try to keep a toehold in southern Bessarabia to finish evacuating materials until the official withdrawal deadline the next day, but the local Red Army forces were determined to push the Romanians across the Danube by the original deadline. The arrival of Soviet tanks panicked the Romanian battalion in the bridgehead resulting in a company being captured. Still holding the road and rail bridges, the Cavalry Corps negotiated the turnover of the disarmed soldiers, including two wounded, and once the last one crossed they blew up the Giurgiulești bridges at 6:30 pm.¹²³ General Ciuperca thought the Soviets might respond with an attack and ordered the Soviets be told that the bridges were blown up “by a regrettable mistake.” At the same time, he pushed for authorization to blow up all the bridges on the Prut as well.¹²⁴

The events in Dorohoi greatly alarmed the General Staff who feared that it signaled the start of a breakdown in discipline in the ranks, so it took action to restore order and reorganize its scattered and demoralized army. In a report to the *Grăniceri* Corps, the General Staff wrote that

¹²² Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 941, f. 469.

¹²³ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 206, f. 1, 306; Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 87, f. 164.

¹²⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 381, f. 253; dosar 341, f. 27.

it had been informed of 3rd *Grăniceri* Group’s “excesses” during its retreat, including throwing Jews from trains and perpetrating the Dorohoi pogrom, and concluded with a sharp reprimand.

Even if these excesses on the part of the *grăniceri* soldiers might be justified, as a reaction to the violent events [*bruscările*] suffered during the withdrawal from Bukovina, nevertheless they cannot be tolerated under any condition because such events can degenerate into actions with grave nature and consequences, the first being the weakening of military discipline in units.¹²⁵

General Constantin Sănătescu, commander of VIII Corps who was assigned to investigate the pogrom, pretended shock about the events, remarking “I am surprised by these acts of banditry committed by what I thought were elite units.”¹²⁶ The army blamed the pogrom on two captains Gheorghe Teoharie and Constantin Serghie, yet neither one was seriously punished, and made 3rd *Grăniceri* Group the scapegoat for all of the army’s crimes committed against Jews in 1940 – no other unit was sanctioned for crimes against Jews. Despite scores of attacks, looting, and murder only a few individual soldiers and gendarmes were held responsible.

As a 4 July report from Fourth Army attests, anti-Semitic violence did not immediately stop because many Romanian soldiers who had become separated from their units and continued to trickle across the border were dead set on taking revenge on Jews.¹²⁷ Revealingly, soldiers resented the new, less indulgent attitude towards anti-Semitic violence, especially as gendarmes began arresting troops for looting, torture, and murder. Some even interfered in the punishment of fellow soldiers for anti-Semitic crimes of which they were often equally guilty or did not see as crimes, but rather as patriotic or justified. For example, some of Major Carp’s troops attacked

¹²⁵ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, 169-170.

¹²⁶ International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, “Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania,” 61, Minority Rights Information System, accessed 9 April 2016, <http://miris.eurac.edu/mugs2/do/blob.pdf?type=pdf&serial=1117716572750>.

¹²⁷ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, 178.

the Comănești gendarme post where three comrades were being held “for anti-Semitic activity,” looting and murder, to spring them from custody.¹²⁸ However, increased patrols by gendarmes and officer threats finally brought anti-Semitic violence in Moldavia under control.

Wounded Honor

The new border was officially established on 3 July 1940. Despite the hysteria about “Jewish-Communist” bands, only nine soldiers were killed and five wounded during the retreat, but 62,503 were missing, including hundreds of NCOs and officers, almost all from Bessarabia who chose to stay behind. Additionally, the army had significant material losses: 67,079 rifles, 6,134 pistols, 1,080 submachineguns, 277 machineguns, 43 mortars, 147 artillery guns, and tons of ammunition.¹²⁹ The loss of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia sheared an area of 59,762 sq km with 3,776,000 inhabitants from *România Mare*, although roughly 200,000 refugees fled to the Old Kingdom.¹³⁰ While these manpower and material losses were serious, the retreat from Bessarabia was not a complete disaster and most Romanian units withdrew without significant losses, particularly ones without large numbers of soldiers from Bessarabia. Nevertheless, the humiliation of the retreat deeply wounded the officer corps’ sense of honor.

Once safely across the Prut, officers were forced to confront their sense of dishonor and explain their humiliating retreat. Romanian officials, officers, and even the king had continued to promise to fight right up to the last minute.¹³¹ The Iași high school student Gheorghe Ioniță recalled the hostility towards the soldiers who arrived in the city after retreating from Bessarabia.

Soldiers spilled onto the streets with weapons, cannons, vehicles, horses and carts. People looked at them with rebuke. Why were they not allowed to fight? Perhaps

¹²⁸ Ibid., 189.

¹²⁹ Scafeș, *Armata română*, 14; Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 284.

¹³⁰ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, vi.

¹³¹ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 25-26.

they would have died under the folds of the tricolor flag, but [dying for the nation] has been the soldier's mission since the beginning of time. How will they, and their posterity, bear the burden of abandoning the holy Romanian earth from the swath of earth of [medieval king] Ștefan the Great without a fight...¹³²

The General Staff reassured officers and soldiers that they had not dishonored themselves and tried to convince their men that *not* resisting was even more honorable since it was supposedly more difficult than fighting. The 7 July 1940 issue of *Sentinela* reassured soldiers that while they had withdrawn without a fight it was not “from cowardice” because the Romanian soldier “was not and never will be a coward” and promised the setback was temporary.¹³³ The loss two months later of northern Transylvania to Hungary and southern Dobrogea to Bulgaria once again without a fight, exacerbated the sense of dishonor. As 2nd Lieutenant Teodorescu retreated from Transylvania in September he wondered, “Were we somehow guilty?”¹³⁴

The humiliation of the Romanian Army was even greater in the eyes of the officer corps because of the contempt in which they held the Red Army and its officer corps. They saw the Red Army as a poorly disciplined mass of different ethnicities and races (Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Central Asians) led by incompetent officers who were controlled by “Jewish” political commissars.¹³⁵ Romanian army reports condemned Red Army officers for being “high-handed” [*samovolnicia*] and “lacking gallantry” [*lipsă de cavalerism*].¹³⁶ Overall, despite its encounter with the Red Army in northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, the Romanian officer corps remained

¹³² Bărboi, *Armata română în vâltoarea războiului*, 34.

¹³³ Editori, “Editorial pe prima pagină,” *Sentinela*, 7 Iulie 1940, 1.

¹³⁴ Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte*, 27.

¹³⁵ The Red Army practiced a policy of dual command. It was begun in Russian Civil War when the Communist Party did not trust officers and tasked political commissars to verify their actions, but by the Second World War the Soviet officer corps was politically reliable and the two worked well together. Western military observers greatly exaggerated the alleged negative effects of dual command, see, Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 104-108.

¹³⁶ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, 82.

remarkably unimpressed with the Red Army. As one report summarized, “Good drivers and mechanics. The officers, troops[,] especially those in in the infantry, very poorly trained and undisciplined. The majority of the tank crews were drunk. Weak material. Old and worn-out tanks.”¹³⁷ It seems clear that many officers believed they could have and should have resisted the Red Army, which helps explain why most officers now turned against Carol II.

Widespread popular disgust with Carol II’s decision to abandon the provinces without a fight triggered attacks on the royal dictatorship from all sides. In statements sent to the Council of Ministers by leaders of all the outlawed parties, including Iuliu Maniu’s National Peasants and Constantin Brătinau’s Liberals, declared, “The Romanian people...cannot understand why, when the army had to defend the country’s frontiers, it was ordered to withdraw in haste and give the enemy a free hand to occupy the two provinces, leaving three million Romanians to the mercy of the USSR.”¹³⁸ Antonescu also sent a letter to the Carlist government that protested the surrender of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, which he described as the culmination of a long line of mistakes by the king.¹³⁹ Politicians was responding to public outrage, harnessing it to undermine Carlsim, and then in turn contributing to intensified public anger against the monarch.

In the politically charged atmosphere, Antonescu began to reach out to opposition leaders seeking a new alliance to bring him into a position of power and continued to publicly criticize the king.¹⁴⁰ Carol II ordered him arrested on 9 July. Due to his links to the Legionaries, German diplomats worried that Antonescu might be murdered while in custody like Codreanu previously and told the Carlist government that his imprisonment could negatively impact German relations

¹³⁷ Dobre, *Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. I, 135.

¹³⁸ Quote cited in Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 32.

¹³⁹ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 121.

¹⁴⁰ Watts, *Romanian Cassandra*, 216-217.

with Romania. This prompted the king to release Antonescu, but then he sent him to the isolated Bistrița monastery in the Carpathian foothills where he was kept under house arrest.¹⁴¹ For the moment Carol II had neutralized the troublesome general, but Antonescu's persecution at the hands of the king and his open opposition to the unpopular decision to abandon eastern Romania to the Soviets was not soon forgotten by the officer corps or the public.

National Legionary State to Military Dictatorship

In the aftermath of the Soviet occupation Romania's other revisionist neighbors, Hungary and Bulgaria, made territorial demands on Transylvania and Dobrogea respectively, but this time the Romanians could delay occupation by negotiation. The talks were held in Romania, at Turnu Severin with the Hungarians and at Craiova with the Bulgarians, beginning in mid-August, and dragged on for weeks. The talks with the Hungarians soon deadlocked and forced Nazi Germany to intervene before the two sides came to blows.¹⁴² On 30 August, a German-Italian commission unveiled the Second Vienna Award that ceded a great swath – 42,243 sq km with a population of 2,628,238 – of northern Transylvania to Hungary that prompted another flood of refugees to the Old Kingdom, totaling around 230,000.¹⁴³ On 7 September, an agreement with Bulgaria ceding southern Dobrogea – 6,921 sq km with a population of 425,000 – was signed.¹⁴⁴ The pressure from Berlin, combined with fears of a Soviet attack in the east if war broke out with Hungary or Bulgaria, which threatened Romania with the same fate as Poland in 1939, again convinced King Carol II to order a withdrawal from these regions without a fight. While it was probably the best decision at the time, it was fatal to the survival of his royal dictatorship.

¹⁴¹ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 47.

¹⁴² The Axis had to act as the League, see, Case, *Between States*, 1-2, 31-33; Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, 130.

¹⁴³ Case, *Between States*, 115.

¹⁴⁴ Unlike the Second Vienna Award it included a population exchange, see, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 95-102.

The news of further territorial concessions caused protests to break out against Carol II across Romania. Romanians demanded, “Where are the planes for which we paid [the special stamp tax]? Where are the arms for which we paid the [army] endowment tax? Where are the munitions for which we paid the rearment taxes?”¹⁴⁵ The Hungarian Army slowly occupied northern Transylvania between 5 and 13 September 1940. Hungarians troops advanced timidly because they lacked motorized units, had orders not to fire, and Romanian officers preemptively disarmed and sent home Transylvanians – *ardeleni* and minorities – who did not want to leave with the army to the Old Kingdom.¹⁴⁶ The Bulgarian takeover was even more drawn out and not completed until October. Ironically, both were completed later under the new Antonescu regime. Large demonstrations, joined by Legionaries, took place in Brașov, Cluj, Oradea, Sighișoara, and Bucharest.¹⁴⁷ Carol II called Antonescu from house arrest and asked him to form a government after the Second Vienna Award caused the collapse of Ion Gigurtu’s ultranationalist government left no other options than him or an all-Legionary government under Horia Sima.¹⁴⁸

Antonescu was free of any association with the decision to cede northern Transylvania because he had resigned from the army on 12 July after his internment in Bistrița. His reputation of honor, discipline, and incorruptibility was in stark contrast to the much-maligned reputation of the king for corruption, incompetence, and self-interest. Furthermore, Antonescu’s close links to the far right, the Legion specifically, made him appear to be only figure who was both acceptable

¹⁴⁵ Translated by author and quote found in Midan, *Carol al II-lea și teroarea istoriei*, 295.

¹⁴⁶ Dobre, *Anul 1940: Armata română de la ultimatum la dictat*, Vol. II, 284-285, 158; *ardeleni* had to sign a declaration if they decided to leave with the army, some decided to visit their families before heading to the Old Kingdom, see, Ioan T. Lungu, *De la Stalingrad la Gherla: Roman document* (Timișoara: Editura de Vest, 1993), 9.

¹⁴⁷ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 51.

¹⁴⁸ Quinlan, *Playboy King*, 214; Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 222; Carlists preferred the irascible Antonescu to the Legion, see, Haynes, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State,” 711, 708-710.

to right-wing populists and able to restore order. The favorable opinion of German diplomats in Bucharest to Antonescu did not hurt either. Lastly, he could command the respect and loyalty of the officer corps, which was showing signs of discontent after the humiliation of a second major withdrawal – a few officers openly participated in the demonstrations against the king and those sympathetic with the Legionaries helped arm crowds in early September.¹⁴⁹ When Carol II asked Antonescu to become prime minister, he did not immediately accept and demanded that the king grant him full dictatorial powers. The desperate king agreed, with the caveat that he retain his position as head of the army and that all major decisions still had be co-signed by the monarch, and Antonescu accepted these conditions on 5 September.¹⁵⁰ The decision to allow the king to remain the titular head of the army had important repercussions years later on 23 August 1944. The next day, however, crowds continued to demand the king's resignation and Antonescu was informed of a plot by the king and Carlist generals to assassinate him, so he demanded that Carol II abdicate and go into exile.¹⁵¹ In order to increase pressure on the king, he ordered the police and army to not fire on demonstrators outside the royal palace who were chanting for the head of the king.¹⁵² That evening Antonescu again requested that Carol II abdicate and told him that he could not assure his safety if he did not.¹⁵³ Finally, in the wee hours of 6 September, Carol II succumbed and agreed to abdicate in favor of his 19-year-old son, who became King Mihai I (for the second time), and went into exile with Madame Lupescu and a few others in his camarilla.

¹⁴⁹ Beldiman, *Armata și Mișcarea Legionară*, 85; Haynes, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State,” 719-720.

¹⁵⁰ Quinlan, *Playboy King*, 215.

¹⁵¹ Haynes, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State,” 713-714, 717.

¹⁵² Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 123; assisted by General Coroamă, another Legionary sympathizer, appointed by Antonescu, see, Haynes, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State,” 718.

¹⁵³ Quinlan, *Playboy King*, 216; for a dramatic account of the events, see, R. G. Waldeck, *Athene Palace: Hitler’s “New Order Comes to Romania* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 173-180.

On 9 September 1940, Antonescu adopted the title of *Conducător*, used by Carol II since 1938, and declared the foundation of the National-Legionary State.¹⁵⁴ Antonescu's government was comprised of Legionaries, specialists, and military men; he hoped to forge a lasting alliance between traditional conservatism and far-right populism. He ended the state's persecution of the Legion and brought them to power. Sima became deputy prime minister and five more ministers were Legionaries – Internal Affairs, External Affairs, Public Instruction, Communication, and Health. Legionaries replaced Carlist prefects in all 50 of Romania's administrative counties.¹⁵⁵ Antonescu shared the responsibilities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the retired General Constantin Petrovicescu, another Legionary. This split personality government soon began to fray. In the following months, Legionaries spread chaos and destabilized Romanian society as they tried to carry out a fascist revolution, attacked Jews, and pursued radical economic reform. Their violent version of Romanianization literally threw Jews out of business, extorted cash, stole goods, and seized property. Legionary violence, plunder, and arbitrariness in carrying out these policies during this time created tensions between them and increasingly pro-Antonescu civil servants.¹⁵⁶ The situation quickly deteriorated over the following months.

In the meantime, Antonescu needed the Legion's support until he consolidated power. "I did not have the whole army on my side," he recalled later and Carlist officers still held most key positions in the army.¹⁵⁷ His first move was to gather around himself trusted officers, beginning

¹⁵⁴ Antonescu had hoped to have a coalition government with Liberal and National Peasant support, but they refused to share power with the Legionaries who Antonescu was intent on bringing to power in the hope of harnessing their popularity, see, Haynes, "Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State," 721-722.

¹⁵⁵ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 222.

¹⁵⁶ Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to "Romanianization,"* 5.

¹⁵⁷ Quote from Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 52; a close confidant described Antonescu as a "recluse," isolated from the army, see, Haynes, "Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State," 718-719.

with General Pantazi. The 52-year-old was only four years younger than the *Conducător*, born into a military family, a fellow cavalryman, and a longtime friend who stood by Antonescu when the king's ire against him was strongest.¹⁵⁸ A few hours before the king abdicated, Antonescu summoned Pantazi from Transylvania, where he had just taken over the new armored division, and when he arrived that afternoon made him Sub-Secretary to the Minister of Defense, held by Antonescu, and military commander of the capital.¹⁵⁹ This put a trusted colleague in charge of security in the capital in case Carlists tried a coup. Antonescu dismissed senior Carlist officers, officially because they had “contributed through their stance to the moral state that caused the turning back [*carmirea*] of the country’s borders, without the army firing so much as a shot.”¹⁶⁰ He was able to scapegoat them and remove a political threat at the same time. With his position secure, the *Conducător* turned his attention to restoring morale in the officer corps.

Antonescu promised the officer corps a break from Carlist corruption, restoration of its honor, and redemption of *România Mare* by arms at the proper moment, but until then it had to wait and endure. The Germans supported Antonescu’s seizure of power because he seemed the best chance to enforce the Second Vienna Award as Carol II was discredited and popular anger was such that it seemed that Romania and Hungary might go to war over Transylvania.¹⁶¹ On 8 September 1940, in the first issue of *Sentinela* after taking power, Antonescu told the army it had to bear the burden of losing northern Transylvania – the occupation was completed a week later.

¹⁵⁸ Born Contantinescu, he changed his last name to Pantazi, see, Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, x-xiii, 78.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 87.

¹⁶¹ Haynes, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State,” 715; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 96; Romanian protestors attacked Hungarians and even targeted the German consulate in Bucharest, Hungarians also carried out atrocities during and after the occupation, and Iuliu Maniu soon attacked Antonescu for allowing northern Transylvania to be surrendered, see, Case, *Between States*, 98-99, 102-103.

He said that Romania's "friends" Germany and Italy had been asked to step in to arbitrate, the army had to abide by the decision they had reached, a war with Hungary was then inopportune, and Europe should be grateful for Romania's sacrifice.¹⁶² In the next issue, Antonescu focused on discipline, which he called "the first law" of his regime, and told soldiers to master the "inner enemy" of disorder.¹⁶³ Legionary anarchy stood in stark contrast to his goals.

After being brought to power the Legion began a reign of terror against Jews that most Romanians supported, or at least tolerated, but soon an influx of opportunists entering its ranks began to abuse their power, and often did not limit their violence to Jews.¹⁶⁴ Anyone could be a target: Romanians with anti-Legionary pasts, beggars, gamblers, drunks, anyone suspicious, and of course minorities – especially Jews, but also Hungarians, Germans, Bulgarians, Gypsies, and others. Sima tried to set up a dual state with Legionary police, courts, press, charity, and other institutions. Antonescu became frustrated with Legionary anarchy, "if everyone interferes, if everyone gives orders and intervenes – according to one's own free will and time – the collapse, under the present internal and external circumstances of the country, will come most rapidly."¹⁶⁵ On the night of 26 November, a group of Legionaries carried out an outrage that alienated most Romanians when they broke into the Jilava Prison outside Bucharest and killed 65 prominent Carlists being held there. At the same time, two other groups murdered Nicolae Iorga, a widely respected historian and interwar politician, and Virgil Madgearu, an accomplished economist, in

¹⁶² Ion Antonescu, "Cuvânt către ostași," *Sentinela*, 8 Septembrie 1940, 3.

¹⁶³ Ion Antonescu, "Primele infăpturi ale conducătorului Statului," *Sentinela*, 15 Septembrie 1940, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 224-225.

¹⁶⁵ This tug of war between an emerging fascist state and the established state was common. For details on the dual state, see, Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, 119-128; quoted in Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 61.

their homes; both were ardent nationalists.¹⁶⁶ Antonescu and Sima were seen together in public for the last time four days later at the official reburial of the slain Legionary leader Codreanu.

As the Legionaries ran amok, Antonescu focused on foreign policy and building a close relationship with Hitler to prepare to restore *România Mare*. He told Pantazi, “I was brought to power following the destruction of the borders, my mission is to rebuild the country’s borders,” and he believed that there was no way to do it without the support of Nazi Germany.¹⁶⁷ The fall of France convinced Antonescu Nazi Germany would dominate Europe for the foreseeable future and was the only counterbalance to the USSR. He was not alone. The events of 1940 convinced almost all Romanians that they needed Nazi Germany. The king asked for an alliance, territorial guarantee of Romania’s borders against the Soviet Union, and a German Military Mission, but Berlin waited until after the Second Vienna Award to agree and made an alliance conditional on accepting the loss of northern Transylvania.¹⁶⁸ Carol II, the camarilla, and Carlist officers were willing, even bringing in a few Legionaries to prop up the king’s government, but popular anger against the royal dictatorship was too strong and the Legionaries demanded too much power.¹⁶⁹ The camarilla pushed the king to enlist Antonescu. The Germans sounded out Antonescu about accepting the Second Vienna Award in exchange for an alliance and a German Military Mission before the king brought him to power.¹⁷⁰ After Antonescu forced out Carol II, his reputation and

¹⁶⁶ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 228-229.

¹⁶⁷ Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 89.

¹⁶⁸ Carol II made a direct personal appeal to Hitler for German military assistance, see, Richard DiNardo, “The German Military Mission to Romania, 1940-1941,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (April 2013): 92-93.

¹⁶⁹ In July 1940, Sima and two other Legionaries served in the short-lived Gigurtu government and in August was negotiating with Carol II for an all-Legionary cabinet, see, Haynes, “Germany and the Establishment of the Romanian National Legionary State,” 709-710; Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 222.

¹⁷⁰ Deletante, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 48-49.

Legionary support allowed him to quickly convince the public to support an alliance with Nazi Germany because they knew he would fight to restore *România Mare*.

Antonescu quickly asked for a German military mission be sent to Romania to show the alliance was protecting the nation from “Judeo-Bolshevism” and merited tolerating the Second Vienna Award until it was destroyed. Hitler sent four separate military missions: an umbrella German Military Mission, a German Army Mission, a German Air Force Mission, and a small German Navy Mission. The benefit of these missions was twofold. First, Antonescu trusted the mere presence of German soldiers would act as a deterrent to the Soviets and, second, German advisors would train Romanian officers and NCOs in new tactics and mobile warfare to use in future battles to redeem *România Mare*. The first German units entered Romania on 12 October 1940. Initially just an infantry division, but reinforced in mid-December with a panzer division, totaling over 22,000 men.¹⁷¹ The began training Romanian troops in early 1941.

The presence of German military formations in Romania was not met with the hostility expected by observers. British journalist Clare Hollingworth attributed the lack of animosity to an apathetic population who “appear to be past feeling anything or caring about anything” due to a rapid series of disasters: territorial losses, abdication, and earthquake.¹⁷² It seems more likely that Romanians had come to agree with Antonescu and saw comfort in every piece of modern German military equipment (tank, airplane, gun, or truck) crossing the border and each fresh-faced, confident German soldier they encountered.¹⁷³ Additionally, soon after they arrived the Germans received favorable press due to an unexpected opportunity to provide humanitarian

¹⁷¹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 41; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 98.

¹⁷² Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, 180.

¹⁷³ Waldeck, *Athene Palace*, 237, 239-240, 249; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 403, f. 51.

assistance when an earthquake struck Romania on the night of 9/10 November and men of the German 13th Motorized Infantry Division joined in the rescue efforts in Bucharest.¹⁷⁴ Of course there were a few whose anger over the loss of northern Transylvania ran deep, leading to insults and scuffles, and Romanians grumbled about inflation that came with Germans soldiers. Forced civility and inflation seemed reasonable prices to pay for protection from the Soviets, even to the few ardent anti-Nazis.¹⁷⁵ Romania's signing of the Tripartite Pact on 23 November 1940, where Antonescu and Hitler met for the first time, cemented the alliance with Nazi Germany.

The first signs in Romania of a coming war between Nazi Germany and the USSR began to appear in December 1940. Todt Organization construction teams came to northern Moldavia to strengthen bridges to carry at least 25 tons. Shortly after General Erik Hanson, commander of the German Military Mission, asked Antonescu that the Romanians undertake their own efforts to strengthen all bridges along major routes through the rest of Romania. The General Staff did what it could to fulfill the German requests. Hanson organized war games with the General Staff and other senior officers to exposed them to German tactics and operational doctrine.¹⁷⁶ During the winter and spring of 1941 the Germans carried out significant training with the Romanian 5th, 6th, 13th, 18th, and 20th Infantry Divisions. The three so-called "model divisions," the 5th, 6th, and 13th Infantry, and the newly formed 1st Armored Division received the most attention.

¹⁷⁴ German soldiers had been the first to arrive at the Carlton House, a downtown apartment building that he collapsed and helped alongside Legionaries and soldiers, see, Waldeck, *Athene Palace*, 273.

¹⁷⁵ The worst examples of Romanian "hatred" of the Germans at this time that one British journalist recorded were averted gazes and a thrown bottle, hardly serious, see, Easterman, *King Carol, Hitler, and Lupescu*, 217; these complaints about German soldiers causing inflation were not only legitimate but very perceptive of Romanian peasants, as German soldiers had enormous purchasing power that drove inflation across Europe, see, Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Holt Paperback, 2006), 94-97, 103-105; an April 1941 intelligence report recorded that, "Romanian intellectuals consider the presence of German troops as necessary, being convinced that in the current international situation, through them we can guarantee calm and the borders of the country, against the danger from the east, see, Fond MR: CM, dosar 56 bis, f. 13.

¹⁷⁶ Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 111-112.

Before Antonescu could take Romania to war he needed to reign in the Legion and secure the home front. A second meeting between Hitler and Antonescu on 14 January 1941 convinced the *Conducător* that he had the Führer's backing in his conflict with Sima and the Legion.¹⁷⁷ An opportunity presented itself on 20 January when a German officer, a certain Major Döning, was assassinated in Bucharest by a Greek citizen – there is an unresolved mystery as to his motive or if he was a British agent. Antonescu blamed General Petrovicescu for the murder, called him corrupt and incompetent, and removed him as co-Minister of Internal Affairs.¹⁷⁸ Legionaries took to the streets spontaneously in support of Petrovicescu, protests spread to other cities across the country, but it became most violent and the stakes were highest in Bucharest. An estimated 3,000 Legionaries occupied police headquarters, seized the national radio station, and protested in the streets.¹⁷⁹ From police headquarters Legionaries took pot-shots at the Ministry of External Affairs, where Antonescu had his office and the Council of Ministers met. Alexandru Cretzianu, the diplomat had survived the fall of Carol II and found a post in the new government, visited the ministry that afternoon. When he arrived the *Conducător* was explaining to aides that they had to remain on the defensive and wait for troops to arrive. A staff officer took Cretzianu aside to tell him the situation was serious, and they were in a race against time.¹⁸⁰ Six infantry regiments and a battalion of tanks soon arrived in central Bucharest, however, with orders to shoot anyone who failed to remain 550 yards away.¹⁸¹ Soldiers engaged in pitched battles with Legionaries holed up in buildings. The fighting continued all night as the crackle of small arms and booms

¹⁷⁷ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 64.

¹⁷⁸ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 134.

¹⁷⁹ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 230.

¹⁸⁰ Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 227.

¹⁸¹ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 231.

of tank fire echoed across the city. In the morning when Cretzianu returned, he found a “more reassuring [sight] than the night before. The Presidency had been transformed into a general headquarters. A swarm of Staff officers, red-eyed and unshaven after a sleepless night, were pouring over large-scale maps of the city or speaking on the telephones.”¹⁸²

The Capital Military Command was so intent on clearing Bucharest of Legionaries it did not attempt to halt the atrocities committed by the rebels against the capital’s Jewish community during the rebellion – anti-Semitism assuredly influenced officers’ lack of concern. Legionaries believed Antonescu’s moves against them were a “Judeo-Masonic plot” and targeted defenseless Jews. They invaded two Jewish neighborhoods in Bucharest and arrested approximately 2,000 Jews who they loaded onto trucks and transported to sites where they were beaten, tortured, and rape. Additionally, 25 synagogues, 616 shops, and 547 homes were devastated.¹⁸³ Legionaries also targeted non-Jews, especially communists. Yet, even as Legionary violence peaked during 21-22 January, the Capital Military Command never considered changing tactics and continued a methodical, slow clearing of Bucharest. At the improvised army headquarters, Cretzianu heard telephones ringing endlessly and asked why these appeals for help coming in from across the city were ignored. The Capital Military Command was not going to disperse its soldiers into small groups and risk being defeated in piecemeal fashion, he was told, instead the “proper thing to do” was “to have a strong concentration of troops, that seized the town by slowly spreading like an oil stain.”¹⁸⁴ The Germans sat on the sidelines. At one point a column of German tanks drove

¹⁸² Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 229.

¹⁸³ Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 231-232.

¹⁸⁴ Cretzianu, *Relapse into Bondage*, 229.

through the city as a show of support for Antonescu to try to convince the Legionaries to give up and negotiate with the army, but it did not play a major role in ending the rebellion.¹⁸⁵

The Capital Military Command finally cleared the last pockets of Legionary resistance in the early morning hours of 23 January after three days of fighting. By that time many hundreds of Jews had been murdered in Bucharest, the official numbers reported only 118, but the Jewish Federation estimated that around 630 were killed and 400 more were missing.¹⁸⁶ Legionaries did not kill as many in other cities. The Romanian Army reported 21 killed and 53 wounded among the soldiers involved in the street battles with at least twice that number of Legionaries killed and hundreds more wounded in Bucharest – many more were killed and wounded across the country in other cities.¹⁸⁷ The Antonescu regime arrested thousands more. Despite concerns Legionary cells continued to function, the Legion had effectively been destroyed and most former members quickly accommodated themselves with Antonescu's regime – some in high positions.¹⁸⁸ A few irreconcilable Legionary leaders, including Sima, fled into exile in Nazi Germany.

Conclusion

In the year between King Carol II's ceremonial visit to Chișinău in January 1940 and the bloody suppression of the Legion by Antonescu in January 1941 had transformed Romania. The fall of France and the Soviet ultimatum fell like twin blows on the Carlist regime. The retreat from northern Bukovina and Bessarabia was a humiliation for the Romanian Army and triggered a wave of anti-Semitic violence initiated by angry Romanian soldiers in the ranks and halted by

¹⁸⁵ Heinen, *Legiunea "Arhanghelul Mihail,"* 422-423; Waldeck, *Athene Palace*, 348-349.

¹⁸⁶ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 135.

¹⁸⁷ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 74-75; one British reporter estimated 2,000 killed (including Jews) in Bucharest and 11,000-12,000 in the rest of Romania, see, Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, 184.

¹⁸⁸ Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 232-233.

the General Staff. The Second Vienna Award toppled the already teetering royal dictatorship of Carol II since his personal dictatorship placed the blame squarely on his shoulders for the loss of *România Mare*. The loss of territory robbed the army of manpower that forced the General Staff to disband First and Second armies, only a shadow First Army of around five divisions guarded the western frontier against any Hungarian attack until August 1944. The subsequent National-Legionary State proved unsustainable, but Antonescu regime's power struggle with the Legion did not signal an improvement in the situation of Romanian Jews. In fact, his decision to prepare to join the coming war against the Soviet Union set the Romanian Army down a path to commit even greater anti-Semitic violence in eastern Romania than it had in early July 1940.

The bloody events in Bukovina, Bessarabia, and Moldavia reveal that the initiative for anti-Semitic violence came from the bottom-up instead of the top-down. Army hierarchy and discipline still acted as brakes on the atrocities of Romanian soldiers against Jews in 1940. A year later these brakes were removed by the Antonescu regime that first legitimized atrocities by soldiers and expanded by mid-ranking officer, and then increased the scale of mass murder even further when it ordered the deportation of Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia. It also extended atrocities to Romanian-occupied Transnistria and on the front in the Soviet Union. The wave of atrocities in June-July 1940 highlights the importance of mid-ranking officers in the process of transforming soldiers' popular anti-Semitic violence into systematic mass murder. The character and decisions of individual colonels, majors, and captains significantly influenced the extent of atrocities – as the case of Major Carp makes clear. While in 1940 several mid-level officers had taken the initiative to harness the intrinsic motivation of soldiers to organized systematic murder of Jews deemed suspicious, a year later senior officers would issue explicitly anti-Semitic orders that most mid-level officers enthusiastically carried out in eastern Romania.

Wounded honor was a significant motivator for the Romanian Army, and not just in committing atrocities but also in combat. The humiliation of the officer corps during the retreat from northern Bukovina and Bessarabia in 1940 left many officers eager to redeem themselves by covering themselves in martial glory in combat against the Red Army. Similarly, soldiers were anxious to defend their country from the threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism” and deal a death blow to the Soviet Union alongside their new powerful ally the German Army. These factors explain the motivation of the army in combat after 1941. There is every indication that had King Carol II survived the backlash after the Soviet ultimatum, and Second Vienna Award, the nation would have supported the invasion of the USSR and the Carlist regime would have supplied the Wehrmacht troops it requested. It is probable that soldiers would still have taken revenge against Jews they blamed for 1940 whether or not Antonescu or Carol II was *Conducător*.

CHAPTER VI

1941: INVASION, LIBERATION, AND REVENGE

“Soldiers, I order you: Cross the Prut!” Every Romanian veteran remembers this laconic order from Antonescu, but it was actually part of a much longer grandiloquent proclamation of the invasion of the USSR on 22 June 1941 penned at General Headquarters. While the rest of the proclamation was almost immediately forgotten, this short sentence electrified the army. Soldiers noted it in their journals, propaganda repeated it ad nauseum, and it still resonates with veterans today because it expressed the desire for revenge for humiliation of 1940 that would be expunged by liberating eastern Romania.¹ Romanian soldiers on the front volunteered to cross the Prut under fire, so that they might be the first to set foot on that “holy soil.”

In Bucharest people entered the streets to celebrate the “holy war.” Mihai Antonescu, left behind to run the government while Antonescu was with General Headquarters, emerged with the king and other leaders to greet a cheering crowd at the royal palace. All knelt in prayer for victory and cheering crowds followed him to the German and Italian legations.² Alice Voinescu, a 56-year-old theater critic with liberal political views, recorded a more cynical account of the day. She went to church after listening to the “bombastic” declaration of war, she did not see anyone kneeling in prayer on the street, her impression of the crowd at the palace was that it was small and anemic, and even thought Bessarabia might not be worth the sacrifice of a war.

No matter how justified opportunism is in our case, [it’s in] vain! This war is immoral. We should only take what is ours. God willing! At the very least, [our

¹ For whole proclamation, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 629, f. 223; Major Scârnesci seemed to only have heard the beginning of the order, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linia întâi*, 111; Alexandru Birou și Constantin Iancu, *Să te împaci cu...tine* (Constanța: Editura “Neliniști metafizice,” 2009), 21.

² Delestant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 82-83.

soldiers ought] to wash away the shame of being brothers with [Nazi] bandits, by a soldierly behavior beyond reproach, to rediscover our virtue...!³

Voinescu was one of the few who questioned the war and her hope that Romanian soldiers would be disciplined and virtuous was soon dashed by news from the front of mass atrocities.

This chapter charts the period preceding Operation Barbarossa, initial invasion, liberation of eastern Romania, and operations east of the Dniester including the battle for Odessa. It argues that while the Antonescu regime anticipated a German-Soviet war sometime in the near future, the Romanian Army was remarkably uninformed of exactly when it would occur and so its plans for the liberation of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia were thrown together at the last minute. This included decisions on how to treat Jews and communists in eastern Romania. The evidence indicates that anti-Semitic polices were primarily improvised at the last minute and that much of violence against Jews was initiated by soldiers, junior officers, or mid-ranking officers, although it was soon endorsed by the General Headquarters. The myth of “Jewish-Communist” treachery during the retreat in 1940 triggered a “franc-tireur” mania in the ranks in 1941. Troops searched for civilians, usually Jews but also local Russians, Ukrainians, and Romanian collaborators, whom they accused of new attacks on the Romanian Army and murdered innocent men, women, and even children in reprisal. General Headquarters reinforced the franc-tireur mania based on the myth of “Jewish-Communist” fifth columnists by issuing orders that legitimated soldiers’ anti-Semitic hysteria and approved summary execution of alleged franc-tireurs – east of the Prut. Romanian soldiers were also influenced by SS troops following in the rear who found Romanian officers, NCOs, and soldiers to be more than willing executioners.

³ Alice Voinescu, *Jurnal, Vol. I* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2013), 302.

As the anti-Semitic violence ebbed and flowed with military operations the narrative is designed to demonstrate how combat and atrocity were interrelated. Such an approach has not been taken before as Romanian military historians have blinders on against the Holocaust when writing about the campaign and Holocaust historians focus on atrocities and victims. The Iași pogrom takes center stage in histories of the war due to the number of victims and location west of the Prut in Moldavia, rather than to the east in territories annexed by the USSR after the war. At the time the Romanian Army tried to shift blame to the Germans or Legionaries. Antonescu and General Headquarters blamed undisciplined soldiers and reserve officers, but he ordered an investigation later that held Legionaries and Germans responsible. In the war crimes trials after the war, Antonescu was accused of orchestrating the Iași pogrom. For decades under Ceaușescu communist nationalist historians minimized it and shifted blame to the Germans and a few evil Legionaries.⁴ This narrative remains popular after 1989. Beginning in the 1980s, Jean Ancel began pushing an intentionalist interpretation of the Iași pogrom that argued it was premeditated and ordered by Antonescu, but recent scholars like Vladimir Solonari have begun to question this version of events.⁵ This chapter argues that the Iași pogrom was spontaneous, not planned, and caused by a combination of factors that were fostered unintentionally by the Romanian Army.

General Headquarters condemned the breakdown in discipline and public order west of the Prut and prevented more pogroms in Moldavia, but its reaction to atrocities east of the Prut was very different. Near the front, the General Headquarters tolerated and even encouraged massacres in eastern Romania and explicated ordered reprisals in Odessa while in Bucharest the

⁴ Aurel Karețki și Maria Covaci, *Zile Însângerate la Iași (28-30 iunie 1941)* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1978).

⁵ He briefly addresses the pogrom and Ancel's problematic arguments, see, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 164-167.

Antonescu regime in Bucharest organized the mass deportation of Jews from eastern Romania to Transnistria. Since other historians have focused on the decision making at the top in Bucharest and deportations of Jews carried out by gendarmes of the Ministry of the Interior they will not be covered in detail. This chapter focuses on officers and soldiers on the front who had little say in the decision of the Council of Ministers in Bucharest to “cleanse the terrain,” but still played an important role in shaping the Holocaust in Romania due to intrinsic motivation.

Preparations for War

After seizing power, the Antonescu regime prepared for war, but not for Nazi Germany’s war against the USSR. Antonescu did not know about Hitler’s December 1940 decision ordering German High Command to begin planning an invasion of the Soviet Union, initially set for May 1941, because it was kept a strict secret.⁶ Additionally, German High Command did not initially plan on needing Romanian Army support. The small size of the German Military Mission when it arrived in December 1940 did not suggest imminent war and only a handful of divisions joined it before April 1941. Instead, the General Staff planned for a defense of Moldavia in case of new Soviet aggression. The Antonescu regime’s challenging first winter made even this difficult.

The territorial losses of 1940 wreaked havoc with the economy and exacerbated shortages that hindered the Romanian Army.⁷ The General Staff demobilized most soldiers in October, but those remaining showed signs of discontent after nearly a year in uniform. The unusually harsh winter increased concerns about families and in December there was a spike of soldiers absent without leave and protests, such as in Fourth Army where a few soldiers refused to eat at meals

⁶ For details on Hitler’s decision, see, Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 160-162.

⁷ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 403, f. 222; especially in cities cut off from usual markets, see, Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor consiliului de miniștri guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, Vol. III, 490.

because “they have been concentrated too long and their families were dying of hunger” and the 58th Pioneer Battalion refused to board a train when it did not get Christmas leave.⁸ The isolated protests were quashed, but financial aid to soldiers’ families was also increased. The Legionary rebellion was a bigger threat, but its failure to attract popular support made Antonescu confident the officer corps, social elite, and peasantry supported him. On 27 January 1941, he replaced the Legionary ministers with generals who supported his goals of reforming the state and restoring *România Mare*. General Constantin Voiculescu got just an hour’s notice to be sworn in with the other new ministers and later claimed that initially he was not actually sure what position he had been given, “How I came to be Minister of Labor, I don’t know!” In July 1941 he accepted the assignment as military governor of Bessarabia in much the same way.⁹ Antonescu trusted these men not only because as officers they followed orders, but also because they shared his political beliefs. The selection of these men later had important ramifications during the Holocaust.

During February-March 1941, approximately 500,000 soldiers of German Twelfth Army traversed Romania to cross the Danube to stage in Bulgaria for an attack on Greece and created a new challenge. Wherever they went some German soldiers inevitably got drunk, got into fights, drove recklessly, and even assisted local ethnic Germans in evading the draft. These incidents kept the German Military Mission and General Staff busy smoothing over resulting tensions.¹⁰ Additionally, cash-flush Germans bought up large amounts of goods to send home, exacerbating inflation and shortages and creating some resentment. At the same time, however, Romanians

⁸ The army arrested 12 NCOs identified as the ringleaders of the strike, stripped them of their rank, and sentenced them to three-five years in prison, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 403, f. 26; dosar 573, f. 49.

⁹ USHMM, RG-25.003M, Selected Records from the Romanian Ministry of Defense, 1940-1944, Fond Ministerul de Război: Cabinet, dosar 293, c. 121A-122A.

¹⁰ German troops were protected from prosecution by local law, see, DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Power*, 99.

profited a great deal from the brisk trade. When German Eleventh Army arrived in May Third Army ordered towns and cities to form “citizen committees” to encourage friendly Axis relations by welcoming German units, visiting with German officers, and ministering to German sick.¹¹

On 2-5 March 1941, Antonescu organized a plebiscite designed to show that the nation was behind him. It consisted of a simple yes or no vote without a secret ballot with 2,960,298 in favor and 2,996 against, while it is easy to discount the accuracy of the 99 percent result in favor of the Antonescu regime, the fact that voters turned out in numbers equal to an interwar election and not protesting by staying home suggests Romanians overwhelmingly supported the alliance with Nazi Germany.¹² The fate of Yugoslavia convinced any remaining doubters. After a coup by Serbian officers toppled the pro-Axis government, German High Command planned and then invaded Yugoslavia, defeating and occupying it during 6-17 April, all without Romanian support because it wanted to conserve Antonescu’s forces for Operation Barbarossa.¹³ The breakup of Yugoslavia, with Italy, Bulgaria, and Hungary annexing slices, discouraged Carlist officers from considering a coup against Antonescu. On 28 April 1941, the new Minister of Defense General Iosif Iacobici declared, “The recent events in Yugoslavia demonstrate to us what misfortune can be produced if the army conducts its own politics. The army... must follow the path prescribed by the government...From now on officers who manifest in any way against comrades from the German Army, will be considered practicing politics and will be removed.”¹⁴ These were mostly wasted words because most Carlist officers already supported the alliance with Nazi Germany.

¹¹ Some local elites, angry about Transylvania, had ignored the Germans, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 305, f. 157.

¹² Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 94; Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 127.

¹³ Moreover, the majority of the army was still demobilized and unready for combat, see, Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 124; the German High Command also discounted the Romanian Army’s ability to participate in the rapid mobile operations envisioned against Yugoslavia, see, Chirnoaga, *Istoria politică și militară*, 167.

¹⁴ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 305, 99.

The long, harsh winter delayed the start of training until April. Romanian officers did not know war was rapidly approaching, now planned for June, and German advisors were too few to re-train the whole army. Yet even had Romanian officers known or had more German advisors, deficiencies in training and professionalism were rooted in social factors unable to overcome in a few short months, or even years. While German advisors helped to train some officers, NCOs, and soldiers, most Romanian officers focused on whipping (often literally) the new contingent of draftees into shape and concentrated on close-order drill, so soldiers would march handsomely in the annual national day parades on 10 May. On 14 May 1941, General Alexandru Ioanițiu, recently promoted Chief of the General Staff, wrote a scathing report on the state of training after two years of European war. He dismissed excuses claiming the events of 1940 derailed training, he blamed officers for failing to prioritize it and squandering what little they did by focusing on drill. He ordered drill limited, practical training increased, and greater focus on offensive tactics. Recent events had proven “that only through offensive and movement can victory be obtained.”¹⁵ He ignored another factor affecting training, using soldiers as free labor. The Antonescu regime prioritized agriculture over training that spring, granting prefects the right to use soldiers, horses, and carts to help with the planting, so there would be a bountiful harvest. It affected even elite units; mountain troops plowed fields or transported seeds and up to 30 percent of cavalrymen did not return from leave to train as they had been diverted to labor in the fields.¹⁶

The transfer of German Eleventh Army to northern Moldavia in May alerted Antonescu that something was afoot. General Eugen von Schobert arrived in Piatra Neamț on 24 May to

¹⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 370, f. 92-96.

¹⁶ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 374, f. 11, 18; Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 228, f. 240.

take command of the German divisions arriving on the Prut and met with Antonescu to discuss developments. Within days the General Staff began ordering corps commanders to call up their reserves and fill out the units already mobilized and on 31 May, since the *Conducător* had gone already to Odobești (near Focșani) to set up General Headquarters in southern Moldavia, Mihai Antonescu led the first meeting of the Council of Ministers that discussed preparations for war.¹⁷ Therefore, when Hitler summoned Antonescu for a meeting in Munich on 12 June he suspected they would discuss Romania's participation in a coming German-Soviet war.

The *Conducător* was the first Axis leader to be sounded out by the Führer about the war with the Soviet Union. On the record, the two discussed why war with the USSR was necessary. Antonescu came prepared and immediately offered to put all military, political, and social forces of Romania at Hitler's disposal for "the great event that was approaching." Hitler then asked if the Romanians would join the Germans in the days after if war broke out and Antonescu replied that Romanians would insist on fighting from day one. Hitler offered Antonescu command of an Axis army group, with General von Schobert its "German liaison," to liberate eastern Romania. Hitler remained vague about the exact date of the start of the war and Antonescu argued that any delay threatened Axis chances of defeating the USSR.¹⁸ Off the record, they discussed the fate of Soviet Jews and communists.¹⁹ Hitler probably informed Antonescu of the Commissar Order, a plan to execute Soviet civil servants, Red Army political commissars, Jews in the Communist

¹⁷ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 118, 69; Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor consiliului de miniștri guvernarea Ion Antonescu, Vol. III*, 554.

¹⁸ Vasile Arimiae, Ion Ardelanu, Ștefan Lache, și Florin Constantiniu, ed., *Antonescu-Hitler: Corespondență și înțilniri inedite (1940-1944): Vol. I* (Bucharest: Cozia Ed.-Co, 1991), 95, 103-104.

¹⁹ What was said in this off the record meeting can be pieced together, see, Gerhard Weinberg, "Hitler and the Beginning of the Holocaust," in *Lessons and Legacies, Volume X, Back to the Sources, Reexamining Perpetrators, Victims, and Bystanders*, ed. Sara R. Horowitz (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 6, 11n4, 11n5.

Party, and all other “radical elements” captured during the invasion. He also mused about Nazi plans to deport Soviet Jews east of the Urals after victory.²⁰ This conversation influenced the Antonescu regime’s later decision to deport Jews from eastern Romania to Transnistria.

As the dictators debated the fate of Jews east of the Prut, the Romanian Army was taking measures against Jews to the west of the Prut. Since May, senior officers put Jews under greater surveillance and ordered radios confiscated, but they pushed for more radical measures. Third Army warned units in Bukovina on 12 July of possible communist fifth column activity in the rear and vaguely ordered units to take precautionary measures. Commanders initiated various policies. The 8th Infantry Division proposed immediately evacuating 20 “communists” from Ștefănești and then deporting all Jewish men 18-50 to camps in southwest Wallachia. The Mountain Corps restricted Jews from making phone calls, traveling, or working in telegraph or telephone exchanges.²¹ Officers, and soldiers, were convinced Jews could not be trusted.

On 18 June, Hitler finally informed Antonescu that Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the USSR, would start four days later. Hitler claimed he was forced to act to eliminate the threat of the Soviet Union, reaffirmed his promise that Antonescu would command an army group, and explained the “initial mission” of the Romanian Army: 1.) its primary goal was to defend against any Soviet attacks by air bombardment or airborne assault on the oil fields near Ploiești and oil infrastructure, particularly the Cernavoda bridge over the Danube and the port at Constanța, but at the same time pin down Red Army forces by threatening an attack by seizing bridgeheads over

²⁰ Hitler had not yet decided on the “Final Solution.” It took months Operation Barbarossa began for Nazi leaders to decide to kill all Soviet Jews and more before Hitler approved plans to murder all Jews in Europe, see, Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of the Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln: University Press of Nebraska; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), 424-428; Evans, *The Third Reich at War*, 175-178, 221; Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 198.

²¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 411, f. 17, 16.

the Prut; 2.) the Romanian Royal Air Force was also to prioritize defending the oil industry; 3.) once Army Group South advanced through Galicia, Army Group Antonescu would then attack to keep the Red Army from retreating across the Dniester.²² The General Staff furiously prepared for the deadline. Romanian commanders received their first offensive operational plans – every plan since September 1939 had been for a defense – on 19 June.²³ That same day civilians began to be evacuated from an area 3-4 km behind the border and all “suspect” Jewish men were to be evacuated under guard to be sent to Târgu Jiu internment camp in southwest Wallachia.²⁴ It was expanded on 21 June to all Jewish men 18-60 in villages between the Siret and Prut; wives and children were also evacuated, but only to the nearest city. Moldavian cities began to fill up with Jews, ironically increasing in the minds of generals the danger of Jewish uprisings in those cities. Pressure to deport all Jews from Bukovina had been building in the officer corps since August 1940, when General Atanasescu, now fired from command of Cavalry Corps, argued that Jews were “a permanent danger” because they were in cahoots with Soviet agents and spies.²⁵ The General Staff was anxious that the alleged Jewish perfidy of 1940 not be repeated.

As the Romanian Army girded itself for war it also prepared to take revenge for 1940. In a proclamation to Fourth Army, General Ciupercă crowed over the chance to erase the “shameful stain” of 1940, “I feel that the moment approaches to make [the Soviet Union] pay, dear soldiers. With the help of God, and our great ally [Nazi Germany], I have unshakeable faith that we will succeed in returning the borders of the Country to the Dniester...earth fattened with the marrow

²² Arimiae, *Antonescu-Hiter*, Vol. I, 107-109.

²³ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 875, f. 95.

²⁴ Fond Armata 3-a, dsoar 426, f. 66, 67; Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 361, f. 70, 66

²⁵ Ibid., dosar 90, f. 45.

of our ancestors.” [Underlined in original.]²⁶ The SSI and army intelligence made lists of Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, and a few Romanians who “did evil” to Romanian soldiers, civil servants, and civilians during the Soviet occupation in 1940-1941 to be arrested.²⁷ The Commissar Order may have been disseminated verbally to officers in Third Army. In interrogations after the war, officers of the 7th *Roșiori* Regiment claimed that on 21 June its commander, Colonel Gheorghe Carp, held a conference in Botoșani in which he announced the invasion would begin the next day and explained, “a verbal order was given that when we cross the Prut we will exterminate Jews who mocked Romanian units during the evacuation of Bessarabia in 1940.” While it’s tempting to take these statements at face value and point the finger of blame toward Antonescu, there is little evidence except these biased post-war testimonies of such verbal orders.²⁸ It’s more likely the orders originated with Carp (conveniently dead by the post-war interrogations) or the officers themselves. Regardless, the officers claimed the meeting was secret and they did not inform their men of the verbal order until they crossed the Prut on 2 July, so whether or not there was such a verbal communication of the Commissar Order it did not go out to soldiers until the last minute. It did not matter, however, because soldiers proved willing to carry it out and many also took the initiative because they were motivated to destroy “Judeo-Bolshevism.”

Operation Barbarossa and the Iași Pogrom: 22 June to 1 July

Romanian civilians living near the frontier had no need to wait for a radio announcement to know the war had begun, citizens in cities like Rădăuți, Dorohoi, Iași, Galați, and Tuclea, were awoken by the sound of artillery fire and aircraft buzzing overhead. There were no celebrations

²⁶ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 629, f. 208.

²⁷ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 624, f. 17-20;

²⁸ Fond Documentar, dosar, 8178, f. 76; Ancel never found written orders and built his arguments on the assumption of verbal orders, rather than initiative from below, see, Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 214, 219.

like in Bucharest since they were within range of Soviet artillery. Soviet bombers attacked cities too, soon including Bucharest and Ploiești. In many places in Moldavia, where Romanians had dreaded a Soviet invasion for the last year, the declaration of war and bombardments triggered a mixture of relief and fear. For the first week and a half, Axis forces remained on the defensive, awaiting the arrival of Army Group South, during which time the Red Army tried to fight the war it was trained for – an immediate counterattack to take the war to the enemy's soil.²⁹

Romanian-German forces limited their attacks to incursions to seize bridgeheads. Army Group Antonescu resembled a backwards S: Third Army, now under General Petre Dumitrescu (formerly First Army commander), comprised of the Mountain Corps, facing north in Bukovina, and the Cavalry Corps, acting as a pivot with part facing north in Bukovina and the bulk facing east on the Prut; German Eleventh Army, commanded by General von Schobert, with German XI, XXX, LIV, and Romanian IV corps all facing east on the Prut down to Ungheni east of Iași; Fourth Army, still led by General Ciupercă, comprised of III, V, and XI corps, facing east on the lower Prut; and II Corps facing north on the Danube. *Gruparea Aeriană de Luptă* (GAL), or the Air Combat Group, and *Luftflotte* 4 provided air defense for the army group.³⁰ On 22 June Third Army began probing Soviet defenses in Bukovina, while German Eleventh and Fourth armies seized bridges and carried out combat crossings of the Prut with German pioneers aiding to ferry Romanian troops across due to a shortage of boats, and II Corps engaged in artillery duels on the Danube. German Eleventh Army created bridgeheads at Bădărei, Sculeni, Stânca, Lingurari, and Țuțora; and Fourth Army at Albița, Fălcium, Bogdănești, Rânzești, and Cotu Morii.³¹ The Soviets

²⁹ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Picador, 2006), 24-26.

³⁰ DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 111.

³¹ Barboi, *Armata Română în Vâltoarea Războiului*, 51.

counterattacked the small and vulnerable bridgeheads that were held by mere handfuls of troops and a Romanian platoon at Albița was immediately driven back across the Prut.

As these small skirmishes seesawed back and forth, the Red Air Force began a strategic bombing campaign. While Ploiești and Constanța were key targets, Soviet aircraft from Odessa and Crimea also struck cities and towns across Moldavia to interdict Axis movements.³² With Soviet airfields so close, citizens in Suceava, Botoșani, Iași, Vaslui, Bârlad, Galați, Brăila, and Sulina experienced an unending series of air raid alarms – both real and false – that quickly took a psychological toll. Romanian air defenses were weak but had some early successes. On the morning of 23 June, Lieutenant Hoira Agarici scrambled his Hurricane fighter at an airfield by Constanța and shot down three bombers over the port – he soon became a national celebrity.³³ But even the best-organized defenses could not intercept every attack, and Romanian passive air defense was far from satisfactory: few (and substandard) air raid shelters, fewer radar stations, weak ground observation, and incomplete blackout.³⁴ Moreover, Romanian active air defense, reinforced by German formations not under its control, concentrated its limited fighter squadrons and anti-aircraft batteries around Constanța, Bucharest, and Ploiești, exposing Moldavian cities. Prefects anticipating heavy civilian casualties ordered mass graves be dug, often using Jewish forced laborers. The repeated air attacks spread panic and paranoia as rumors quickly spread that Jews were signaling the Soviet pilots with bolts of red cloth during the day or fires in chimneys at night, even that Jews who had emigrated from Moldavia to Bessarabia in 1940 were piloting

³² Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 177.

³³ Complete with a catchy tune that rhymed his name with the Romanian word for Bolsheviks [bolșevici]. “Agarici has gone to hunt *bolșevici*,” see, Benes, *Rumanian Aces of World War 2*, 15-16.

³⁴ Alexandru Armă, *București Sub Bombardamente (1941-1944)* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2015), 17; Germans complained about incomplete blackout for months, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 283, f. 94-95; dosar 314, f. 458.

the aircraft to drop bombs with deadly accuracy.³⁵ Whenever cities were bombed at night reports flooded in of “red rockets” in the sky, allegedly fired from Jewish neighborhoods, for a simple reason. The “red rockets” were tracers from anti-aircraft batteries, but civilians were convinced they were signals to pilots from Jewish fifth columnists to Soviet pilots.³⁶ News and rumors of setbacks on the Prut did not reassure anxious civilians close behind the front.

Soldiers were not immune to rumors, paranoia, or panic. During the night of 22/23 June, the 3rd *Călărași* Regiment reported that civilians in Siret, a town in Bukovina near the front, were shooting at soldiers guarding a bridge, so the Cavalry Corps Praetoral Service sent Lt. Colonel Mușatescu. He ordered police to search homes for shooters, investigated reports Ukrainian and Lipovan (Russian Old Believers) civilians were shooting at soldiers in other villages, arrested a lawyer hiding a Jewish family from evacuation, and oversaw the evacuation of civilians. Luckily for Ukrainians and Lipovans, he concluded Red Army soldiers had fired the shots, so no one was executed.³⁷ Most soldiers were so poorly trained and inexperienced that they were more amateur militia than professional soldiers, so they were easily spooked and confused when they were shot at (or thought that they were). They often decided that they were being attacked by treacherous civilians: Ukrainians, Russians, Lipovans, and above all Jews. General Headquarters kept up a constant flow of orders warning about saboteurs, spies, and parachutists, who allegedly received support from Jewish fifth columnists, which further confirmed soldiers’ fears.

As the initial surprise of the Axis attack wore off, Red Army counterattacks intensified. German-Romanian troops had expanded the Sculeni bridgehead, but on 25 June the Red Army

³⁵ Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 75-76.

³⁶ Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 76, 78; CMC, dosar 269, f. 26, 118, 120, 121; Arma, *București Sub Bombardamente*, 24.

³⁷ Fond Corpul Cavalerie, dosar 292, f. 413-414.

counterattacked and after the town changed hands four times the Germans ordered an evacuation. Similar counterattacks occurred elsewhere, one Romanian bridgehead was described as a tiny “nest of projectiles.” On the Danube the Soviets managed land troops on the opposite bank after driving off the Romanian defenders with artillery fire.³⁸ Civilians from Sculeni evacuated with the Axis troops and on 27 June Captain Ion Stihă ordered troops from the 6th *Vânători* Regiment, with the help of Christians from Sculeni, to separate Jews from among the refugees, forced them to dig a mass grave, and shot 311 for allegedly firing on soldiers or directing Soviet artillery fire. Among the dead were a few women and children. This early massacre set the pattern of future violence. Soldiers primarily targeted Jewish men, but often swept up women and children, as communist agents.³⁹ Individual guilt was less important than the perception of collective Jewish responsibility for the Romanian losses suffered in combat against the Red Army.

The news of the Sculeni defeat contributed to an outbreak of anti-Semitic violence in the nearby city of Iași initiated by soldiers that same day. A year before, strong policing prevented a pogrom, but this time police had their authority undermined by the army, officers got swept up in the myth of “Jewish-Communist” fifth columnists, and after a quick buildup a spark of fear lit an explosion of violence. Iași was one of the largest cities in Moldavia with over 100,000 people, a key rail hub, and close to the front, so it came under repeated attack. On 24 June alone, the city experienced seven air raids, although many were false alarms, and was bombed again two days later causing more damage and killing around 200, including 38 Jews.⁴⁰ A few with the means sought shelter in the countryside, but Jews were not allowed to leave, and most poor Romanians

³⁸ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 26-28; RG-25.003M, Reel 2, dosar 3751, c. 25, 76, 95-96.

³⁹ Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 490; Henry Eaton, *The Origins and Onset of the Romanian Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013), 77-78.

⁴⁰ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 748, f. 105; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 51, f. 320; Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 75-76.

remained. People felt exposed and helpless, some blamed corrupt civil servants or incompetent officers for inadequate defenses, but most blamed “Jewish-Communists” for signaling Soviet pilots.⁴¹ The city had long been a den of LANC and Legionary activism. The press contributed to growing anti-Semitic hysteria by publishing stories of Soviet agents and Jewish spies. The Iași garrison commander ordered police and gendarmes to search Jewish homes who arrested 500 (mostly male) Jews for having flashlights or red cloth, allegedly for signaling Soviet pilots, and took them to Police Headquarters to be interrogated – often beaten or tortured.⁴² The women were released quickly, but men were also released for insufficient evidence after refusing to confess to signaling Soviet aircraft. This was frustrating to soldiers who were convinced of Jewish guilt and believed that the lack of evidence only meant that Jews were too clever to leave any for dimwitted (or possibly corrupt) officers to discover, so they began to take matters into their own hands. Led by Sergeant Mircea Manoliu, incidentally a Legionary, men from the 13th *Dorobanți* Regiment began shooting Jews after they were released and soon even before arriving at Police Headquarters.⁴³ This was the beginning of popular anti-Semitic violence, soon joined by civilians, which spiraled out of control in Iași in the following days.

The commander of the Iași garrison, Colonel Constantin Lupu, was preparing to evacuate all Jewish men from the city at the same time. That same day, also in response to the reversal at Sculeni, Antonescu called Lupu to order him to deport all Jewish men in Iași as soon as possible to the camp in Târgu Jiu in southwest Wallachia. Iași was just 25 km from Sculeni and General Headquarters was worried because as early as July 1940 Fourth Army had predicted if war broke

⁴¹ Eaton, *The Origins and Onset of the Romanian Holocaust*, 75.

⁴² Ioanid, *Holocaust in Romania*, 68.

⁴³ Sergeant Manoliu was investigated most thoroughly immediately afterwards and court martialed by the army, becoming the scapegoat for the pogrom due to his legionary past, see, Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 142.

out the army could expect “rebellious actions in Iași on the part of the Jews.”⁴⁴ The army had already evacuated thousands of Jewish men from frontline villages successfully, trains arrived in Târgu Jiu with thirsty and hungry men, but not corpses. It had never tried anything on this scale before, however, since close to half the population, or about 45,000, was Jewish. Lupu was told to coordinate with an SSI team, municipal police, and CFR (state railroad) personnel, but soon events overtook Lupu and a half-finish plan was brutally implemented to deadly effect.

In response to reports of gunfire on 27 June and looting under the cover of the blackout in the night during 27/28 June, the Iași Prefect ordered patrols in the city increased, but police soon discovered that they were nearly powerless to halt the growing chaos. Around 10 am on 28 June, soldiers of 13th *Dorobanți* and 24th Artillery regiments entered the Jewish Tătărași neighborhood (also known as the Abattoir Quarter due to its Jewish slaughterhouse) to search for hidden radio transmitters they were convinced Jews were using to signal Soviet bombers. The search quickly turned into a pogrom as civilians joined soldiers in beating Jews and ransacking their property. When municipal police tried to intervene, Sergeant Manoliu called over a passing German patrol, as Iași was in German Eleventh Army’s sector, who he told his search for radios had failed only “because the police were protecting the Jews.”⁴⁵ The Germans allowed the searches to continue and watched the Romanian abuses. Nicolae Crăciun, a policeman, reported he found troops with rifles trained on families of Jews, many beaten and bleeding, and civilians egging on the soldiers.

Every attempt we made to stop the action described above was fruitless, and I even put myself at risk by trying, since they might have shot me or lynched me, since the citizens were agitated against the police. They screamed that [the police] belonged to the Jews and had been bribed by them.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 272, f. 55; Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 26.

⁴⁵ Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 186.

⁴⁶ From a longer translated quote from Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 90-91.

The police – who were not all so sympathetic towards the abused Jews – were intimidated by the mob and cowed by rebellious soldiers supported by the Germans, so they contacted Lupu and an army praetor came with gendarmes who halted the pogrom and placed Sergeant Manoliu under arrest for a short time before releasing him.⁴⁷ Calm was temporarily restored to the city.

Order was breaking down not just because of anti-Semitism, but also due to institutional confusion. There was a bewildering array of groups in Iași with overlapping duties: city police, gendarmes, local garrison troops, soldiers of the 14th Infantry Division, SSI agents, and German LIV Corps units. Post-war prosecutors, and later Jean Ancel, argued that these men conspired to plan the pogrom on direct orders from Antonescu.⁴⁸ In reality, there was no conspiracy, only anti-Semitic paranoia, groupthink, and confusion. With the declaration of war, city police and gendarmes lost authority to the army, but were still tasked with maintaining order; 14th Infantry Division had most of its soldiers spread in the countryside defending the frontier, so in time of crisis had few soldiers available; the local garrison had no authority over German patrols in the city; and SSI agents had special authority over soldiers to root out communist threats.

The final spark occurred during the night of 28/29 June when at 9 pm an air raid alarm sounded. Aircraft flew over the city, anti-aircraft guns opened fire (misidentified as “rockets”) and by 10 pm police were receiving reports from Romanian and German patrols that they were being shot at from rooftops by communist snipers. The patrols shot back and searched Jewish homes, but never found any snipers.⁴⁹ German patrols got swept up in the panic and reported

⁴⁷ Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 148.

⁴⁸ Ancel included an organizational charge with clear lines of authority to create an illusion of order in his account of the Iași pogrom to support his arguments in favor of conspiracy, see, Ancel *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 70-71.

⁴⁹ Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 149; USHMM RG-25.004M, Selected Records from the Romanian Information Service, 1934-1984, Reel 35, dosar 40010, vol. 89, c. 312.

taking casualties to the Romanian military authorities.⁵⁰ When two recently arrived Romanian infantry units began crossing the dark and unfamiliar city on their way to the front they added to the confusion, both reported being fired on, and by 3 am panicked troops in both columns were shooting up streets with all their weapons, including 53 mm cannon. Soldiers grabbed Jews from buildings they believed that they had been fired on from and shot many on the spot. An initial report recorded 300 dead and 50 wounded Jews that first night, but the army stopped counting as Iași descended into chaos over the next few days and Jews were murdered by the thousands.⁵¹

“That Sunday,” as locals later referred to 29 June, soldiers, gendarmes, civilians, and a few German soldiers began massacring the Jewish men of Iași, some women and children fell victim too. As the day dawned, Romanian authorities were beginning to realize that despite all the gunfire during the night there were few casualties – discovering later not a single soldier was killed. Soldiers and gendarmes pulled Jews into the streets, made easier because many families had gathered in improvised basement bomb shelters, anyone who resisted or was found with items deemed suspicious were shot on the spot. Jewish men were sorted from women, children, and elderly. Romanian and German soldiers organized “convoys” of Jews sent on to improvised collection points (local police stations; 13th *Dorobanți* Regiment, SSI, or gendarmerie headquarters; a Jewish school; a gymnasium; the Jewish slaughterhouse) or directly to Police Headquarters to be interrogated, just as they had in days previously except on a mass scale.⁵² Anyone who fell behind or dropped their hands from over their head was shot. Prison cells at Police Headquarters were already stuffed with Jews, so its courtyard was used as overflow. Already at 9 am 1,000

⁵⁰ It took until 5 July for the Romanians to confirm there were none, see, RG-25.004M, Reel 45, dosar 108233, vol. 64, c. 80.

⁵¹ RG-25.004M, Reel 13, dosar 2983, vol. 323, c. 886.

⁵² Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 143-144.

Jews had arrived, and by noon the number increased to 3,000-4,000.⁵³ Civilians emboldened by the soldiers began to loot Jewish homes and businesses as disorder spread.

Officers believed “Jewish-Communists” along “with very weak elements of Romanian communists” had sniped at soldiers to hinder troop movements and trigger a public panic.⁵⁴ The Jewish uprising senior officers had anticipated for a year finally seemed to be happening. While officers wanted to halt the pogrom, they contributed to the violence by their biased pusillanimity. General Gheorghe Stavrescu, commander of 14th Infantry Division and ranking Romanian army authority in Iași, visited the Police Headquarters several times on Sunday. At 11 am he gave a speech to the Jews penned in the courtyard, guarded by machineguns, in which he admitted that not all Jews were guilty and promised to release women, children, and elderly, but warned that men would be interrogated and shot if found guilty.⁵⁵ Many of the women, children, and elderly did not leave because they waited for the men to be released and they feared crossing what had quickly become a dangerous urban environment as mobs of civilians roamed the streets. They encouraged soldiers to kill Jews, lead soldiers or gendarmes to Jewish neighbors, and gathered along routes taken by convoys to spit on, throw rocks or bottles at, beat with sticks or iron bars, and murder Jews. These mobs consisted of Romanians of all walks of life, like the tax-collector who wrote a list of Jews in his building, armed himself with a pistol, and directed troops to arrest them.⁵⁶ Those few who tried to shield Jews, including a few local police, were accused of being “sold to the Jews” and sometimes murdered, like an engineer shot by an officer shouting, “Die

⁵³ Some witnesses after the war placed the number even higher at 5,000, see, Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 151.

⁵⁴ RG-25.004M, Reel 35, dosar 40010, vol. 89, c. 314.

⁵⁵ Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 152; Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 167.

⁵⁶ Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 136, 141.

you dog, with the Jews you're protecting.”⁵⁷ German patrols participated in the roundup, sorting, and abusing Jews, but many just watched. By 1 pm a few Germans from the Todt Organization gathered at the Police Headquarters to watch Romanian soldiers beat Jewish men to coerce them into confessing to being snipers. The number of Jews in the courtyard had increased. Although hundreds were released after interrogation and given a paper with the word *liber* (“free”) written on it, convoys continued to arrive and soldiers who did not recognize the *liber* slips brought Jews back. News of the *liber* papers spread among Jews and a few, knowing they were innocent, went to collection points in the hope of obtaining a *liber* slip to be protected by it, but this scrap of paper could not protect them from the enraged mob.⁵⁸ At 3 pm, air raid sirens wailed again, and panicked officers slammed shut the gates at the Police Headquarters courtyard before running for cover. Inside, terrified Jews tried to escape to find shelter, the sheer press of humanity killed a few who were crushed underfoot or against fences, and some began to break out or jumped the fence. Romanian guards fired into the crowd. Machineguns and rifles killed hundreds instantly, then soldiers – joined by some Germans – condoned off the area to hunt down the Jews that had fled, and most were shot on the spot after being captured.⁵⁹ Many more were left to die of their wounds. Machinegun fire had scythed down most victims in a few minutes, the hunt continued for another hour, probably killing an estimated 1,000 Jews and terrorizing the survivors.

After this bloody massacre, officers tried to restore order to Iași, but remained convinced that Jews presented a real threat. General Stavrescu posted an order on the streets declaring that “enemy terrorists” had tried to “produce panic and disorder,” ordered a curfew between 7 pm and

⁵⁷ Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 146; Ioanid, *Holocuast in Romania*, 75.

⁵⁸ Accounts differ, but 200 or 2,000 were given these release papers, see, Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 170-171.

⁵⁹ Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, 154; Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 185.

5 am, required all firearms be turned in by 5 pm (or face being shot), demanded all civilians lock their doors to keep out strangers, threatened to execute everyone in buildings gunfire came from, and warned that 10 hostages taken from the “terrorist-communist movement” would be killed for each gunshot or wounded soldier.⁶⁰ Near 5 pm, the Iași Prefect reported that he feared continued “grave disorders” in the city, blamed German patrols for being “stubborn” in rounding up Jews, and claimed Jewish snipers had not been found yet only because they were wily or well-hidden.⁶¹ Stavrescu’s curfew was effective in clearing civilian mobs from the streets by 6 pm, but soldiers continued to search for snipers and murder Jews. While Romanian and German patrols chased shadows, survivors at Police Headquarters, including a few women and children, were taken to the train station where they waited, until soldiers and CFR workers brutally crowded them into unventilated freight cars (120-150 in space for 40). The first train was loaded with 2,500 Jews and left after midnight, the second was loaded with 1,900 Jews and left in the early hours of the morning, and both were directed south and west – towards Târgu Jiu.⁶² Near 11 pm, Stavrescu asked the German Army to withdraw their patrols from Iași, but reports indicate that not all of them left and disorders continued. Third Army ordered that Colonel Lupu be replaced.⁶³

The Iași pogrom triggered a flurry of orders from General Headquarters that affected the fate of Jews in Moldavia. Local officers tried to blame the Germans for breakdown in order, but General Ioanițiu blamed panicked soldiers and incompetent officers. On 30 June, he ordered that

⁶⁰ RG-25.004M, Reel 35, dosar 40010, vol. 89, c. 359-360.

⁶¹ RG-25.004M, Reel 13, dosar 2983, vol. 323, c. 887.

⁶² Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 241, 257; RG-25.004M, Reel 65, dosar 40015, vol. 1, c. 445.

⁶³ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 481, f. 12; RG-25.004M, Reel 13, f. 889; dosar 2983, vol. 323 on 2 July General Dimitrie Carlaont arrived in Iași with a mission from the General Headquarters to take over all military forces and restore order. He moved to end anti-Semitic “chaos.” After the General Headquarters established its headquarters in the city on 13 July he evacuated Jews from the area around it and forced them to wear yellow stars, see, Reel 44, dosar 108233, vol. 45, c. 641-642.

patrols should not be led by reserve officers, soldiers should be kept close together, and soldiers only fire on clearly identified targets.⁶⁴ His conclusion was not wrong, Romanian soldiers were badly trained and had terrible fire discipline, but it was incomplete. Ioanițiu ignored the effect that orders coming from General Headquarters had on troops, encouraging them to see “Jewish-Communists” around every corner. That same day, Ioanițiu contributed to soldiers’ paranoia by announcing the Soviets were dropping spies and “terrorist agents” by parachute into Romania to provoke disorder, he claimed a Jewish baker from Moldavia who left for Bessarabia in 1940 had been parachuted into Iași and downed Soviet pilots had women’s clothes to disguise themselves. “All these enemy agents make contact with resident agents in the Country and with the Judeo-Communist population and together organize acts of sabotage, terrorism, aggression, etc.” To guard the rear, Ioanițiu, citing Antonescu’s authority, ordered all cities in Moldavia to enforce a strict curfew between 6 pm and 7 am for Jews, each night all Jewish men would be gathered and placed under guard in a few large buildings in the Jewish neighborhood, and during the daytime hostages would be taken from among prominent Jews and communists to deter any attacks.⁶⁵ An exception was in Constanța. On 26 June, a failed Soviet naval attack (probably to prepare for an amphibious landing) convinced officers to evacuate all Jewish men from the port city and seaside villages to camps in the countryside away from the coast.⁶⁶ Fourth Army passed along Ioanițiu’s order, warning that the “Jewish population is an accomplice in these actions [of enemy agents].”

⁶⁴ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 481, f. 14.

⁶⁵ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 17.

⁶⁶ A pair of destroyers were driven off, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 331; RG-25.004M, Reel 14, dosar 2986, vol. 5991, c. 716.

and gave soldiers the authority to shoot suspects on the spot.⁶⁷ Despite these orders, there were no further massacres of Jews in Moldavia because of an intervention by Antonescu.

Antonescu never deviated from his conviction that Jews were a threat, but he signaled his displeasure with popular anti-Semitic violence – west of the Prut in Moldavia. In a special order on 4 July, he began by attacking Jews for impoverishing Romania. Next, he recalled the shame of 1940, but then reprimanded, “The shame is even greater when isolated soldiers on their own initiative, and many times only with the purpose to rob or maltreat, attack the Jewish population and randomly kill as was the case in Iași.” Antonescu argued only the state could “legally” carry out anti-Semitic policies and bemoaned the chaos in Iași, saying it proved that Romanians were undisciplined and uncivilized. He concluded by threatening soldiers with court martial if they continued to abuse Jews.⁶⁸ The rhetoric of his order may appear surprising, but it was motivated by memories of 1907 mixed with the recent Legionary uprising. Antonescu feared popular anti-Semitic violence getting out of control, perhaps being used by Legionaries, and causing chaos in the rear in Moldavia that would impede military operations to liberate eastern Romania.

Antonescu’s intervention came two days after order had been restored in Iași. In the days after “that Sunday,” soldiers and civilians killed hundreds more Jews, especially on 30 June after an air raid alarm in the middle of the night again heightened tensions and rumors swirled that the Soviets had dropped parachutists into Iași. Workers at the trolley car factory and power station killed dozens, if not hundreds, of their Jewish co-workers who showed up for work on Monday.⁶⁹ At 1:30 pm, a group of soldiers patrolling in the city who believed they had been fired at from an

⁶⁷ RG-25.004M, Reel 35, dosar 40010, vol. 89, c. 305.

⁶⁸ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 325, f. 12.

⁶⁹ The workers stonewalled post-war investigators on details, see, Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 141-142.

apartment above a Jewish-owned pharmacy, followed General Străvescu's order, grabbed all the people inside, and used an armored car to machinegun 18 men, women, and children.⁷⁰ Isolated shot continued to be heard in Iași for several more days. Concurrently, hundreds of Jews in the two "death trains" died of hunger, thirst, and exhaustion as they both slowly meandered through the countryside, often sitting for hours while military trains were given priority, for day after day. Approximately 1,200 died on the first train before being unloaded at Podul Iloaei and 650 died on the second train before being unloaded at Târgu Frumos.⁷¹ Many more on the trains died before they reached their final destinations or shortly after being unloaded. The total number killed in Iași during 26 June-2 July and on the two "death trains" was around 13,000 innocent Jews.⁷²

The Iași pogrom and "death trains" demonstrated what awaited Jews in the Old Kingdom had Germany won the war in 1941, but fortunately they remained an exception west of the Prut. The authorities took steps to prevent "rebellions by the Jewish population" by increasing patrols, assigning police to patrols to keep them in line, and ordering stricter fire discipline.⁷³ Resulting from Antonescu's demand for order, these orders ironically protected Jews west of the Prut from pogroms. The Antonescu regime continued other anti-Semitic policies. Gendarmes evacuated Jews from villages to cities and sent suspected Jewish men to internment camps.⁷⁴ By the end of August, approximately 7,000 Jews from Moldavia, including 1,100 "death train" survivors, and Bukovina, mostly from in or around Dorohoi, were held in seven camps in western and southern

⁷⁰ Ioanid, *Holocaust in Romania*, 79-80; RG-25.004M, Reel 35, dosar 40010, vol. 89, c. 346, 357-358.

⁷¹ RG-25.004M, Reel 65, dosar 40015, vol. 1, c. 445.

⁷² Romanian Jews estimated around 10,000, see, RG-25.004M, Reel 8, dosar 7635, vol.2, c. 228; an SSI investigation in 1943 came up with the total of 13,266, see, Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 86; although some of this number were Jews who may have left illegally to find refuge in the capital, see, Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to "Romanianization,"* 23.

⁷³ X Corps implemented these measures in Bacau, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 481, f. 24-25.

⁷⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 34.

Wallachia. Most of them were men, but hundreds of women and children who had survived the “death trains” or deported from Dorohoi were interned as well. In the next few weeks, all of the Jews were transported back to cities in Moldavia and Bukovina – except for 1,000 actual leftist or communist Jews who remained interned in Târgu Jiu.⁷⁵ The situation of Jews west of the Prut faced remained difficult and many had to perform forced labor under the direction of the General Staff, but east of the Prut soldiers carried out mass atrocities against Romanian and Soviet Jews. Antonescu not only tolerated them, but eventually escalated the violence east of the Prut.

Operation *München* and Cleansing the Terrain: 2 July-26 July

As order broke down in Iași, Army Group Antonescu was preparing to launch Operation *München*. On 20 June, Romanian-German command issued an order with two offensive options: Operation *München*, an attack against defenses on the Prut if the Red Army stood its ground; and Operation *Nachstoss*, a vigorous pursuit to harry the Red Army before it could cross the Dniester in case it retreated immediately due to pressure from Army Group South.⁷⁶ The forces available, an estimated 326,000 Romanians and 135,000 Germans, were manifestly unsuited for a pursuit. German Eleventh Army had almost no panzers and few motorized units. General von Schobert had to rely on Third Army’s three motorized cavalry regiments and single armored division for mobile operations, these were poor substitutes for panzer divisions, but performed well-enough during the liberation of eastern Romania. Army Group Antonescu had mixed success, at best, in fulfilling its operational mission but succeeded in liberating northern Bukovina in two weeks and Bessarabia by the end of July. The liberation of eastern Romania, however, was marred by anti-

⁷⁵ RG-25.004M, Reel 25, dosar 20725, vol. 10, c. 806-807.

⁷⁶ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 22.

Semitic violence initiated by poorly-trained soldiers who saw Jews as threats or took revenge for 1940. Officers channeled soldiers' intrinsic motivation to "cleanse the terrain" of Jews.

Operation *München* was delayed due to unexpectedly strong resistance, but by 1 July the Soviet counterattack was spent allowing Axis forces to attack. In the event, the offensive was a mixture of *Nachstoss* in Bukovina and *München* in Bessarabia.⁷⁷ Third Army would carry out a short left hook through northern Bukovina with the Mountain Corps, cross the Prut around Cernăuți, harry Soviet forces retreating to the Dniester aided by a cavalry brigade, and then link up with Army Group South. German Eleventh Army would attack Soviet defenses in northern Bessarabia, break through, and drive east with the support of most of the Cavalry Corps and 1st Armored Division towards Moghilev (Mohyliv-Podilskyi) on the Dniester. Fourth Army would mark time further south, carry out demonstration attacks on the Prut until 5 July, then attack east into central Bessarabia aiming for Tighina (Bender) on the Dniester, and liberate Chișinău on the way. II Corps would only cross the Danube to clear southern Bessarabia and retake Cetatea Albă after Fourth Army's offensive succeeded. Operation *München* would liberate northern Bukovina and Bessarabia north to south much like the child's toy Jacob's ladder.

Third Army's pursuit in northern Bukovina had difficulty keeping up with the Red Army retreat because the Mountain Corps was limited by the speed of man and horse and also because its soldiers stopped to pillage Jewish and Ukrainian villages. After a tour of the front on 4 July, Antonescu complained that units were not taking security measures, allowed columns and wagon trains to bunch up, thus slowing the march and presenting easy targets for air attack, carried out costly frontal attacks, and were delayed by "Jewish or Ukrainian snipers (francs-tireurs)." Since

⁷⁷ DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 113-114.

29 June he had also accused Soviet soldiers of using “deception methods” such as: shooting from trees, waiting to fire until Romanian soldiers came very close, using agents allegedly dressed in German or Romanian uniforms in the rear, and receiving aid from civilians. The very same day Antonescu condemned the Iași pogrom, he ordered summary execution of francs-tireurs.⁷⁸

The precipitous Soviet retreat from northern Bukovina, and after an Axis breakthrough from northern Bessarabia, meant that Romanian and German soldiers were greeted in villages by joyful peasants. Local *bucovineni* and *basarabeni* were particularly relieved because the Soviets had begun deporting Romanians to the Soviet far east. Ukrainians were also excited to see Axis troops, although Romanian soldiers treated them roughly and a few fights broke out with armed Ukrainian nationalists. Jews stayed inside or fled east – Romanians saw either action as proof of guilt for 1940.⁷⁹ The initial celebratory atmosphere in liberated villages or towns soon dissipated as troops began looting, raping, and murdering. Lieutenant Nicolae Dan, a reserve officer in 3rd Mountain Artillery Regiment, recalled that upon entering Adâncata (Hlyboka), just 10 km across the border, gunfire was heard, and soldiers began yelling about Jewish snipers, scattering down side streets, and breaking into homes looking for Jews. “The troops were inflamed with a kind of madness and only very few soldiers remained calm.” While some were shot immediately, many were seized to be interrogated, sorted, and then shot. Dan took pity on a woman and her six-year child, ordering a corporal to let them go, and he was soon stuck with six more. He tried to keep them out of view, but a group under a major arrived, ordered all eight turned over, and took the

⁷⁸ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 325, f. 2-3, 27-28, 10.

⁷⁹ Some, like Dumitru Nimigeanu, were deported just weeks before, see, Dumitru Nimigeanu, *Însemnările unui jăran deportat din Bucovina* (Bucharest: Editura Vestala, 2015), 41, 53; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 411, f. 102.

Jews to a courtyard being used for executions after expedited interrogations. Dan followed, but could not stand to watch, so another officer accused him of being a Jew and threatened him.⁸⁰

The reports of Jewish snipers were accepted by most commanders who then sanctioned reprisals. After 1st Mountain Brigade entered Ciudei, General Lascăr ordered “the most energetic measures” against Jewish snipers and 300-400 Jews in the town were murdered, finishing what Major Valeriu Carp began the year before.⁸¹ The traditional dress of Jews in shtetls, especially men, aided soldiers in identifying them, but help from local Ukrainians or Romanians to point out Jews and communist collaborators was even more important. In places, soldiers arrived to discover that Romanian or Ukrainian villagers had already begun pogroms or gathered Jews to be murdered. When the Red Army decided to defend a town, Romanian troops pushed forward recklessly, often without clearing nearby Soviet positions, and suffered casualties. They blamed Jews (or Ukrainians) for allegedly directing Soviet artillery fire, and butchered Jews in revenge. 2nd Lieutenant Ignat Timaru boasted of dodging “kike bullets” in the town of Storojineț, picking his way along streets strewn with bodies of “francs-tireurs,” corpses Antonescu and Ioanițiu must have seen when they inspected the newly captured town on 4 July.⁸² To speed up the advance, Antonescu ordered commanders to avoid towns filled with “malevolent foreigners.”⁸³

Despite being slowed by Soviet rearguards and pogroms, the Mountain Corps reached the Prut on 5 July. General Avramescu spent the day “crossing all over” the Mountain Corps’ rear as he investigated an unending series of reports claiming that columns were coming under attack by

⁸⁰ His post-war testimony may have been self-serving, but not unbelievable, see, RG-25.004M, Reel 9, dosar 7644, vol. 1, c. 1069-1071.

⁸¹ ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, dosar 6347, f. 57, 266-267.

⁸² Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 468, f. 30-31; dosar 108, f. 114.

⁸³ Ibid., dosar 638, f. 53.

franc-tireurs. In every case there were no snipers and all gunfire was “only from panic-stricken soldiers,” so he ordered that soldiers should not fire unless expressly ordered to by an officer.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the first mountain troops entering Cernăuți claimed they had been fired on from the Jewish cemetery and in following days the city was subject to successive waves of violence even as Avramescu’s forces pressed on towards the Dniester.⁸⁵ The 8th Cavalry Brigade joined in the advance and arrived outside Hotin on 8 July. Third Army was still clearing the area when it received orders to prepare an assault across the river into Ukraine.⁸⁶

The offensive into Bessarabia was not so easy because the Red Army put up a fight, but German Eleventh Army quickly penetrated Soviet defenses in northern Bessarabia and General von Schobert requested Fourth Army move up its attack to 4 July. General Racoviță’s Cavalry Corps prosecuted an especially violent advance as the three motorized regiments created ad-hoc “execution teams” to murder Jews. Captain Leon Ostrovschi, who had attended Colonel Carp’s briefing with the officers of 7th *Roșiori* Regiment, gave a speech to his soldiers after crossing the Prut. He declared it was time to take revenge, asking for “worthy, courageous, and determined men who will not give up for anything. To kill without mercy from babes in swaddling clothes to [old men with] white beards.” Only nine volunteered, annoying Ostrovschi, who chose seven more to join the team, but those who self-selected proved highly motivated and consistently left the column during the advance to murder Jews in groups of 5-50.⁸⁷ Killing Jewish women and

⁸⁴ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 638, f. 59.

⁸⁵ Major Scârneci records that his men found a Jew praying in the cemetery who told them that other civilians had fired on the Romanians. Then followed by “[...]” because the editors of *Editura militară* who published his journal removed a section of his notes, most likely dealing with reprisals, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linia întâi*, 113.

⁸⁶ Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector, ed. *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads’ Campaign Against the Jews, July 1941-January 1943* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 19.

⁸⁷ Fond Documentar, dosar 8178, f. 27, 29-30.

children initially shocked many Romanian soldiers, but killing Jewish men was less traumatic as troops were convinced they were a threat. The cavalrymen gathered Jews, village leaders, and anyone else locals pointed out as pro-Soviet traitors to be interrogated and executed. Those who wanted could easily find ways to get out of the assignment. During 4-6 July, successive cavalry units passed through Edineț and each day the number of bodies in the streets multiplied. Troops gathered 3,000 Jews into the courtyard of a school and another 400 into a small house. Alcohol flowed freely, contributing to the crimes, as one soldier later laconically summarized, “in Ediniț [sic] they drank a good wine, shot Jews, and raped women.”⁸⁸ Racovița was pleased to report Ukrainian and Romanian civilians reacted “very violently” against Jewish neighbors, declared Jews were “a second and even more dangerous enemy” than the Red Army, advocated sending remaining Jews to concentration or labor camps “way in the interior of the country” in southwest Wallachia, and concluded that Jews were “frightened” by the brutality. He argued, however, that brutality was needed to “annihilate” Soviet propaganda.⁸⁹ Racovița’s sentiments were far from unique and the officer corps became convinced that such pitilessness was part of its duty.

German Eleventh Army was soon battling for cities that had to be cleared street by street. When German XXX Corps entered the city of Bălți on 7 July, Axis troops reported battles “with armed bands” as German and Romanian troops cleared the city, but a Soviet counterattack with tanks forced them to retreat temporarily until the Bălți fell for good on 10 July.⁹⁰ Cities were threatening places to peasant soldiers used to life in small villages: large, unfamiliar, and filled with smoke and fire. Soldiers saw danger around every corner. They also blamed Jews for all of

⁸⁸ Fond Informativ, dosar 203760, f. 8-9; Fond Documentar, dosar 8178, f. 28.

⁸⁹ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 287, f. 7-9.

⁹⁰ RG-25.003M, Reel 1, dosar 3744, c. 496, 518, 520, 587.

the destruction in cities because they allegedly started fires as part of the Soviets' scorched-earth policy, but strangely Jewish neighborhoods usually suffered the worst from flames. After Bălți fell, Romanian soldiers gathered 400 Jews, both men and women, but after hours of sorting only 15 men of military age were executed.⁹¹ Romanians did not murder Jews in the cities of eastern Romania alone, German soldiers participated and were soon joined by SS troops.

Einsatzgruppe D operated throughout eastern Romania in July and August, particularly in large towns and cities. Heinrich Himmler ordered the creation of these special units, staffed with SS security forces, and tasked with pacifying the German Army's rear by the selective murder of political enemies. Each *Einsatzgruppe* (A, B, C, D) had about 900 men assigned to army groups North, Center, South, and Antonescu; *Einsatzgruppe D* was established later than the others. The German Army ceded authority over rear area security and promised to provide support to the SS. Himmler ordered wherever they went *Einsatzgruppen* should encourage "without leaving a trace" local anti-communists and anti-Semites to carry out "self-cleansing efforts" of Jews and communists.⁹² *Einsatzgruppe D* arrived in Romania and set up its headquarters in Piatra Neamț next to German Eleventh Army headquarters on 4-5 July.⁹³ Antonescu's General Headquarters moved to Roman, an hour or so away, to better coordinate with the Germans. *Einsatzgruppe D* soon had a *Vorkommando* operating east of the Prut that reported, "Good cooperation with the Romanian Army."⁹⁴ The SS were a malevolent force, but Romanian officers and soldiers did not need to be pushed to murder Jews or communists. Instead, they focused on teaching Romanians

⁹¹ The SS complained about the wild nature of this round up and claimed that only intervention by the local German commander prevented the massacre of all 400 Jews by the undisciplined Romanians, instead of carefully sorting out the communists and dangerous radials as per the Commissar Order, see, Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 34-35.

⁹² Browning, *Origins of the Final Solution*, 225, 228.

⁹³ Ancel, *Prelude to Mass Murder*, 224.

⁹⁴ Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 19.

on how to “properly” sort Jews and communists from suspects gathered by frontline troops and to create ghettos like in Poland. This established a precedent for future collaboration in Ukraine.

Einsatzgruppe D received support from and influenced the policies of the SSI. The secret police organized an *Eşalon Operativ*, or Operational Echelon, a small group of 100-160 men sent to the front to aid army intelligence, known as Section II, in gathering information on the enemy, reporting on the morale of soldiers and civilians, and securing the army’s rear from communists, saboteurs, and terrorists.⁹⁵ These men were not fascists, indeed many had tracked, arrested, and even executed Legionaries for over a decade, but they did hate “Judeo-Bolshevism” and adopted SS policies, including “self-cleansing efforts.” The SSI informed Fourth Army Section II on 11 July that it was recruiting agents to send ahead of the army to create “an unfavorable atmosphere for Judaic elements” in villages by a whisper campaign, so when soldiers arrived locals would help point out Jews, communists, and other threats.⁹⁶ Considering difficulties in recruiting and how quickly eastern Romania was overrun it seems unlikely these efforts made much difference. Moreover, they were superfluous because *basarabeni* did not need to be prompted to collaborate with the army; Diana Dumitru shows that Romanian and Ukrainian civilians often attacked Jews before the army even arrived, very much like the infamous case of Jedwabne in eastern Poland.⁹⁷ SSI agents acted as liaisons for *Einsatzgruppe D* to ease collaboration with army officers.

When a city fell one of the four *Einsatzkommandos* (10a, 10b, 11a, or 11b) rushed to try to direct repressive measures, but they usually arrived after Romanian soldiers and gendarmes

⁹⁵ Paul A. Shapiro, *The Kishinev Ghetto, 1941-1942: A Documentary History of the Holocaust in Romania’s Contested Borderlands* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), 9-10.

⁹⁶ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 92-95.

⁹⁷ Dumitru, *The State, Genemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 7-10, 149-150; Polish peasants massacred Jews before the arrival of the Germans, see, Jan Gross, *Neighbors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

had already begun to “cleanse the terrain.” This phrase was army jargon for clearing an area of enemy combatants, but it took on a more sinister meaning during the war. While turning a blind eye to German looting, the SS complained they often arrived to find Romanian troops looting or randomly rounding up Jews and communists. The SS depict themselves as bringing order to this chaos, but these reports need to be treated with some skepticism.⁹⁸ A number of frontline troops did create chaos by thieving as they murdered, raping Jewish or Ukrainian women, and accepting bribes. Officers and gendarmes from the Praetoral Service soon arrived, however, who enforced order and repression became more uniform. Praetor officers gathered suspects for interrogation, sorted women and children from men, and took hostages. The main difference between SS and Praetoral Service treatment was applying different sets of subjective criteria – racial or cultural – when sorting Jews. Yet, when SS *Einsatzkommandos* arrived in a city, often accompanied with an SSI liaison, Romanian officers and gendarmes generally deferred to their wishes.

The officers of the Praetoral Service arrived with the second wave of rear echelon troops and were the first to restore a semblance of order.⁹⁹ They took custody of Jews and communist suspects already arrested, searched out more, and executed hostages in reprisal for attacks. They also tried to restore discipline and halt looting until gendarmes of the Ministry of Internal Affairs arrived with the next wave of occupying forces, but the arrival of each new unit triggered another round of looting, rape, and murder.¹⁰⁰ By mid-July General Headquarters was complaining that troops were treating liberated Romanian territory like occupied enemy territory: looting animals, equipment, and seed from kolkhozes (created by the Soviets with property requisitioned from

⁹⁸ Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Report*, 19, 57, 105

⁹⁹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 867, f. 361-362.

¹⁰⁰ Six different units passed through Chișinău from July to November, see, Shapiro, *The Kishinev Ghetto*, 18.

peasants that the regime wanted to return to the original owners); and furniture, materials, and valuables from towns and cities. Antonescu complained after a tour of the front that wagons loaded down with stolen goods made advancing columns look like “true Gypsy caravans.”¹⁰¹ The General Headquarters ordered officers to shoot troops caught in the act, but this threat was not carried out, especially as officers often participated in and directed the looting.¹⁰²

Each city taken by Axis forces was progressively because locals had fled, some just a short distance to nearby villages to escape artillery or air bombardment, while others evacuated with the Soviets. Cernăuți fell so quickly that most its population remained; elsewhere, such as Bălți or Chișinău, it took longer to reach the cities and their populations were noticeably reduced; cities located on the Dniester, such as Hotin, Soroca, or Cetatea Albă, allowed escape across the river into Soviet Ukraine. After a year of Soviet rule, most locals were thoroughly disillusioned with communism and stayed put, and it was the Red Army’s turn to experience mass desertion of local *basarabeni* and minority draftees from its ranks. Nonetheless, many draftees retreated with the Red Army and hundreds of thousands fled with communist civil servants, including 124,000 Jews.¹⁰³ Towns and cities began to fill up again as those who sought shelter in villages or were overtaken by the Axis forces returned home. Initially, Jewish refugees were escorted west across the Prut to be interned in Târgu Jiu, but on 16 July Third Army passed down a decision that the Ministry of Internal Affairs now had responsibility over all Jews in eastern Romania who would be concentrated locally.¹⁰⁴ Gendarmes gathered Jewish refugees caught on highways into camps,

¹⁰¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 411, f. 43.

¹⁰² Trucks and soldiers were diverted to smuggling. In August one officer sent home all the equipment of a dental office. NCOs driving a Soviet truck with stolen goods fired on gendarmes before it was stopped and four officers were court martialed for their role in the smuggling, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 497, f. 226, dosar 498, f. 18.

¹⁰³ Ioanid, *Holocaust in Romania*, 172.

¹⁰⁴ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 426, f. 51; this order had to be repeated, see Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 191.

often next to POW camps, and survivors of massacres in towns or cities were kept in ghettos. In a few places, probably due to SS influence, Jews were marked by yellow stars.¹⁰⁵

While soldiers, gendarmes, and SS troops instituted a reign of terror in the rear, German Eleventh Army continued its offensive to clear central Bessarabia. After reaching the Dniester at Soroca, General von Schobert diverted the 1st Armored Division southwest, reaching Bălți on 12 July, to launch it against the Soviet flank in central Bessarabia to rescue Fourth Army, which was mired in a bloody stalemate. III Corps had crossed the Prut south of Ungheni, initially benefiting from German Eleventh Army's success, and advanced without much resistance. The Red Army regrouped in the wooded hills of the Cornești Massif located in central Bessarabia and Romanian units advanced as recklessly here as they did elsewhere. A counterattack by a Soviet battalion on 8 July caught the officers of the 35th Reserve Infantry Division off-guard, their soldiers panicked, and embarrassingly several artillery batteries were captured.¹⁰⁶ III Corps ordered fruitless frontal assaults against Soviet positions for another week.

Further south things were even worse. V Corps had barely expanded its bridgehead at Falciu and any advance came at great cost against dug in Soviet infantry with artillery support. On 9 July, the 11th *Dorobanți* Regiment lost half its officers and 40 percent of its soldiers killed or wounded advancing just a few kilometers to Țigancă. V Corps considered evacuating back across the Prut, but division commanders protested because they did not want to abandon terrain

¹⁰⁵ Wearing a yellow star was not required uniformly and even rescinded, Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 31-34.

¹⁰⁶ Antonescu publicly castigated the division in a daily order on 18 July and court martialed several officers. This placed the division under a cloud. Although, the division recovered and fought well all the way to Odessa, Fourth Army eventually broke the division up into nine battalions assigned to rear area security. Historians later blamed its poor performance on the fact that it was a newly raised reserve division, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 624, f. 34-35; Armata 4-a, dosar 646, f. 142-145; dosar 661, f. 206; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 46-47, 76-77.

seized at such a high cost.¹⁰⁷ Private Ioan Popa wrote his parents from Țigancă telling them not to believe the announcements that the army had reached the Dniester, “Papa there ain’t been nothing like this war being fought between Romania and Russia...know that we’ve barely gone seven kilometers, advancing without tanks, artillery, or planes, only with infantry fire, while the Russians got casements.”¹⁰⁸ Fourth Army had old artillery easily outranged by Soviet guns since most of the Romanian Army’s modern heavy artillery was assigned to Third Army or German Eleventh Army. Before the Soviets retreated the Guard and 21st Infantry divisions took 2,743 and 6,222 casualties respectively, and a song was soon circling among the ranks, “Over in the valley at Țigancă, the Russians sat in casements, and they hit us with grenades, with grenades and shrapnel, and with machineguns.”¹⁰⁹ It’s a testament to the strength of their motivation that Romanian soldiers continued to attack in the face of such strong Soviet firepower.

The 1st Armored Division’s attack, taking Călărași on 14 July, unhinged the whole Soviet line in central Bessarabia finally allowing Fourth Army to advance, but the Red Army carried out an organized withdrawal. Romanian armor continued south, taking a weakly defended Chișinău off the march on 16 July before turning southeast, and concluded its romp on 19 July at Tighina, where it found the bridges across the Dniester already dynamited. General Voiculescu arrived in Chișinău that day to find a devastated city, moved to restore utilities, began setting up a ghetto in the lower part of the city, and forced Jews to clean up the damage for which the Romanians held them responsible.¹¹⁰ Sergeant Ioan Lungu, a gendarme in the Praetoral Service, was shocked by the damage to the city’s Orthodox cathedral, but inside “on the wall of the burned iconostasis,

¹⁰⁷ Dăscălescu, *General Nicoale Dăscălescu*, 78-79.

¹⁰⁸ Private Popa was ordered court martialed for alarmism, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 784, f. 7-9.

¹⁰⁹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 47; Dăscălescu, *General Nicolae Dăscălescu*, 77.

¹¹⁰ Shapiro, *The Kishinev Ghetto*, 15-16.

there is the icon of the pure Mary, untouched by the flames of fire!”¹¹¹ How many Jews soldiers murdered in the following days is unknown, but numbered many hundreds.

Fourth Army chased the Red Army out of central Bessarabia, allowing II Corps to finally cross the Danube to help clear southern Bessarabia. The Soviets were in full retreat by 20 July, leaving villages and fields burning in their wake, but the Romanian pursuit was easily checked with powerful artillery fire. In northern Bessarabia the same day, General Racoviță, his forces already across the Dniester, declared that he “didn’t want to see a kike” in the rear of the Cavalry Corps west of the river because he considered them a threat to the logistics of his advance into Soviet Ukraine, so Jewish men were rounded up in towns, held in synagogues, and often shot.¹¹² Despite losing the bridge at Tighina, the Soviets still evacuated troops, civilians, and materials by boat down the Dniester to the Black Sea and Odessa; the railyards at Cetatea Albă were soon crowded with hundreds of train cars.¹¹³ Bessarabia was officially declared liberated after Fourth Army units reached the Dniester on 26 July, but the Red Army still held a small bridgehead on the lower Dniester “with very weak forces” and evacuated the last of its men.¹¹⁴ Advancing into southern Bessarabia, which was more sparsely populated in general and now stripped bare by the Soviets, Romanian soldiers found less to loot and fewer Jews to murder. The pattern of pogroms initiated by soldiers, and civilians, during the initial occupation and then concentration of Jewish survivors into improvised ghettos by the Praetoral Service, however, still repeated. By 31 July, the Romanian Army had suffered 24,396 casualties (5,011 dead, 14,898 wounded, and 4,487

¹¹¹ Lungu, *De la Stalingrad la Gherla*, 11.

¹¹² ACNSAS, Fond Personal, dosar 10617, vol. 3, f. 175.

¹¹³ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 843, f. 311, 312; RG-25.003M, Reel 3, dosar 3823, c. 408-409.

¹¹⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 843, f. 858.

missing) – more than a third of them at Țigancă alone. Romanian soldiers left tens of thousands of murdered Jews in their wake as they crossed into Soviet Ukraine.

Advance into Ukraine and Battle for Odessa: 17 July to 16 October

When Romanian forces reached the Dniester, they had to halt to wait for their logistics to catch up and prepare combat crossings. After the war this minor pause, required by operational realities, was turned into a crossing of the Rubicon moment when Antonescu allegedly overrode widespread opposition by politicians, senior officers, and the public against continuing the war into the USSR. Therefore, the *Conducător* was solely to blame for the disaster that followed.¹¹⁵ In reality, choices months earlier by senior officers and most of the political elite to support an alliance with Nazi Germany had already set them down this path. Furthermore, it became almost impossible for the Romanian Army to turn back after crossing the Prut because its soldiers, from General Ioanițiu down to the lowest private, had implicated themselves in Hitler’s criminal war. There was no debate at the time among Romanian senior officers about continuing the war into Ukraine. As career soldiers they knew the Red Army had to be defeated to permanently secure eastern Romania and ideologically they believed in the necessity of the total defeat of the threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism” – expecting the Germans to crush the Soviets in a matter of weeks. All claims that they had opposed continuing across the Dniester only appeared later.

General Headquarters had already accepted that Third Army would fight east of Dniester on 20 June when it was subordinated to German Eleventh Army. Just over a week after the start of Operation *München* over 100,000 Romanian troops, the mountain and cavalry brigades under

¹¹⁵ For the conventional “To the Dniester or beyond” narrative, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 47-49; Barboi, *Armata română în vâltoarea războiului*, 80-81; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 71-73.

General Dumitrescu, plus the five German-trained infantry divisions under General von Schobert (1st Armored Division had been sent south), representing the most-mobile and best-trained units of the Romanian Army, stood prepared to cross the Dniester. On 13 July, von Schobert ordered Dumitrescu to prepare the Mountain and Cavalry corps to cross the river to support German XI Corps' attack on Mogilev, help pierce the Stalin Line, advance to the Bug, and then turn south to protect German Eleventh Army's left flank – using the Bug to guard his own flank. The Stalin Line was a series of half-finished fortifications built on the old border in 1938, cannibalized of its weapons in 1939, but in 1941 its concrete casements still offered the Soviets a chance to slow the Axis.¹¹⁶ Third Army carried out its crossing during the night of 16/17. General Avramescu's men encountered many difficulties: a shortage of boats, a river swollen by flooding, insufficient bridging equipment, and light mountain artillery with limited range unable to support the attack. The Mountain Corps' bridgehead was constantly counterattacked, yet it held on, and pioneers – lacking training, flamethrowers, or specialized equipment – cleared 182 concrete casements.¹¹⁷ General Racovița's Cavalry Corps had a much easier time with its crossing. Third Army broke through the defenses by 19 July, joined General Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group South that had finally arrived, and marched in pursuit of Red Army troops trying to escape over the Bug. The Mountain Corps combat journal trumpeted, “The Victorious Crossing of Romanian troops across the Dniester and decisive battle for the destruction of Bolshevism.”¹¹⁸

Anti-Semitic violence by Romanian soldiers noticeably declined east of the Dniester for four major reasons. First, Romanian soldiers simply had less time to loot or murder because the

¹¹⁶ Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 144, 176.

¹¹⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 63; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 118, f. 201-206.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., dosar 108, f. 143.

pace of operations stepped up significantly and officers pushed troops in long, tiring marches to keep up with the motorized and panzer forces of Army Group South. General Dumitrescu could no longer allow looting or pogroms to slow his men. Second, since disorders continued officers feared a breakdown in discipline and reigned in soldiers' "excesses." Dumitrescu complained on 23 July that soldiers: broke into homes, pocketed valuables, devastated beehives, rustled animals, and profaned the few churches still intact under Soviet rule. He ordered that soldiers should be instructed to act as liberators towards locals. Three days later, exasperated, he castigated officers for tolerating crimes against Soviet Ukrainian peasants "not guilty of the communists' outrages," demanded stronger patrols by gendarmes, and threatened to execute soldiers caught in a criminal act.¹¹⁹ Officers also faced arrest and dishonor if they let their men get out of control. Third, the ardor to take revenge for the alleged betrayal of Romanian Jews in 1940 had cooled a little and did not apply to Soviet Jews. During long marches, tired soldiers overtook crowds of miserable-looking Jewish refugees consisting primarily of women, children, and elderly and some took pity on them. On 5 August, Major Scârneci ordered men from 3rd Mountain Battalion to give bread to a group of Jews from Bălți and told the refugees to leave the road to hide from the Germans.¹²⁰ Such acts of kindness were few and far between. Back in eastern Romania, hastily improvised camps were already overflowing with Jewish refugees, and on 17 July the Great Praetor of the Army General Ioan Topor reported, "We cannot guard them. We cannot feed them. I beg you to give an order concerning what to do with them."¹²¹ Conditions in these camps were much worse compared ghettos. General Headquarters did nothing to ease Jewish suffering after German

¹¹⁹ Ottmar Trașcă, ed., "*Chestiunea evreiască*" în documente militare române, 1941-1944 (Bucharest: Institutul Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România "Elie Wiesel," 2010), 187, 189.

¹²⁰ Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linia întâi*, 127.

¹²¹ Translated and quoted in Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 201.

soldiers and SS troops moved further east out of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. Last, but not least, most Soviet citizens did not join in anti-Semitic violence. Indeed, a few individuals collaborated, and many held anti-Semitic beliefs, but the arrival of Romanian or German soldiers did not trigger pogroms by civilians as it did in eastern Romania. Soviet citizens were also more willing to offer Jews aid.¹²² Romanian soldiers did not completely stop looting, raping, or murdering Jews (or communists) in Soviet Ukraine, but they no longer did so in the frenzied manner as earlier in eastern Romania.

Passing through villages many soldiers felt pity for Soviet peasants. They remembered stories of cannibalism during collectivization, saw the misery they lived in, and were impressed by their Orthodox piety – especially among the older generation. During a pause in operations while his unit carried out “moral education,” cleaned up, and held a ceremony to bury its dead, Major Scârneci noted on 30 July, that local Ukrainian women looked at the unit chaplain “with a kind of ecstasy. Too bad they are old ladies!”¹²³ Fourth Army Section II claimed soldiers were received with “greater warmth” by some villagers in Transnistria than in parts of Bessarabia due to their long oppression under the Soviets. When troops entered villages, they were greeted not with pogroms but celebrations in which scores of couples were married and hundreds of children or youths were baptized with Romanian soldiers acting as godfathers. Chaplains contributed to the evangelical atmosphere developing across the Dniester as they preached “holy war.” Priest Sever I.D. Husariu later wrote a letter to Antonescu petitioning him for funds for a church youth program in Transnistria because “the first measure that we need to occupy ourselves with, is the

¹²² Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust*, 182-186.

¹²³ Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linia întâi*, 122-123.

religious culture problem and the forming of the [Soviet] youth.”¹²⁴ Although arrests, hostage taking, and executions remained common, Romanian soldiers could feel, and many began to act, like a liberating army as they tramped into villages full of Orthodox believers.

German LIV Corps, having liberated central Bessarabia, crossed the Dniester and Hitler asked Fourth Army to follow on 27 July. The German crossing near Dubossary was supported by Romanian artillery. Antonescu responded four days later, promising that, “I will go to the end of the line” to destroy “the greatest enemy of civilization, of Europe, and of my country.”¹²⁵ An SS *Nachkommando* soon turned Dubossary into a charnel house by murdering 10,000 Jews with help from German and Romanian troops. Fourth Army began crossing at Tighina on 3 August. Antonescu and Hitler met at Berdychiv in Soviet Ukraine on 6 August, he was decorated with a Knight’s Cross and asked to send Fourth Army to neutralize Odessa to protect German Eleventh Army’s rear as it cleared the Dnieper bend.¹²⁶ At the same time, General Topor began to push Jews (an a few Ukrainians and Russians) from overcrowded camps in eastern Romania across the Dniester with official approval from Antonescu who cited Hitler’s excited ramblings about pushing Soviet Jews across the Urals that the invasion seemed about to make a reality.¹²⁷

The sudden flood of Jews across the river worried Romanian and German officers alike. 2nd Lieutenant Ioan Manu, commanding a platoon of 58th Police Company guarding a bridge at Kozliv near Moghilev, was alarmed when 10,200 Jews were driven across on 27-28 July. He reported “imminent danger” because instead of seeing terrified, exhausted, and starving women, children, and elderly, he saw “10,000 provocateurs” who might seize weapons on the battlefield

¹²⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 793, f. 537; Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1575, dosar 286, c.159-160.

¹²⁵ Arimiae, *Antonescu-Hitler: Vol. I*, 118.

¹²⁶ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 49; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 82.

¹²⁷ Ioanid, *Holocaust in Romania*, 119; Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 150-151.

to attack Axis columns.¹²⁸ General von Schobert complained and ordered *Einsatzgruppe D* to force back the Jews back across the Dniester. The SS pushed 3,000 back across the Dniester on 6 August, in places Romanian gendarmes opposed the effort, so the SS often just shot the Jews. Romanian generals were as unhappy with General Topor's orders. General Ciupercă argued that starving and unguarded Jews were a threat to his logistics and suggested they be kept west of the Dniester as labor.¹²⁹ Ciupercă also targeted non-Jews to secure supply lines from attacks. Since isolated groups of Red Army stragglers were roaming the countryside of eastern Romania not all attacks on the army were imagined. Fourth Army reported attacks on the highway from Chișinău to Tighina. Ciupercă demanded five "proven" communists be executed in 17 villages along the highway and Fourth Army claimed the reprisals had the desired effect of halting attacks.¹³⁰

As General Topor's gendarmes and the SS in northern Bessarabia competed to push Jews across the Dniester in opposing directions, Romanian and SS troops cooperated in "cleansing the terrain" of the few Jews left in southern Bessarabia. The Red Army held off the Romanians long enough for many Jews to escape across the Dniester. A forward scout unit entered Cetatea Albă on the morning of 27 July to adulation, but when the *Grăniceri* Division arrived its troops began looting mounds of goods abandoned by the Soviets, broke into a wine factory, and fired off shots all night as they looked for Jews and communists. Locals told *grăniceri* that "communists" were hiding in basements waiting to attack and had mined buildings. It's certain scores of Jews still in the city were killed over the next few days.¹³¹ After these disorders ended, the Praetoral Service gathered surviving Jewish men into a synagogue and Jewish men gathered from the countryside

¹²⁸ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 421, f. 14.

¹²⁹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 134.

¹³⁰ Ibid., dosar 793, f. 258, 338, 432.

¹³¹ An investigation into these abuses was halted in October, see, Ibid., dosar 645, f. 148, 152, 155-159.

were imprisoned in another synagogue, with about 500 in each, between 30 July and 2 August.¹³²

The same thing occurred in cities across southern Bessarabia. On the Danube in Ismail, Jewish men were put in a “camp” (a synagogue) while their families were kept in an improvised ghetto. Fourth Army Praetoral Service was applying the same policy being used in cities in Moldavia, separating Jewish men and placing them under guard in a few central locations.

In southern Bessarabia, however, under pressure to secure the rear and encouraged by the SS teams still roaming the region, army praetors and gendarmes massacred Jewish men, and in a few places women and children. The opposite bank was still in Soviet hands, so General Topor’s policy of just pushing the Jews across the Dniester was not viable. In Cetatea Albă, the garrison commander, the police chief, and an SSI agent conferred with an SS team and decided to shoot all the Jewish men held in the two synagogues beginning 3 August. Before dawn a truck brought the Jews to a quarry near the river bank to be executed by gendarmes under Captain Alexandru Ochișor. Initially reticent, he reminded his superior they had orders to send all “communists” to Chișinău for military trial. They decided to call on Colonel Marcela Petala, Third Army’s Chief Praetor who was touring the area with a German colonel, to verify they had authority to shoot the Jews. Petala was upset to be woken up early in the morning and yelled “that in Chișinău all Jews are imprisoned in a ghetto and in every night they pull out hundreds of Jews f.[or] executions,” implying they could do whatever they wished. The killings went ahead under the eye of Ochișor, finishing four days later, but Jews caught later were shot too.¹³³ On 15 August, at the Tătărăști camp in Chilia County, located between Cetatea Albă and Ismail counties, where around 1,200

¹³² RG-25.004M, Reel 25, dosar 20725, vol. 11, c. 1172-1173

¹³³ RG-25.004M, Reel 26, dosar 20725, vol. 11, c. 89-90; Reel 95, dosar 20670, vol. 1 & 2, c. 23-24.

Jews were being used as labor, guards shot hundreds because they had become “aggressive.”¹³⁴

The SS were later blamed for ordering the massacre, but the Jewish inmates may have revolted due to overcrowding and starvation. In Ismail, sometime in August, “German police” took 105 Jewish men held in the synagogue and shot them. The surviving men, and women and children in the ghetto, were used for labor until they were deported to Transnistria.¹³⁵

Romanian leadership was divided on what to do with surviving Jews in eastern Romania. Senior officers believed they should remain in place and be used for forced labor, while civilian leaders favored removal by deportation, but the SS offered a third option, extermination. Across the Eastern Front in the rear of the German Army, *Einsatzgruppen A, B, C, and D* began taking the initiative as they expanded their original orders to include not just communists, military age men, or hostages as reprisals, but all Soviet Jews. This process of radicalization took weeks, but by mid-July Berlin began issuing orders to the SS that all Soviet Jews should be murdered.¹³⁶ In northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, however, the Romanian Army was in control. The SS had to cooperate with the Romanian authorities who continued to primarily target Jewish men and who, at times, resented German meddling. For this reason, many Jews in eastern Romania, particularly women and children, survived the initial bloodbath long enough to be deported to Transnistria. During July-August, the Romanian soldiers and gendarmes, aided by civilians or SS troops to varying degrees, murdered an estimated 43,500 Jews in northern Bukovina and Bessarabia.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs’ gendarmes took over the occupation in eastern Romania in August, allowing General Headquarters to focus on coordinating operations in Soviet Ukraine.

¹³⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, 844, f. 776; officially 118, but post-war claims of 500, see, *Ibid.*, Reel 17, f. 339.

¹³⁵ From a September 1941 report on the history of the Ismail camp/ghetto, see, *Ibid.*, Reel 121, f. 393-397.

¹³⁶ Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, 253-267.

Fourth Army advanced on Odessa as quickly as possible. 1st Armored Division supported the advance, taking the longer eastern route while slower infantry divisions marched directly south. Fourth Army reached Odessa's outer defenses on 10 August.¹³⁷ Concurrently, Third Army was preparing to cross the Bug near Voznesensk to follow German Eleventh Army. At first General von Schobert believed Third Army was staying west of the Bug to carry out security operations and told General Dumitrescu as much. The news leaked to soldiers, whose expectations of being demobilized increased after a few worn out units were sent home, so when they were ordered to cross the Bug instead they did so less enthusiastically than when they had crossed the Prut or the Dniester. After being informed, General Headquarters reminded Third Army on 21 August that so long as the Red Army fought the USSR was a threat to Romania, "Every drop of blood shed across the Dniester is thus an absolutely necessary sacrifice, a sacrifice made only for our cause and not for any other."¹³⁸ Third Army began crossing the Bug on 9 August and encountered resistance, not from Soviets, but from the Hungarian Rapid Corps with German Twelfth Army. As mountain troops began crossing into their rear the Hungarians grew alarmed, demanded they stop, and even threatened to attack when they did not, so the Romanians halted for a day while German liaisons worked out the conflict.¹³⁹ This incident has been blown out of proportion, but from then on the Germans were careful to keep Romanian and Hungarian forces separate. Third Army soldiers then began trudging east, guarding German Eleventh Army's left flank as it turned south to clear the eastern bank of the Bug to Nikolaev and then east to the Dnieper.

¹³⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 49; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 84.

¹³⁸ Dumitrescu passed along this order to his troops, see, RG-25.003M, Reel 18, dosar 413, c. 182-184, 187-188.

¹³⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 453, f. 5.

Fourth Army, on the other hand, was advancing into the teeth of heavy defenses as Soviet resistance outside Odessa stiffened on 10-14 August. The attack on Odessa was thrown together last minute because German planning for Operation Barbarossa had been so overoptimistic and rushed that the port was forgotten until mid-July when German Eleventh Army was desperately needed further east.¹⁴⁰ Odessa represented a major threat to its rear, so German High Command turned to the willing Romanian Army. General Ciupercă's advance lacked finesse, but as Odessa sat on the Black Sea protected from envelopment there was no other option than a frontal assault hoping the city's defenses would collapse. Unfortunately for Ciupercă, Stalin had decided that major cities be held at all costs. Odessa proved an impossible nut for Fourth Army to crack. It was the seventh-largest city in the USSR with factories quickly converted to war production that made 1,500 mortars (enough to export to Crimea), tens of thousands of grenades and incendiary bottles, and turned tractors into armored "Odessa tanks." The city had time to prepare defenses. Citizens were mobilized to dig trenches, pour concrete, and build barricades. Initially, the Soviet Independent Coastal Army only had 34,000 soldiers and 247 field guns but could call on coastal artillery and naval guns of ships in the port, including the aging cruiser *Komintern*. Crimea acted as an unsinkable aircraft carrier to provide air cover. Since Axis naval forces consisted of just a few Romanian or Bulgarian destroyers and support ships, the Soviet Black Sea Fleet dominated the waters and allowed Stavka (Soviet High Command) to quickly reinforce Odessa whenever Fourth Army threatened a breakthrough, eventually boosting Soviet forces to 86,000.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 51-54, 81, 114; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 112.

¹⁴¹ DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 118; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 50; N. Krylov, *Glory Eternal: Defence of Odessa, 1941*, trans. David A Myshne (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 43-44, 52, 63.

A thin Red Army line held back waves of attacking Romanian infantry with a wall of firepower for two months. At first glance, Fourth Army seemed to have significant advantages. It had over 200,000 soldiers (eventually more than 340,000 took part in the battle), supported by 1st Armored Division, and had three times as many field guns as the Soviets. Appearances can be deceiving, however, and lack of training and professionalism in all arms impeded efficiency. Poorly trained and inexperienced artillerymen pounded away ineffectively, proving unable to time artillery bombardments to aid infantry attacks and definitely could not coordinate a creeping barrage that was a standard since the First World War. Outdated guns from the First World War made the situation worse. Most batteries were equipped with light 75 mm field pieces that had minimal effect against prepared defenses, by the end of the battle 1.3 million 75 mm shells had been fired compared to just 200,000 heavier 105 or 150 mm.¹⁴² *Luftflotte 4* had moved on with German Eleventh Army, so only the inferior – in both numbers and quality – GAL remained for air support. Poorly trained infantry contributed to the failure to take Odessa. A captured Soviet captain reported Romanian infantry attacked in dense formations (resulting in heavy casualties), had poor fire discipline (making it easy to spot their positions), were timid in pursuit (due to lack of motorization), and attacked “by template” (making it easy to predict their moves).¹⁴³ Fourth Army’s logistical system relied mostly on horse or ox carts and created shortages in ammunition, supplies, and rations. Sudden downpours that flooded newly built bridges on the Dniester added to difficulties. Its inability to modernize and neglect of training not cost the army dearly.

¹⁴² Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 30; for shell expenditure, see, Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 100; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 772, 261-262; moreover, 10-15% of them reportedly did not explode, see, dosar 845, f. 362.

¹⁴³ 20 July 1941 interrogation of Soviet Captain Niculae Filipovici, see, *Ibid.*, dosar 843, f. 412-414.

Fourth Army tried to take Odessa off the march on 18 August, but was halted after week, although it managed to bring the port under sporadic bombardment. Following a pause to bring up units, a second assault began 28 August that made progress, took 7,000 POWs, and came near to breaking through, but then 10,000 Soviet troops arrived by sea. After heavy losses, the attack stalled by 5 September.¹⁴⁴ General Headquarters looked for scapegoats, blaming cowards and “Jewish-Communists.” Fourth Army Section II claimed “a battalion of Jews, called the death battalion” was policing the Soviet rear, “Jewish” political commissars executed Soviet deserters in front of arriving troops to motivate by fear, and all Jewish men over 15 had been mobilized. It also warned officers to expect street battles with diehard Jews when Odessa fell.¹⁴⁵ Officers and soldiers were convinced that “Jewish-Communists” were responsible for the continued resistance of Odessa and anger built against them. Romanians dealt with suspect locals brutally, especially after a costly attack; such as when after taking Bilyaivka, a village southwest of Odessa, soldiers shot 50 civilians for allegedly bearing arms on 2 September.¹⁴⁶ On 20 August, General Ioanițiu, reported that Antonescu believed recent attacks showed lack of *élan*, so he threatened that troops judged to be cowards would have financial aid to their families cut off, land grants promised to soldiers for winning medals revoked, and that units in the rear would fire on those who retreated without cause. Ioanițiu announced six days later that Antonescu thought that many wounds were self-inflicted and ordered confirmed cases be punished by execution. Only a few likely cases of self-mutilation were uncovered, and most were not shot. III Corps shot two soldiers in front of their units and XI Corps sentenced 23 suspected cowards to twelve years hard labor.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Axworthy, Third Axis, Fourth Ally, 51-52; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 118.

¹⁴⁵ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 721, f. 171.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., dosar 793, f. 971.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., dosar 772, f. 403; dosar 672, f. 1; dosar 658, f. 146; dosar 629, f. 247; dosar 784, f. 23.

General Ciupercă, shocked by 31,552 casualties in such a short time, wanted to wait for German reinforcements before a decisive attack in the Dalnik sector. Dalnik was a long, thin town laying across the most direct path to Odessa that had been heavily fortified by the Soviets and all attacks against it were cut down. A Soviet officer compared the Romanian attacks to the popular 1934 film *Chapaev* that had White forces being mowed down by Red Guards.¹⁴⁸ German High Command sent four engineer, two infantry, and a heavy artillery battalion, all it could spare, to help Fourth Army. General Headquarters favored attacks in all sectors, however, and believed Fourth Army could break through before the Germans arrived. Ciupercă was sacked for lack of offensive spirit, but publically because he was exhausted. He was replaced with General Iacobici on 9 September. Antonescu took over Iacobici' position as Minister of Defense, spending more time in Bucharest. In Ciupercă's final message to Fourth Army, he told the troops that they were again masters of Bessarabia. He warned, however, that it could not be "true masters" until the USSR was defeated. "At the gates of Odessa, we are now only a step away from this goal...[so make]...one last effort."¹⁴⁹

During Fourth Army's second assault, German and Romanian military leaders hammered out an agreement to end the tensions triggered by the expulsion of Jews across the Dniester. On 30 August, the Tătăranu-Hauffe decision, better known as the Tighina Agreement, was signed. It granted the Romanians authority to administer and exploit the territory between the Dniester and Bug (soon christened Transnistria), required them to provide troops for security operations in the German rear all the way to the Dnieper, and clarified that Jews should not be pushed across the

¹⁴⁸ Some argued the Romanians made "psychological attacks" like in the film, see, Krylov, *Glory Eternal*, 119.

¹⁴⁹ Victor Nitu, "Lieutenant General Niculae Ciupercă," WorldWar2.ro, accessed 4 May 2018, <https://www.worldwar2.ro/generalii/?language=en&article=93>; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 766, f. 728.

Bug and instead would be kept in work camps in Transnistria until they could be deported further east once the USSR was defeated.¹⁵⁰ General Topor immediately ordered his army gendarmes to prepare to deport Jews from Bessarabia on 7 September, beginning with the largest internment camp at Vertiujeni, which also held Soviet POWs, where about 23,000 starving Jewish refugees had been gathered on the Dniester near Soroca. The Jews were to be deported across the river in groups of a thousand at a time – anyone who resisted would be shot.¹⁵¹ The Jews held in ghettos in northern Bukovina and Bessarabia would also be deported, but only once Odessa fell.

During the first assault against Odessa, Third Army was exhausting itself in 15 km a day marches, as it crossed the parched steppe that quickly turned to sucking mud when it rained. It reached the Dnieper on 26 August. During 1-16 September, General Dumitrescu defended the west bank of the river from Soviet attacks trying to cross over and flank German Eleventh Army. General von Schobert carried out a combat crossing of the Dnieper on 30 August and constructed a bridge at Beryslav with the help of Romanian pioneers who provided 30 percent of the bridging equipment. Third Army remained another week on the river as it prepared to follow.¹⁵² General Avramescu issued an order on 16 September read to the Mountain Corps in which he reminded troops of centuries of Russian oppression of Romania, celebrated the chance for revenge with the help of the Germans, and repeated that only after the Red Army was defeated would Romania's borders be restored, “Today, as we expand the field of battle against the Bolsheviks across the Dnieper, we win the right to enlarge the truncated borders of Transylvania [Ardeal].”¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 481, f. 120-126.

¹⁵¹ Ioanid, *Holocaust in Romania*, 143, 131.

¹⁵² Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 65; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 114-117.

¹⁵³ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 118, f. 253.

On 11 September, General Iacobici's hurriedly prepared third assault on Odessa began, before German reinforcements arrived, and nearly broke through within four days. The Soviets pulled back their left flank to prevent collapse, exposing the city, and Iacobici tried to rush troops into position for a final attack planned for 17 September against Dalnik spearheaded by some of General L'Honere de Coubière's newly arrived German units. Soviet aircraft heavily bombarded troop concentrations as units made little effort to camouflage movements and more Soviet troops from the Caucasus landed just in time to knock back the assault.¹⁵⁴ Horses now sought cover at the sound of aircraft without any direction from their riders. Despite their best efforts Romanian pilots of GAL were unable to dominate the air and lacked dive bombers like German Stukas to aid infantry attacks. General Virgil M. Protopopescu, commanding an infantry brigade, noted in his diary that while his soldiers came under air attack whenever they moved, across the trenches he could see Soviet tanks, trucks, and soldiers moving with impunity.¹⁵⁵ Sergeant Lungu wrote of the carnage left behind, "The field was dotted about with dead, Romanian and Russian. Some had died with weapons in their hands, others with a telephone at their throat, others on houses, swollen like barrels and eaten by flies in the heat of summer."¹⁵⁶ The third assault culminated on 21 September. The next morning a Soviet counterattack, along with an amphibious landing and a team of 23 naval parachutists dropped by air in V Corps' rear, panicked Romanian troops who retreated 9 km, lost 1,300 men, and abandoned artillery positions overlooking the port.¹⁵⁷ The fate of Odessa would not be decided at Dalnik, but at the Perekop Isthmus in Crimea.

¹⁵⁴ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 53; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis*, 119; Armata 4-a, dosar 772, 251.

¹⁵⁵ Romanians constantly complained about a very active Soviet air force, see, Fond Manuscrite, MSS 656, f. 22, 24.

¹⁵⁶ Lungu, *Dela Stalingrad la Gherla*, 13.

¹⁵⁷ Krylov, *Glory Eternal*, 237, 241-249; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 94-96.

As it continued on to Rostov, Army Group South ordered German Eleventh Army to take Crimea. General von Schobert, however, was killed on 12 September when his plane accidentally landed on a Soviet minefield at Nikolaev, so General Erich von Manstein took his place. Five days later bad luck struck again as General Ioanițiu, coming to inspect the front with Antonescu, was also killed accidentally when he stepped into the propeller of their aircraft on an airfield near Odessa. His death threw the General Headquarters into disarray. General Iacobici took over as Chief of the General Staff on 22 September while continuing to direct Fourth Army's attacks at Odessa. Ioanițiu's loss was keenly felt. General Pantazi later wrote that not only was Ioanițiu intelligent, hardworking, and calm, but he got along well with Antonescu, not the easiest thing to do, and acted as a mediator, "He was the best complement possible for the volcanic temperament of the Marshal."¹⁵⁸ King Mihai I had raised Antonescu to the rank of marshal on 22 August.

General von Manstein ordered General Dumitrescu to take over parts of the German line on the Nogai steppe north of the Azov Sea to free up troops to break through the heavy Soviet defenses at Perekop. He placed the Mountain Corps on the left, with its flank on the Dnieper, German troops in the middle, and the Cavalry Corps on the right, with its flank on the sea; von Manstein hoped these natural obstacles would prevent the Romanians from being outflanked. He began his offensive to batter through Perekop by frontal assaults on 24 September, but two days later the Soviet Southern Front attacked the German-Romanian line stretching across the Nogai steppe to threaten the Axis rear. The Mountain Corps, with light mountain artillery, few trucks, and no armor, faired more poorly than the Cavalry Corps; additionally, mountain infantry felt exposed on the steppe, lacking the mountains they trained to fight in, and were forced to keep

¹⁵⁸ Pantazi, *Cu Marâșal până la moarte*, 134-135, 140.

reserves far to the rear due to Soviet artillery.¹⁵⁹ Pounded by artillery, aircraft, and tanks, the whole German-Romanian line began to bend, but a retreat by 4th Mountain Brigade opened up a seven-kilometer gap forcing von Manstein to turn his forces at Perekop around to meet the threat. They were joined by panzers from the newly arrived Panzer Group Kleist that broke through on 1 October and encircled parts of two Soviet armies with the assistance of Romanian motorized *Roșiori* regiments. General Racoviță had kept them in reserve while his horsed regiments had borne the brunt of the initial Soviet attacks on Cavalry Corps. By 7 October, 65,000 Red Army troops had been captured.¹⁶⁰ This fresh disaster convinced Stavka to order the forces at Odessa to begin evacuating to Sevastopol on 1 October to participate in the defense of Crimea.

Since 22 September Fourth Army had settled into trench warfare after the failure, even with German support, of the last assault. It was now clear to all, from Antonescu on down, that Fourth Army could not take the city, and an artillery colonel reported he heard soldiers, and even officers, saying, “Why don’t the Germans come? Why not bring one or two PANZER [sic] Divisions? Why don’t the Stukas come? Until the Sea is closed …nothing can be done.”¹⁶¹ The soldiers remained ready to fight, despite the grumblings, but were no longer willing to be thrown into doomed frontal assaults without proper support. Romanian soldiers dug deep to shelter from the torrents of fire poured on them by the Soviets. They dug “Tartar holes” just wide enough for a man and deep enough to stand in, effective against tanks and mortar blasts. What had not been stripped by the Soviets in the surrounding countryside before they arrived had now largely been consumed, so food was in short supply. Soldiers drank from whatever water source they could

¹⁵⁹ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 481, f. 2-5.

¹⁶⁰ Robert M. Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht: The German Campaigns of 1942* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), 57-58; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 65-67.

¹⁶¹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 772, f. 451; dosar 773, f. 189.

find, causing diarrhea and afflicting horses – both blamed on poisoning by Soviet agents. In the “dirty rat life” in the trenches, General Protopopescu noted, the only beauty was anti-aircraft fire over the city at night.¹⁶² Any movement brought down fire on the exhausted soldiers.

Soviet Independent Coastal Army began a quiet, steady withdrawal after 2 October, but reacted violently to even minor Romanian attacks. Romanian pilots and Soviet POWs provided Fourth Army news of the evacuation, but General Iacobici had to be content with occupying the positions vacated by Red Army forces because whenever he probed for weak points the Soviets brought down concentrated artillery fire on the Romanians.¹⁶³ Chaplains ministered to wounded soldiers and Soviet peasants in the rear. On 14 September, with patronage from the 15th Infantry Division, the village church in Bujalik outside Odessa was reopened, 42 children baptized, and a speech was given in Ukrainian and Romanian to hundreds of villagers and soldiers. Chaplain V. Apostol, in the trenches with the 9th *Dorobanți* Regiment, reported that morale was good because “the Christian soldier possess a true fighting spirit for our holy defense.”¹⁶⁴ A few cracked under constant bombardment. Major Gheorghe Răscănescu recalled a lieutenant had to be held back by two soldiers from attacking in nothing but a shirt and underwear. Răscănescu slapped him hard, told him not to dishonor reserve officers, and sent him back from the frontline for a few days.¹⁶⁵ A final assault was planned for 23 October, but the last Soviet ships loaded with troops slipped away during the night of 15/16 October.

¹⁶² Răscănescu, *Erou la cotul Donului*, 99; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1369, f. 235; Fond Manuscrite, MSS 656, f. 30-31.

¹⁶³ The Romanians were very aware of the evacuation, see, Fond Secția II-Informații, dosar 992, f. 45-46.

¹⁶⁴ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1575, dosar 266, c. 185-187, 303.

¹⁶⁵ Răscănescu, *Erou la cotul Donului*, 98.

Odessa Massacre

Romanian units entered Odessa the next morning. As they navigated barricaded streets, soldiers expected a final street battle against fanatical “Jewish-Communists” and rounded up all deemed suspicious, especially military aged men, but it soon became clear the fighting was over. Order broke down as troops, relieved to be alive, celebrated, drank, looted, searched for threats, and took revenge against Jews they believed had kept the Red Army fighting. Fourth Army had suffered 90,020 casualties – 63,280 wounded, 17,891 killed, and 8,849 missing – in two months. On 17 October, General Iacobici told General Ionel Glogojanu, the commander of 10th Infantry Division had been tasked to organize the Odessa Military Command, that Odessa was “teeming” with Soviet soldiers and Jews in civilian clothes. He ordered “radical searches” to find them.¹⁶⁶ Non-Jewish citizens later smirked when they recalled these “sugar patrols,” as they nicknamed soldiers who successively broke into homes looking for weapons and demanded food (especially sugar), but for Jews these patrols were deadly serious. Hundreds of Jews and scores of non-Jews were murdered. Over 7,000 non-Jews were arrested as partisans. On 21 October 15 “communist terrorists” under a Jewish “ringleader” were shot.¹⁶⁷ Fires were blamed on Jewish arsonists and the German Military Mission warned Iacobici that a few weeks previously the NKVD had mined buildings in Kiev that greatly damaged the city and killed German soldiers, so teams of German and Romanian pioneers inspected buildings. Glogojanu was ordered to secure Odessa and bring order, but since his headquarters on the outskirts of the city he had difficulty doing so.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 860, f. 412.

¹⁶⁷ Dallin, *Odessa*, 70-72; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 860, f. 540.

¹⁶⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 870, f. 541-542

After Odessa fell, the deportation of Jews from eastern Romania to Transnistria began in earnest. On 11 and 22 October the civilian Government of Transnistria told Fourth Army that it would create ghettos and camps for 150,000-200,000 Soviet Jews caught in Transnistria. They would be joined by 125,000-145,000 Romanian Jews deported from Bukovina and Bessarabia in deadly marches organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.¹⁶⁹ General Glogojanu moved his 10th Infantry/Odessa Military Command headquarters into downtown Odessa on 22 October, so he could better enforce order, sort Jews and communists, and set up a ghetto. The former NKVD headquarters was chosen for this command. The building had been verified by both German and Romanian pioneers, nevertheless, locals repeated warned that it had been mined. The building was evacuated and re-checked several times after bomb threats but continued to be used.

At 5:35 pm on 22 October, the headquarters exploded killing Glogojanu and 91 others, including a few German officers, and wounding 43.¹⁷⁰ General Constantin Trestioreanu, second in command of 10th Infantry Division, and initially presumed dead somewhere under the rubble, appeared an hour later. He ordered reprisals against Jews and communists. Soon hundreds were swinging from street poles as a warning to partisans, and many more were simply shot that night. General Iacobici sent General Nicolae Macici, commander of II Corps now assigned to guard the coast from any landing, to assess the situation. He arrived the next morning at the explosion site. Macici screamed that reprisals had been insufficient, “you are a bunch of cowards and scaredy-cats, by now Odessa should’ve been turned inside-out!”¹⁷¹ The number of Jews still in Odessa is hard to determine, but probably 80,000-90,000.¹⁷² Antonescu personally added fuel to the fire by

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., dosar 781, f. 175; dosar 860, f. 576; Ioanid, *Holocaust in Romania*, 177, 173-174.

¹⁷⁰ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 110.

¹⁷¹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 870, f. 611; RG-25.004M, Reel 14, dosar 2986, vol. 4094, c. 577-581.

¹⁷² In 1939, there were 200,000, see, Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust*, 210.

ordering that for each officer or soldier killed, respectively, 200 or 100 “communists” should be hanged, and hostages taken. His order was exceeded. Iacobici reported “severe reprisals” were taken on 23 October murdering approximately 5,000 Jews with 20,000 more held in the city jail. The next day 5,000 were marched to Dalnik, crammed into four warehouses (two with men and two with women and children), and lit on fire. Soldiers shot or threw grenades at those who tried to escape. On 25 October, the charred ruins were symbolically blown up, and reprisals continued for days. An estimated 25,000 Jews were murdered and 16,258 remained in jail as hostages.¹⁷³

General Headquarters expected German victory any moment and believed that the fall of Odessa signaled the end of major operations east of the Dniester. It ordered Fourth Army on 15 October to send as many divisions as possible back to Romania, beginning with those mobilized longest.¹⁷⁴ This rewarded those who fought longest to avoid demoralization and returned troops home to help bring in the bumper harvest sown earlier, but over 100,000 stayed. The Romanian Army remained committed to the war. When General von Manstein asked Antonescu for more soldiers for Crimea he immediately agreed, but General Headquarters believed that Third Army would be used mostly in mop-up operations and naively asked on 21 October, “We ask if you could please communicate to us how long it will be necessary for III [sic] Army units to remain East of the Dnieper, both to secure the Azov Sea littoral and eventually in Crimea.” The troops in Transnistria were placed under Third Army administration on 24 October.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 870, f. 645-647; RG-25.004M, Reel 31, dosar 40010, vol. 1, c. 51; Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 171-172; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 178-182

¹⁷⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 866, f. 348.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., dosar 866, f. 487; dosar 870, f. 71.

Conclusion

The myth of Jewish betrayal in 1940 permeated every level of the Romanian Army and in 1941 manifested in executions of “Jewish-Communist” franc-tireurs, pogroms, and massacres. Anti-Semitic violence took many forms: panicky soldiers, ruthless officers, interrogations by the Praetoral Service, ad-hoc “execution squads,” SSI agents with lists, SS actions, civilian pogroms, and Legionaries in the ranks. Not all were heartless killers: alcohol dulled guilt, some bourgeois reserve officers avoided direct involvement, and soldiers balked at shooting women and children – at least initially. Officers grew concerned about discipline and a few skeptical of Jewish guilt. Few protested, like Major Gherman Pântea, a *basarabean* reserve officer made mayor of Odessa. In late October 1941, he sent a letter to Antonescu by Alexandrina Cantacuzino, boyar patron of the Red Cross then in the city, that blamed army incompetence and the NKVD for the explosion that killed General Golgojanu and appealed to his sense of law and order to end crimes against innocent Jews. Antonescu ignored it and the General Staff issued more warnings of Jewish fifth columnists aiding Soviet parachutists, spies, and agents. Pântea never resigned in protest.¹⁷⁶

The Romanian Army did not begin 1941 with plans for an offensive war, nor genocide, but as this chapter shows it quickly embraced both Operation Barbarossa and the Holocaust. The events of 1940 had created a powerful national consensus built on underlying intrinsic factors of nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism that motivated Romanian soldiers in combat and committing atrocities. West of the Prut, General Headquarters discourage popular anti-Semitic violence. East of the Prut, anti-Semitic violence initiated by soldiers was quickly

¹⁷⁶ RG-25.004M, Reel 30, dosar 21401, vol. 3, c. 549-551; his other efforts failed too, see, Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 182, 211.

endorsed by senior officers who believed that military necessity required brutal policies to secure the rear of the army. In Bucharest, Mihai Antonescu and other ministers, with input and backing from the *Conducător* on the front, decided to use the situation to “cleanse the terrain” of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia. Soldiers and gendarmes cooperated well with SS units. The Tighina Agreement ended the brief period of tension between the SS and army gendarmes. On the front and in the rear, Romanian soldiers were implicated in Hitler’s war of annihilation.

CHAPTER VII

1941-1942: WINTER OF GENOCIDE, SPRING RECOVERY, SUMMER OFFENSIVE, AND FALL OF STALEMATE

Golta County gendarmes were taking a break to celebrate the traditional three days of Christmas. They were envious of Fourth Army soldiers already home, while they were stuck in godforsaken Transnistria, but counted themselves lucky they were not with Third Army forces on the front. On 28 December, they went back into the cold, joining local Ukrainians and ethnic Germans, to continue shooting thousands of Jewish men, women, and children. Only seventy Romanian gendarmes and Ukrainian police, plus sixty more ethnic German militiamen, under the command of Romanian and SS officers, shot nearly all of the estimated 52,000 Romanian and Soviet Jews in the Bogdanovka camp between 21 December 1941 and 15 January 1942.¹ This massacre was the start of an incredibly murderous two months near Golta, the right bank part of the city of Pervomaisk (the rest of the city on the left bank was occupied by the Germans), and east of Odessa on the Bug during a period of military crisis on the front in the USSR.

Romanian atrocities were not limited to Transnistria or only to times of crisis, however, and Jews not the only target. Soviet civilians, partisans, and POWs faced similar treatment. This chapter examines hard fought Axis victories between October 1941 and October 1942 in which Romanian troops played an important supporting role, and drew Third Army ever deeper into the USSR, to show that despite terrible conditions, heavy losses, and fleeting periods of poor morale, Romanian soldiers remained highly motivated in combat against the Red Army. Furthermore, in

¹ Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of Ukraine*, 126-129.

operations east of the Bug, Romanian troops also murdered many thousands of Soviet Jews, both on their own initiative and under German direction, demonstrating that they were still motivated to commit anti-Semitic atrocities. Officers and soldiers hoped to destroy “Judeo-Bolshevism.”

The participation of Romanian soldiers in battles with the Red Army or in the Holocaust east of the Bug is largely overlooked by historians. The important contribution of the Romanian Army is dwarfed by the size and scale of the major belligerents of the Eastern Front and when it is remembered more often than not it is to blame the Romanians for German defeats or mistakes. In his account of the battle for Crimea General von Manstein used the Romanians as convenient scapegoats for German failures. Since the publishing of von Manstein’s memoir *Lost Victories*, military historians have followed his lead in granting begrudging respect for Romanian infantry but castigating Romanian officers and accusing Romanian soldiers of lacking motivation to fight east of the Dniester.² Romanian military historians are quick to take umbrage at accusations that officers were incompetent or soldiers cowardly, but they gladly accept the fallacy that Romanian soldiers were reluctant victims in war. Unsurprisingly, they almost completely ignore atrocities.³ Historians who specialize in the Holocaust in Romania neglect atrocities east of the Bug because they focus on eastern Romania and Transnistria to prove intentionalist arguments that condemn Antonescu. Of course, this prioritization is legitimate because most of the Jews murdered on the direct order, or through implicit approval, of the Antonescu regime were in these provinces. The

² A few have begun to give Romanians their due, see, Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 68-69; Robert Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow: The Crimea, 1941-1944* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 83-84, 214-215.

³ Axworthy dedicates a single sentence to the atrocities committed in Crimea, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 142; the irrefutable evidence of crimes against Soviet Jews, civilians, and POWs have prompted more recent military historians in Romania to emphasize the harsh sounding orders of Dumitrescu to enforce discipline (ignoring they were largely unenforced), self-interested token humanitarian aid given to Crimean Tatars or minorities in the Caucasus, and claim civilian resistance “obligated” harsh reprisals, see, Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 185-187.

continuation of crimes east of the Bug, proves that Romanian soldiers' motivation was more than just revenge against Jews for alleged betrayal in 1940 and should be included in any narrative of the Holocaust in Romania. Evidence for crimes east of the Bug is much sparser than for crimes west of the Bug. Post-war efforts by Soviet and Romanian investigators to punish soldiers for crimes committed in Ukraine, southern Russia, and the Caucasus were limited because collecting evidence was difficult, witnesses hard to find, and often the term "fascists" subsumed Romanian crimes with German ones. Recently uncovered Romanian Army documents and new research by historians specializing in the Holocaust in the USSR now allow a fuller picture of these crimes.

The survival of the Red Army, followed by a Soviet winter counteroffensive, threw both German High Command and General Headquarters into crisis. Romanian troops probably faced the worst conditions on the front of the war because they lacked winter gear, Axis logistics were overstretched, and units were almost totally isolated from home. These soldiers proved resilient because of deep reserves of intrinsic motivation: nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. Third Army provided critical manpower to Army Group South, thus allowing it to contain Soviet winter counterattacks and then deal the Red Army crushing defeats in Crimea and at Kharkov in the spring. Romanians divisions again advanced with the Germans in the summer, many Romanian soldiers believed that 1942 might result in a decisive victory, and wherever they went atrocities against Jews, civilians, and POWs followed. Yet Romanian soldiers' motivation could only make up for material shortages so much in an industrial war of attrition. The German Army increasingly relied on Romanian (as well as Hungarian and Italian) divisions to fill gaps in the line, which at best had the same combat value as in 1941. The Red Army was recovering and growing in strength, and thus the Axis courted disaster at Stalingrad.

Anti-Partisan Operations and Battle for Crimea: October to December 1941

After the fall of Odessa and subsequent rapid demobilization of most of Fourth Army, all troops east of the Dniester fell under General Dumitrescu who set up Third Army headquarters in Nikolaev (Mykolaiv) next to the headquarters of German Eleventh Army and *Einsatzgruppe D*. By November 1941, Dumitrescu's troops were divided into three areas: 104,000 in Transnistria, 106,000 occupying southern Ukraine to the Dnieper, and roughly 70,000 operating further east with the Mountain Corps in Crimea or the Cavalry Corps on the Azov Sea coast.⁴ General von Mansetin had total operational control of all Romanian combat divisions with German Eleventh Army, so Dumitrescu was relegated to coordinating the administration, supply, and discipline of Romanian formations spread across over 800 km of Soviet Ukraine from Tiraspol to Taganrog.

Third Army, following German orders, began to carry out a brutal anti-partisan campaign in German-occupied Ukraine. Anti-partisan warfare resulted from the German Army's inability to capture all the Soviet troops overtaken in its headlong rush into the USSR and Stavka orders for Red Army stragglers to form partisan groups to fight a guerilla war in the rear as early as July 1941. The partisan movement was initially small and disorganized. Katherine Merridale argues that its role was more about maintaining Soviet power in occupied areas and had limited military impact, but David Stahel demonstrates that the sheer number of wandering Soviet stragglers and organized partisan bands became a real threat to Axis logistics. By September 1941, the NKVD in Soviet Ukraine reported 21,530 partisans operating or prepared to operate in the German rear.⁵ Romanians quickly adopted German tactics of sweeps, hostage taking, and mass reprisals since

⁴ ANIC Fond P.C.M.: CM, dosar 2/1940, f. 5.

⁵ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 143-144; Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa*, 159-160, 199; Bellamy, *Absolute War*, 268.

they had already used them against “Jewish-Communist” franc-tireurs. The primary difference was partisans were an actual threat, not just an imaginary one, although many of the “partisans” were just Jews or unlucky civilians caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In October 1941, the Antonescu regime still believed German propaganda and anticipated imminent victory. The General Staff ordered lists of soldiers who had received medals be drawn up so they could be given land grants in eastern Romania, officers began compiling materials on the advance from the Prut to the Dnieper to write unit histories, and rumors swirled among Third Army troops on the front that once Crimea fell they too would be demobilized like Fourth Army. Antonescu was also optimistic. He organized a victory parade for the fall of Odessa in Bucharest on 8 November and held another plebiscite on 9-12 November. It resulted in another 99 percent vote in favor of his regime with 3,446,889 for and 68 against.⁶ All soldiers (except for regular officers and NCOs) were expected to vote, including those east of the Dniester, even in Crimea or on the Azov Sea coast. When soldiers voted yes they were then ordered to sign a “covenant” declaring, “I... covenant [*ma leg*] to support our Marshal by thought and deed to the fulfillment of his program to reorganize the State and Nation and I stand ready [in any] place and time for [whatever] duty that I will receive.”⁷ Antonescu, expecting the end of the war, made the soldiers to swear this oath specifically to him and his vision of a military welfare state in a new European order under Nazi Germany. If the war had ended in 1941, the *Conducător* would have enjoyed near universal support, but the USSR did not collapse and Antonescu did deliver on his domestic promises, so this semi-coerced “covenant” was conveniently forgotten after 23 August 1944.

⁶ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 94.

⁷ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 313, f. 71; the final tally for Third Army on 2 December 1941 was 79,833 voted “yes” and 7 voted “no,” see, f. 157.

As Antonescu tried to bind soldiers and civilians to his vision of a militarized Romania, General von Manstein was trying to take Crimea. After defeating the Red Army threat to his rear north of the Azov Sea, he ordered German infantry, backed by heavy artillery and air support, to begin battering their way forward at Perekop on 18 October. He kept the Ziegler Brigade, an ad-hoc motorized unit he scrounged up that included the Korne Detachment (6th Motorized *Roșiori* Regiment reinforced with a mechanized squadron and horse artillery) from the Cavalry Corps, in reserve. It was committed after the Soviet collapse at Perekop on 28 October to sweep down to Sevastopol. The Korne Detachment guarded the German flank and cut the roads on the western coast between Simferopol and Eupatoria.⁸ Then von Manstein ordered the 1st Mountain and 8th Cavalry brigades to cross the Sivash Sea on 29 October. 1st Mountain Brigade marched south passing through Karasubazar (Bilohirsk) to the Yaila Mountains along the southern coast of Crimea to clear them of Red Army stragglers and partisans to secure the key roads through the mountains between Simferopol and coastal cities like Yalta, Alushta, Sudak, and Feodoisa, while the 8th Cavalry Brigade turned east to clear the Kerch peninsula.

The Mountain Corps finally got to use its specialized training in the difficult terrain. By November, the Romanians noticed that the Germans kept assigning them to the most remote and benighted areas, and when operations required the Germans to use Romanian soldiers to capture cities they were diverted away at the last moment.⁹ General Avramescu believed von Manstein was trying to horde all the glory, which is possible, but it is just as likely that the Germans, who saw the Romanians as undisciplined soldiers at best and thieving Gypsies at worse, were trying

⁸ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmatch*, 59-61; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 129-130, 132.

⁹ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 108, f. 368.

to prevent them from looting Crimean cities. German Eleventh Army had constantly complained of Romanian soldiers' poor fire discipline, abuses, and looting in southern Ukraine. This was in part due to racist stereotypes, but primarily because the Germans wanted to requisition the goods the Romanians were looting – although to Soviet civilians there was little real difference between Romanian “looting” and German “requisitioning.” General Dumitrescu ordered more gendarme patrols by the Third Army Praetoral Service, enforced a curfew, and restricted his soldiers from entering warehouses, factories, or other buildings in Ukrainian cities, like Melitopol.¹⁰ German Eleventh Army’s attempt to take Sevastopol off the march ground to a halt on 8 November, just as 1st Mountain Brigade began a brutal sweep through the Yaila Mountains. It captured several thousand Soviet stragglers, suffering 800 casualties in the process, but when Romanian officers encountered Red Army soldiers who chose to resist they labeled them partisans and shot them in groups of 20, 50, and even 200.¹¹ Reports comment on the presence of a few female partisans who were viewed as fanatical communist beasts. Major Scârneci described one captured in a group of seven partisans as “a woman with a mop of coal black, curly, tangled hair. She seems completely wild, articulating a single word, *nicevo.*”¹² They were often shot along with the men. Civilians were also targeted in the anti-partisan sweep, not surreptitiously, but by mid-ranking officers following orders. General Lascăr ordered 1st Mountain Brigade on 10 November that for each soldier wounded in partisan attacks that 30 civilians would be killed in the nearest village. Avramescu warned villagers to turn over arms and partisans because if they did not they “will be

¹⁰ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 283, f. 93-95.

¹¹ On 16 December 1941, 4th Mountain Brigade shot over 200 captured “partisans,” including two political officers and a woman, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 118, f. 413.

¹² Russian for “I don’t know,” see, Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 194.

treated according to the laws of war.”¹³ The Mountain Corps swept across the mountains to the southern shore, then turned west, and marched to Sevastopol to take part in a second assault.

The failure to take Sevastopol in the first assault meant General von Manstein required more troops and asked Third Army to provide them, General Dumitrescu obliged, sending units from the Azov Sea. Sergeant Ionescu, serving with artillery battery in 4th Mountain Brigade on the coast, initially thought they were going home when his unit was ordered to begin marching to the west. The colonel commanding his regiment gathered all three battalions on 15 November – five days after they swore their “covenant” to Antonescu and two days after news of their true destination leaked – to read out an order from Third Army. He then began a speech, saying that the Romanian Army needed to destroy the Red Army because “if Germany is defeated we are also defeated,” and promised that in Crimea there “will be many decorations.” In that moment a chant, “Home, home, home, home,” swept across the gathering and drowned out the rest of his words. The colonel demanded those who had chanted step forward, but only seven or eight did, who were sent to court martial, while the rest continued to Crimea.¹⁴ This outburst resulted from a feeling of being lied to since officers had constantly told them that the next battle would be the last, such short-sighted rhetoric continued to be used during the siege of Sevastopol and advance on Stalingrad, and soldiers wanted to go home after doing what they considered their bit.¹⁵ The

¹³ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 131; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 118, f. 378.

¹⁴ Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 39.

¹⁵ It is likely that rather than being deceitful, Romanian officers actually believed their promises that the war would end soon, especially as the propaganda they read promised victory, which was reinforced by intelligence reports on the success of the German Army and the Romanians’ own dismay at the destroyed remains of the Red Army they saw and pace of the advance. General Avramescu issued orders as early as August 1941 asking for “Just one more week of fresh efforts,” and “A few [more] days of effort and victory will be ours,” see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 244, f. 16; dosar 467, f. 52; in October 1941 General Gheorghe Potopeanu, commanding the *Grăniceri* Division with Fourth Army, told his men, “Odessa awaits you and the possibility of returning victorious to your homes,” see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 629, f. 284-285; in July 1942 General Ștefla issued a General Staff order complaining that

fact that most of Fourth Army had been demobilized added to the soldiers' sense of being treated unfairly. There were other isolated cases, such as a labor unit at Tighina collectively demanding Christmas leave, that worried General Headquarters. In response, Antonescu issued a daily order specifically recognizing that the Mountain and Cavalry corps had been called on to keep fighting and reminded troops that "the precious fruit" of victory won by "difficult sacrifices" of comrades "could easily be lost."¹⁶ These arguments, and shocking news of the German defeat at Moscow later in December 1941, convinced soldiers that they were still needed on the front.

When Sergeant Ionescu arrived with 4th Mountain Brigade in Crimea, the peninsula was about to be wracked by the mass murder of Jews because the SS were intent on implementing the "Final Solution." The SS saw Romanian soldiers in Ukraine and Crimea as a liability to Nazi plans for an "orderly" extermination of all Soviet Jews. Since July 1941, *Einsatzgruppe D* had reported that Romanian soldiers were "very corrupt," "very incompetent," "take bribes from all sides," "plundered," and "[do] not regard this war as ideological."¹⁷ Romanian troops murdered Jews seemingly at random and ignored SS efforts to sort out "dangerous" Jews. Now the SS did not trust them to kill all Jews without exception – and especially not to turn over all looted goods to the SS. In German-occupied Ukraine Romanian troops felt free to beat, rob, arrest, and shoot Jews, much to the chagrin of the SS. General Karl Kitzinger commander of *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* held a conference on 11 November in Nikolaev with General Corneliu Dragalina, who was commanding VI Corps (1st, 2nd, and 18th Infantry divisions) helping to occupy the territory between the Bug and Dnieper, to improve cooperation. He emphasized that Romanian soldiers

"the combatants at Sevastopol have been promised that after the fall of the citadel they will be sent home," he then warned that the temporary morale boost was not worth the subsequent disillusion, see, dosar, 1246, f. 1.

¹⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 624, f. 95; dosar 369, f. 351.

¹⁷ Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 63, 73, 111, 166

did not have the right to interfere in the “Jewish Question” because it was “exclusively reserved to the ‘S.S.’ troops.” During an inspection a few weeks later Dragalina ordered a Romanian unit in Kirovograd to turn over a group of Jews, survivors of an earlier massacre in the city who were being held as hostages, to the SS. The SS assumed Jews bribed the Romanian soldiers to protect them.¹⁸ Therefore, Romanian soldiers largely played a supporting role in the “Final Solution” in German-occupied Ukraine and the *Gross Aktion* implemented by *Einsatzgruppe D* in Crimea.

Before 500-600 men from *Einsatzgruppe D* arrived, German and Romanian troops were too occupied in combat to kill many Jews and an estimated 30,000-40,000 Jews remained in the peninsula, including 14,000 concentrated in Simferopol.¹⁹ There had been the usual crimes when cities fell, and the Germans quickly set up ghettos. When Major Scârneci passed through Yalta in late-November, he visited Livadia Palace, but also saw Jews in the city marked with yellow stars.²⁰ A Romanian unit set up the only rural ghetto in Crimea in a village called Voikovstat near Kerch, apparently the 100 Jews were not used as labor and survived through the new year.²¹ In Crimea, the SS had the additional requirement of sorting out Karaites, ethnic Turks practicing a form of Judaism to be spared, from Krimchacks, Turkic-speaking Jews to be killed, because SS leaders in Berlin had recently decided their racial position on the two groups. Romanian soldiers did not differentiate between them because a Jew was a Jew regardless of alleged racial reasons; the Germans later tried to educate Romanians on difference in articles in *Ecul Crimeei* printed

¹⁸ Fond P.C.M.: CM, dosar 31/1941, f. 22-92; Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 159.

¹⁹ Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 202; 25,000-30,000 Jews were probably successfully evacuated from Crimea to the Caucasus, see, Kiril Feferman, *The Holocaust in The Crimea and The North Caucasus* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2016), 80, 120, 128.

²⁰ Scârneci, *Viață și moarte din linia întai*, 199.

²¹ The Jews had to wear yellow stars and lived in houses covered in barbed wire. All but 20 were liberated by the Soviets after 26 December 1942, see, Feferman, *The Holocaust in The Crimea and The North Caucasus*, 157-158.

in December 1942 to explain the continued presence of Karaite Jews in Crimea.²² The first wave of murders by the SS began on 23 November, peaked during 9-13 December as 11,000-17,000 Jews in Eupatoria, Kerch, Feodosia, Bakhchysarai, Simferopol (10,000 there alone) were shot by 20-man execution teams, and ended on 18 December.²³ The *Gross Aktion* was perpetrated nearly exclusively by the SS since Axis soldiers were occupied and few Romanians were in cities.

General von Manstein began a second assault against Sevastopol on 17 December. His men faced one of the most fortified ports in the world with three concentric lines of defense that had been thrown up in the previous months and manned by the Soviet Independent Coastal Army (recently arrived from Odessa) reinforced with Soviet soldiers from Crimea. He had two corps, German LIV and XXX, placed in the northern and southern sectors respectively, reinforced with Romanian units on each wing, with the sea protecting the flanks of the Korne Detachment in the north and the 1st Mountain Brigade in the south – just as he had north of the Azov Sea. Despite a determined Soviet defense, the Germans made remarkable progress in the center, while the 1st Mountain Brigade helped clear the southern coast, and on 20 December elements of German LIV Corps almost reached Severnaya Bay.²⁴ These attacks pushed Germans and Romanians to their limits. Major Scârneci noted soldiers in 3rd Mountain Battalion were utterly exhausted after repeated frontal attacks. He worried, “if I will not be killed by the Russians, I will surely go insane.”²⁵ The morale of Romanian soldiers was further depressed due to isolation from home because mail delivery had broken down, all leave had been canceled, Christmas packages sent by Antonescu arrived opened and partially pilfered, and few newspapers (army or civilian) arrived

²² Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 203-204; Pontinus, “Evrei in Crimea,” *Soldatul* 10 Decembrie 1942, 1.

²³ Feferman, *The Holocaust in Crimea and the North Caucasus*, 123, 133, 146.

²⁴ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 63-64; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 67.

²⁵ He blamed a callous Lascăr who yelled at him to advance, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 229-239.

in Crimea.²⁶ The Soviet Independent Coastal Army just managed to fend off a breakthrough by sheer tactical grit. Stavka's Soviet winter counteroffensive including an attack across the Kerch straits into his rear that forced von Manstein to call off any more plans.

Winter Crisis: December 1941 to April 1942

The defeat of the German Army in the Battle of Moscow and the Soviet counteroffensive launched on 5 December against Army Group Center not only threw Berlin into a crisis, but all the Axis capitals, including Bucharest. The Soviet counteroffensive affected not only operations on the front, but decisions far to the rear in Transnistria. On the front, the false hope that the war would be over by Christmas quickly disappeared and Third Army soldiers in Crimea were soon being pushed to their limits. In Bucharest, delusions that the Romanian and Soviet Jews held in camps and ghettos in Transnistria would soon be pushed across the Bug into German-occupied territory to be deported east of the Urals evaporated. The alarm bells in Bucharest really began to ring after the Soviets began amphibious assaults on the Crimean coast during Christmas 1941 that then triggered a new wave of deportations and murders of Jews in Transnistria.

Crisis on the Front and Genocide in the Rear

The Antonescu regime's attempt to use Transnistria as a dumping ground for Jews from eastern Romania before deporting them further east after German victory resulted in predictably nightmarish conditions by December 1941. Antonescu decided that surviving Jews in Bukovina Bessarabia would be deported to Transnistria in early October. Soon, the General Staff issued deceptively detailed orders to the gendarmes in eastern Romania on how the deportation should

²⁶ No mail meant pay also could not be sent home, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 947, f. 197; all soldiers got a Christmas package. Officers and NCOs got extra coffee, rum, cigarettes, and a bar of soap. Officers and NCOs in Transnistria only received (half the amount of) coffee and cigarettes, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 369, f. 412.

be implemented that specified the size of each column of Jews, number of carts per column, rations, itineraries, preparation of mass graves to prevent disease, and authorized gendarmes to shoot anyone who fell out of line.²⁷ These plans were fundamentally flawed, however, because the army did not provide enough gendarmes, maps, carts, rations, or even shovels to dig graves. Furthermore, columns were comprised mostly of women with children, and the elderly (most of whom were already weak, sick, or starving) who were forced to march up to 30 km a day. Some were transported by train to the Dniester before continuing on foot towards the Bug. One of the last groups to be deported were 12,000 Jews from southern Bukovina, which was *not* occupied by the Soviets in 1940, concentrated in Dorohoi. A large ghetto remained in Cernăuți to provide labor, but General Staff had largely realized its goal of ridding Bukovina of Jews.²⁸

The deportation plans soon broke down and the envisioned orderly transport turned into a series of death marches. Gendarmes hoarded limited rations, got lost, found villages unable (or unwilling) to provide food, beat Jews, raped women, shot those who fell behind, left unburied bodies along the roads, robbed the deportees, and even sold off groups of Jews to peasants to be killed and stripped of their possessions. Despite the horrors, most arrived in Transnistria where they joined Soviet Jews, but both groups were soon freezing in camps without food, medicine, or shelter. The camps were usually set up in kolkhozes that had been stripped of anything of value by Soviets, locals, or Romanians and quickly became overcrowded. Romanian Jews displaced Soviet Jews who were sent to camps further east on the Bug to make room for the new arrivals and then the arrival of more Jews from eastern Romania would displace them. Most Romanian

²⁷ Ioanid, *The Holocuast in Romania*, 143-144.

²⁸ Only half of Jews from the Dorohoi region survived to return in 1944, see, RG-25.004M Reel 14, dosar 2986, vol. 4094, c. 584-586.

Jews crossed the Dniester at Moghilev, Iampol, and Râbița and ended up spread across northern Transnistria. Jewish refugees caught by the advancing Axis forces were concentrated in camps near the Bug in the center of the province. In southern Transnistria, approximately 45,000 Jews survived the October massacre in Odessa.²⁹ The conditions in the ghettos in towns and cities set up by the Government of Transnistria were better than the isolated camps. By December 1941, the Transnistrian Gendarmerie Inspectorate only had 179 officers, 372 NCOs, and 5,432 gendarmes (1,566 in Odessa), too few to effectively guard at least 300,000 Jews, even with help from local Ukrainian policemen.³⁰ Romanian officers and civil servants still feared a Jewish uprising.

The conditions in the camps and ghettos resulted in epidemics, typhus was very common and particularly feared by both Romanians and Germans who used it to justify mass murder in Golta County. In mid-August 1941, the 200 men of the newly created *Sonderkommando R* (for Romania) left Germany for Transnistria with a mission to turn Soviet ethnic Germans into a Nazi vanguard for a future racial empire. The Tighina Agreement gave the SS nearly unlimited power over ethnic Germans in Transnistria, even letting them to create *Selbstschutz*, or “self-protection” militia, in ethnic German towns. The SS-directed militia fended off Romanian troops who looted German towns as readily as any other.³¹ During the fall, *Sonderkommando R* worriedly observed the establishment of Jewish camps near ethnic German towns and soon the SS believed that Jews spreading disease from camps poorly administered and guarded by Romanian troops presented a threat. Third Army expressed concern about typhus outbreaks too and blamed Jews, although shortages of soap, hot water, and changes of clothes for soldiers were more likely causes.³² Most

²⁹ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 201.

³⁰ Jean Ancel, *Transnistria, vol. I* (Bucharest: Editura Atlas, 1998), 52-53.

³¹ Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of Ukraine*, 40-41, 75-77, 80.

³² Peasant hygiene was never very good in general either, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 731, f. 7, 17, 32-33, 44, 69.

of the ethnic German towns were in southern Transnistria, but *Sonderkommando R* did not want to take any chances and was its men were anxious to play a role in realizing the “Final Solution.” Therefore, it decided to convince Romanian officers to liquidate Jews in central Transnistria.

Lt. Colonel Modest Isopescu, the recently appointed Prefect of Golta, proved amenable to SS overtures to help rid him of Jews. Born in Austrian Bukovina, he served as a reserve officer in the Habsburg army during the First World War, so he knew some German. He had served in Fourth Army Praetoral Service, directing gendarmes to “cleanse the terrain” in Chișinău, but after Fourth Army was demobilized he was ordered to stay to become a prefect in the Government of Transnistria. Since the Legionary rebellion in January 1941, Antonescu had replaced Legionary prefects with officers and now extended this practice to eastern Romania and Transnistria.³³ The Antonescu regime had to rely on officers, in part, because few civil servants wanted to relocate to the region. Most prefects were reserve officers, but the fact that they were in uniform and under military discipline belied the “civilian” nature of the state in Transnistria. Dr. Gheorghe Alexianu was appointed governor but took his orders from the General Staff.

Golta County became the destination for tens of thousands of Soviet Jews during the fall. Each day hundreds more arrived, despite Lt. Colonel Isopescu’s protests that he only had a few hundred gendarmes and Ukrainian police to guard them, almost no medicine, and little food. By December 1941 the situation in the Golta camps were appalling, so when SS officers approached Isopescu to urge him to shoot the Jews because of the threat of typhus, promising ethnic German militiamen to help, he quickly accepted – his Habsburg origins may have smoothed negotiations

³³ Legionaries took most prefect positions after September 1940, see, Heinen, *Legiunea “Arhanghelul Mihail,”* 422.

and his German language ability certainly did.³⁴ On 12 or 13 December, he visited Bogdanovka, the most overcrowded camp with over 50,000 people and had Ukrainians in the nearby village to bake bread to lure starving Jews to turn over the last of their valuables. The next week teams of Romanian, German, and Ukrainian shooters began killing groups of several thousand a day. The small number of men and sheer number of victims meant that the executions took several weeks. Soon after, officers at two other smaller camps at Dumanovka and Acmecetka in Golta County ordered the Jews they were responsible for shot. They had even fewer gendarmes or Ukrainian guards, however, so while Romanian and SS guards finished killing a massive number of Jews relatively quickly at Bogdanovka in mid-January 1942, the murder at these much smaller camps dragged into early-February 1942. Romanian gendarmes and Ukrainian police at Dumanovka and Acmecetka lacked aid from SS *Selbschutz*, so they often took a two-three day pause between each day of killing due to the physical and psychological strain exacerbated by the severe cold. After a few days of rest and warmth, they went back outside to finish their grisly task.³⁵

As Lt. Colonel Isopescu's men took a break from murdering Jews to celebrate Christmas, Stavka launched a counteroffensive to relieve Sevastopol and reconquer Crimea. The Red Army landed at multiple points along the Kerch peninsula during the night of 25/26 December, and two nights later made a major landing at Feodosia. The landings had immediate effect in Bucharest. Antonescu ordered Third Army on 28 December that "all kikes in Odessa" must be immediately deported due to the "resistance of SEVASTOPOL [sic] and the insufficient forces found there [in Odessa], we could expect a disagreeable surprise" from Jews that he expected to rebel if the Red

³⁴ It is unclear if mid-level SS officers had orders from the leadership of Sonderkommando R or acted on their own initiative, hindered by paucity of wartime documents, see Steinhart, *The Germanization of Ukraine*, 120-126.

³⁵ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 183-186.

Army landed. He argued that “to keep [Jews] there is a crime. I do not want to stain my activity with this lack of foresight.”³⁶ The *Conducător*’s fears were overblown. Robert Citino describes the Soviet landings as poorly organized, lacking specialized amphibious craft, and “more like the Gallipoli landing of 1915, [than Normandy in 1944,] with the main difference being the horrible weather.”³⁷ Moreover, most military aged Jewish men in Odessa had evacuated with the Soviets or been killed by Romanian soldiers after the city fell. The Red Army had great difficulties just landing troops in Crimea, much less sending a force all the way to Odessa, but only an estimated 112,000 troops remained in Transnistria. Half were poorly equipped third-rate units, such as the 1st, 2nd, 3rd Security, and 1st Fortification divisions. Third Army’s best troops occupied Ukraine or fought in Crimea, so the General Staff considered 45,000 Jews in Odessa a major threat.

While Governor Alexianu, prepared to deport the Jews of Odessa the military situation in Crimea remained precarious. General Hans von Sponeck, commanding German XXXXII Corps in the Kerch peninsular, panicked and retered after the Soviet Forty-Fourth Army landed, but General von Manstein took things in hand and transferred German XXX Corps from Sevastopol. Its mobile units, including the Korne Detachment, went ahead. The 8th Cavalry and 4th Mountain brigades had battalions in Kerch that were thrown piecemeal against Soviet threats while other German units forced march west to east. The 4th Mountain Brigade was soon knocked back by Soviet troops and tanks, but it had managed to slow down the enemy and win vital time for Axis reinforcements to arrive. General Avramescu blamed “cowards” for panicking other soldiers and threatened to have them shot. A few Romanian troops were “stupefied” [*îndobitociti*] by Soviet

³⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 452, f. 2.

³⁷ Citino, *The Death of the Wehrmacht*, 65.

artillery fire, since the beginning of Operation Barbarossa infantry often endured bombardment without support from Romanian counterbattery fire, and heavy (if short) bombardments caused them to flee shallow foxholes.³⁸ Despite the temporary reversal and some shell-shocked soldiers, most Romanians fought well and played an important role in delaying the Soviets long enough to allow von Manstein to set up a line across the Kerch peninsula and counterattack.

In the desperate situation, the Germans no longer had the luxury of diverting Romanian units to rear security and found them to be both effective partners in fighting to retake key cities and close collaborators in rooting out “Jewish-Communists” after successful counterattacks. By 15 January 1942 enough German reinforcements had arrived that von Manstein ordered XXX Corps to counterattack and retake Feodosia. The city fell a second time to German-Romanian forces on 19 January.³⁹ During this time, the Soviets landed troops in the rear to try to outflank the Axis line, on 4/5 January at Eupatoria north of Sevastopol and 12/13 January at Sudak west of Feodosia, German troops supported by Romanian artillery defeated the landing at Eupatoria, but the Soviet established a beachhead at Sudak that took until 27-28 January to eliminate. After retaking Sudak, Romanian soldiers massacred Jews left behind by the Red Army on the beach.⁴⁰ Further north, the Cavalry Corps, guarding the Azov Sea coast with two brigades, held off strong Soviet attacks. Romanian soldiers now began to realize that the war was going to continue much longer. When Sergeant Ionescu went to buy chicken and bread for Christmas, another NCO said the Germans had asked for a million Romanian soldiers for 1942 and after New Year’s he heard that after the Soviet landings were defeated the Mountain Corps may be rotated home, but a vast

³⁸ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 499, f. 162, 165-166.

³⁹ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 65-66; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 68; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 137-139.

⁴⁰ Report from the Soviet *Krasny flot* newspaper, see, Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 194.

mobilization was prepared for spring.⁴¹ In Crimea, the opposing forces settled into a stalemate, but on 18 January 1942 Soviet armies attacked in Ukraine and broke through south of Kharkov at Izyum. Answering German pleas, the General Staff sent the 1st and 2nd Infantry divisions, then operating between the Bug and Dnieper, and diverted a mountain ski unit near Crimea to Izyum.

The Soviet breakthrough at Izyum made the deportation of Jews from Odessa that much more urgent. Governor Alexianu issued Order No. 35 on 2 January 1942, announcing his plans to deport all Jews from Odessa to Berezovka and Oceakov counties to camps on the Bug. Jews could only take 25 kg of personal possessions, had to sell off the rest of their property, and were expected to live off their own funds. Municipal police would transport them to the train station and gendarmes would march them from railheads to camps in the countryside near the Bug to be used as labor.⁴² Alexianu knew that these deportations would result in many deaths. During an earlier Council of Ministers meeting on 16 December 1941, he told Antonescu that he wanted to put 10,000 Jews to work at a Soviet naval barracks outside of Odessa, but he lacked food to feed them and did not know what to do with the rest of the Jews. Antonescu told Alexianu to get rid of the Jews any way he could, immediately, he did not care how. He even suggested packing the Jews into the catacombs under Odessa or throwing them into the Black Sea, “but get them out of Odessa. I don’t want to know. A hundred can die, a thousand can die, all of them can die, but I don’t want a single Romanian official or officer to die.”⁴³ Alexianu quickly agreed.

The deportations from the Slobotka ghetto in Odessa ghetto began on 8 January 1942. Once one of seven police commissions inspected Jews for hidden valuables – unsanctioned theft

⁴¹ Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 47, 49.

⁴² Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 452, f. 8-11.

⁴³ Full translated quote found in Deletant, *Hitler’s Forgotten Ally*, 176.

began in the ghetto out of sight of these official commissions as the news spread among civilians and soldiers that the Jews were being deported – groups of a thousand were marched under guard to the train station. Each day dozens froze to death along the route as Jews were left out in the cold while they waited for their train. They were packed into freight cars, sent east, and dozens more died before being unloaded.⁴⁴ Then Romanian gendarmes or Ukrainian police marched groups of 50-100 Jews through the countryside, directly through the heart of *Sonderkommando R* in southern Transnistria, towards isolated camps on the Bug. The sudden arrival of Jews passing through ethnic German villages surprised the SS, who feared the Jews would spread typhus, and so they decided to intercept, gather, and murder them. Eric Steinhart believes that Alexianu sent the Jews through the area knowing that the SS would kill them, but this was just the most direct route to the Bug.⁴⁵ Romanian gendarmes and Ukrainian police, usually turned over the Jews to the SS, no questions asked, in large part just to get rid of the burden and get indoors.

At the same time, the Soviet winter counteroffensive precipitated a crisis in the General Staff. In late November, after Fourth Army demobilized, General Headquarters reverted to the General Staff, with General Iacobici still its chief, and Antonescu continued acting as Minister of Defense. Then on 29 December 1941 Hitler wrote Antonescu announcing the need for a spring offensive and asking for a large Romanian contribution. Antonescu offered 10 divisions with the possibility of more if German High Command agreed to provide arms and equipment and require the Hungarian Army to contribute large forces too.⁴⁶ This triggered a clash between Antonescu and Iacobici. Iacobici opposed such a large commitment, so he and his two deputy chiefs of the

⁴⁴ RG-25.003M, Reel 18, dosar 452, c. 709-710, 713.

⁴⁵ Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of the Ukraine*, 133-134, 140.

⁴⁶ Arimiae, *Antonescu-Hitler*, vol. I, 162-165

General Staff, generals Nicolae Tătăranu and Nicolae Mazarini, wrote a report on the danger of continuing to field Romanian units on the Eastern Front because they had proved ill-equipped in comparison to Red Army units with more firepower and mobility. When the *Conducător* signed a formal agreement with the German Military Mission on 17 January, Iacobici wrote a letter of resignation stating that the war was unpopular, the Hungarian Army grew more threatening as the Romanian Army was ground down on the Eastern Front, and no more than eight divisions should be provided to the Germans. Antonescu cited the November 1941 plebiscite as proof support for the war, called Iacobici a defeatist, and accepted his resignation on 20 January – his two deputy chiefs of staff were demoted to command divisions. Apologists argue Iacobici's protest was the view of most officers, but Antonescu's rebuttal truly reflected the feelings of the officer corps.⁴⁷ Iacobici was an outsider and unpopular. He was an *ardelean*, had fought against Romania as an Austro-Hungarian officer, and spoke with a heavy German accent. Antonescu had chosen him as Minister of Defense in 1940 because of his assumed pro-German sentiments, and his elevation at the expense Old Kingdom generals angered many officers.⁴⁸ Iacobici's resignation remained an isolated protest. Antonescu easily replaced him with the compliant General Ilie Șteflea, who had commanded 3rd Infantry Division at Odessa and was a former Deputy Chief of the General Staff, and elevated General Pantazi, Subsecretary to the Minister of War since September 1940, to head the ministry on 23 January 1941.⁴⁹ The triumvirate of Antonescu, Pantazi, and Șteflea proved a stable and enduring team, running the war until the royal coup of 23 August 1944.

⁴⁷ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 149-150; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 73.

⁴⁸ Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 122, 160.

⁴⁹ After the war Șteflea claimed that he tried to refuse the assignment, but Antonescu threatened to kick him out of the army, so he took it only as “a military service, ordered in time of war.” He did twice threaten to resign (in August 1942 and April 1944), but both times due to Antonescu’s insulting language about the quality of the General Staff’s work (“robotic,” “rigidity of Old Man Scabbard,” “stupid”) and failure to rebuild the army after Stalingrad, not a

Fears of a Soviet amphibious landing at Odessa continued. General Dăscălescu, now in command of II Corps, was given control of all the military and civilian institutions in the city on 22 January 1942. Troops on the coast were kept on high alert due to reports alleging parachutists had been dropped to free Soviet POWs in Transnistria and in Crimea civilians in Eupatoria had supported the failed Soviet landing there – Romanian and German troops shot an estimated 1,200 civilian “partisans” in response.⁵⁰ On 28 January, Romanian Royal Navy reported to the General Staff that a Soviet landing at Odessa was not likely, but Third Army Section II continued to warn of the danger of a parachutist assault on Transnistria.⁵¹ Therefore, deportations from Odessa did not halt and by early February an estimated 33,000 Jews, most of the surviving Jews were being marched east. *Selbstschutz* militiamen continued to stop and massacre columns of Jews if they entered ethnic German towns, so most Jews did not reach camps on the Bug – especially once the SS began to seek out and intercept columns before they arrived in ethnic German towns.

By the end of February most killing had ended. At least 75,000 Jews were murdered in Golta (50,000 at Bogdanovka, 15,000 at Dumanovka, and 10,000 at Acmecetka) with another 25,000 from Odessa murdered in Berezovka.⁵² In northern Transnistria the Romanians did not carry out mass executions, but the death rates from illness, starvation, and exposure in camps in Balta, Tulcin, and Moghilău counties were appallingly high. In mid-February, reports began to reach Third Army of the scale of death during the winter. An inspection at Dumanovka found

firm stand against continuing the war in the east like Iacobici. Antonescu ignored his pouting and did not accept his resignations. Șteflea employed his skills in service of the Antonescu regime to the end. Later claims that he tried to limit Romanian commitment to the Eastern Front are belied by the facts, see, Fond Personal, dosar 7245, f. 153-183.

⁵⁰ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 511, f. 3, 6, 8-9, 12.

⁵¹ Ibid., dosar 511, f. 23; now-Colonel Grosu ran Third Army Section II, see, dosar 307, f. 81.

⁵² Ioanid estimates 70,000-75,000 killed in Golta, see, Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 186, 193; Steinhart estimates 25,000 by Germans along in Berezovka, not counting those Jews deported from Odessa killed by the Romanian and Ukrainian guards, see, Steinhart, *The Holocaust and the Germanization of the Ukraine*, 156, 131.

unburied bodies being eaten by dogs and Ukrainian guards shooting Jews on a whim. Farther north in the Obodovka and Berşad ghettos, where there had *not* been mass executions, at least 5,000 Jews had died from disease.⁵³ The shortage of guards meant that some Jews were able slip in and out of the ghettos to trade valuables for food or sneak into the Moghilev ghetto to the west on the Dniester where the conditions were better. Third Army ordered all executions to halt.

In Crimea, with the Red Army successfully bottled up at Kerch, *Einsatzgruppe D* rushed to finish the terrible work that the Soviet landings had interrupted. During this second wave of genocidal murder beginning in January there were few German troops available to help with the rounding up of Jews and Romanian soldiers were now on the spot in cities with large surviving populations of Jews, so they played a much greater role in searching for and shooting Jews. The SS used locally raised Tatar police to help seek out Jews too. The 10th Infantry Division reported in late February that it had carried out “a cleansing action” in Eupatoria under German direction, taking seven partisans prisoner and shooting 26 Jews.⁵⁴ By then, the SS had murdered the Jews in Karasubazar, Dzhankoi, and those still in Simferopol. In the months to come, whenever called upon, Romanian soldiers reliably assisted *Einsatzgruppe D* in its hunt for Jews and partisans.

Stalemate in Crimea

In February 1942, Romanian troops helped hold the line across the Kerch peninsula and carried out anti-partisan sweeps in the rear, while General von Manstein prepared an offensive to break the stalemate. On 4 February, General Avramescu reminded his troops why they were still fighting. “By defending Crimea, we defend the borders of the country, we defend the fields that

⁵³ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 452, f. 25-26.

⁵⁴ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 947, f. 503.

must be worked and that give our families food, we defend our children and protect the country from disaster and fire. For as long as the enemy will be held far away from the borders of the country, our families will be able to work, to give us the necessities of war.”⁵⁵ His soldiers knew the horrors they had inflicted on Jews and Soviet citizens during their advance, so the specter of Red Army troops in Romania among their families was a powerful motivator to fight.

After eight months of combat on the front, the situation of the Mountain and Cavalry corps was serious. General Lascăr reported on 2 February that the 1st Mountain Brigade only had 60 percent of its original strength and morale had been “sufficient” until 10 January, when they were thrown into battle for another 40 days, but now his men were “totally demoralized.”⁵⁶ General von Manstein awarded Lascăr the Knight’s Cross in January 1942 for his units suffering, he already got the Order of Michael the Brave in October 1941, but the General Staff transferred him to 6th Infantry Division in Romania after this pessimistic report. This humiliating demotion might explain Lascăr’s steadfastness on the Don later in November 1942 as an attempt to restore his personal honor; the General Staff used this same tactic with other generals who showed lack of grit or sufficient faith in victory.⁵⁷ Chaplains worked as propagandists to shore up morale by giving sermons, passing out the few copies of *Sentinela* or *Soldatul*, and organizing conferences. Their work made more difficult because there were not enough priests, many of whom were older, and it was hard to reach soldiers who were spread across the peninsula in cities, remote mountains, or distant coasts. Priest Ioan H. Popescu held a conference on 29 January with a company from 20th

⁵⁵ Ibid., dosar 118, f. 506-507.

⁵⁶ For General Lascăr’s report, see, Ibid., dosar 947, f. 655-656.

⁵⁷ Some called him a coward, jumping at the chance to go home after getting a medal, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 281, 294; for criticism of the officer corps thirst for awards, see, Crisan, *An Amazing Life*, 129.

Mountain Battalion, the rest were in the mountains, with topics on “Patience in Suffering,” “The Holy Cause,” “Espionage-Holy Silence-Consequences,” and “Spiritual and Bodily Cleanliness.”⁵⁸ The General Staff took more concrete steps. Since regular officers treated reserve officers like inferiors, denying them the same material benefits of career soldiers, Antonescu ordered that the families of reserve officers serving in the expeditionary corps in Crimea be eligible to take food and supplies from army warehouses, the same as families of regular officers. Reserve officers’ families were struggling to make ends meet with the breadwinner gone.⁵⁹

The Red Army won the race to build up forces and attacked from the Kerch bridgehead on 27 February 1942 with three armies. The Soviet offensive, however, made almost no impact against the outnumbered Axis forces stretched thinly across the Kerch peninsula, except for a 11 km bulge in the north. General von Manstein put the 4th Mountain Brigade at the very southern end of the line, with its right flank protected by the sea – as per his usual practice – whose troops had recovered from its earlier defeat at Feodosia and fought tenaciously. Soldiers who had just a month before had been described as cowardly or shell-shocked shows what Romanian units were capable of when they were properly supported by artillery and aircraft to make up for their lack of firepower. The sheer number of Red Army formations squeezed into such a small peninsula actually worked against them, especially due to the large Luftwaffe forces assigned to German Eleventh Army. German pilots found it difficult to miss vehicles and armor packed on narrow roads. Further Soviet attacks on 13 March, 26 March, and 9 April all failed.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1575, dosar 286, c. 835-837, 766.

⁵⁹ Fond Third Army, dosar 410, f. 104, 341; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 830, f. 14.

⁶⁰ The last attack ended on 15 April after 40 percent losses, see, Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 68-69, 89-94, 68.

The battle at Kerch stripped every possible German unit from Sevastopol, leaving behind the Mountain Corps to help hold the line. The 1st Mountain Brigade settled into trench warfare outside of the city, playing a vital part in keeping the Soviet Independent Coastal Army penned in on the other side of Crimea. Major Scârneci noted that increased *Luftwaffe* patrols in the sky overhead improved morale, “I feel so good in my den, among sincere, devoted men.”⁶¹ Soldiers sung old First World War songs in the trenches to remind themselves of why they were fighting. General Vasiliu Rășcanu, who took over the 1st Mountain Brigade, reported his companies took 15-20 casualties each day, reducing some to just 60-70 men instead of 200, so companies were stretched so thinly they had no reserves and could not rotate men off the line to rest. His men were covered in lice too. Rășcanu claimed, however, that morale was “pretty good, even at its best, [considering] the situation we find ourselves in.”⁶² Romanian units made the difference in Crimea and let General von Manstein snatch victory from the jaws of defeat at Kerch.

Spring Army Reorganization

German High Command, usually through Hitler making personal requests to Antonescu, asked for more from the General Staff. The German Army planned spring counteroffensives in Crimea and at Kharkov to be followed by a major summer offensive into southern Russia and the Caucasus. As battles raged on the front, in Bucharest the General Staff began preparing for the German summer offensive by mobilizing and reorganizing divisions collectively labeled Echelon II – the divisions east of the Dniester were labeled Echelon I. Due to manpower shortages each infantry division had to reduce its number of battalions from nine to six, but increased Romanian

⁶¹ Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 281, 291.

⁶² Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 947, f. 758.

industrial production (including Soviet factories in Transnistria), captured stocks of Soviet small arms, mortars, and anti-tank guns, and a few German deliveries of Czech-made anti-aircraft guns or captured stocks of French weapons meant each division's firepower did not suffer.⁶³ Since the start of the war, however, Soviet divisions had superior firepower compared to Romanian ones, it only increased with time, so simply maintaining was not enough. Losses in motor vehicles were partially replaced by captured Soviet ones or German deliveries. On 15 March 1942, Romanian cavalry and mountain brigades were re-designated divisions. This was purely a political decision because only two Echelon II mountain brigades (as both Echelon I brigades were understrength) were the same size as Hungarian and Italian divisions. Antonescu wanted to be sure Romania's contribution to the Eastern Front was not underrated by Hitler and thought he could convince the Führer to reward the *Conducător* by rectifying the loss of northern Transylvania.⁶⁴

As the General Staff carried out this reorganization west of the Dniester, Third Army rounded up stragglers and deserters roaming the rear east of the Dniester, including some that had coalesced into bandit groups.⁶⁵ By spring 1942 military prisons in Romania and on the front were filled with thousands of deserters, or soldiers guilty of other crimes, primarily for theft or smuggling, but also murder and rape. A constant flow of orders by senior officers threatened to shoot deserters, looters, alarmists, and rapists; pretty any soldiers guilty of an infraction. Few were ever shot because there were too many, the General Staff needed men, and the Antonescu regime was unwilling to alienate public opinion by shooting soldiers – although small groups of

⁶³ Echelon I units fighting on the front south of Kharkov, in Crimea, and guarding the Azov Sea coast: 1st, 2nd, 4th, 10th, 18th, 19th, and 20th Infantry, 1st and 4th Mountain, and 5th, 6th, and 8th Cavalry divisions and Echelon II units remobilizing in Romania or tasked with occupying Transnistria: 5th, 6th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 13th, 14th, and 15th Infantry, 2nd and 3rd Mountain, 1st, 7th, and 9th Cavalry, and 1st Armored divisions, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 75-79.

⁶⁴ Scafes, *Armata română*, 109, 118-119.

⁶⁵ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 947, f. 716, 780.

deserters were periodically shot so the threat still carried weight. In March 1942 the army issued General Order No. 240; instead of being shot deserters would be released and sent to the front for rehabilitation and their record would be wiped clean if cited for bravery.⁶⁶ Third Army's courts martial had the responsibility of processing deserters and other miscreant soldiers arrested east of the Dniester as replacements to infantry or cavalry units – and signed off by General Dumitrescu. The process took time: courts martial were few and far between, accused troops required guards, and transport was in short supply. General Avramescu complained these issues made the process onerous for the Mountain Corps, as he needed every soldier for combat, and received authority to oversee rehabilitation in Crimea.⁶⁷ Their families were to be deprived of state aid until they were rehabilitated. The General Staff even applied the policy of rehabilitation to troops thought guilty of self-mutilation, only those found “in the flagrant act of self-mutilation,” should be executed in front of their unit within 48 hours.⁶⁸ In mid-March, Major Scârneci recorded a rash such cases in 3rd Mountain Battalion outside Sevastopol that he blamed on new replacements “not raised in the spirit of the mountain troops.” They used various methods: injection of urine or fuel, knife cuts, burns from boiling water, and cutting off fingers.⁶⁹ In April 1942, the Sărata Training Center was set up in Bessarabia where inmates from prisons west of the Dniester, including political prisoners and common criminals, were sent to be re-trained before being formed into four “independent” infantry battalions that were later sent with Echelon II units to the Don.

The Romanian Army put men to work in fields from Romania to Crimea with the coming of spring. On 24 March, the General Staff ordered units in Romania to create Agricultural Work

⁶⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 358, f. 132.

⁶⁷ Ibid., dosar 358, f. 137; dosar 882, f. 30.

⁶⁸ Ibid., dosar 358, f. 13.

⁶⁹ Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 297.

Labor Detachments, which were units of 500 recruited from minorities (Hungarians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, or Russians) or raw Romanian draftees.⁷⁰ The same day General Avramescu ordered his troops to help the Crimean populace with the spring planting to aid in alleviating shortages of food that he blamed on the Red Army's scorched earth policy during its retreat.⁷¹ Additionally, General von Manstein had told him the previous November that the Axis forces required the help of locals, especially the "Mohamadans," in anti-partisan warfare, so the Mountain Corps should give the Tatar minority favorable treatment. Avramescu ordered the creation of a small canteen in Simferopol to feed orphans (a symbolic gesture as only 20-50 were fed each day with leftovers from soldiers' meals) and took part in Islamic ceremonies. The General Staff sent Captain Sebat Husein, an imam from near Constanța, to carry out missionary work among Crimean Tatars.⁷² A veritable Romanian orientalism developed among officers and nurses in Crimea.

In March 1942, a spat broke out between generals Dumitrescu and Avramescu over who was to blame for material shortages facing the Mountain Corps in Crimea. Avramescu was not shy about complaining to the General Staff, or even to General von Manstein, about shortages faced by his troops. He requested that the battle-worn 1st Mountain Division be replaced by a fresh Echelon II division and accused Dumitrescu of being distant – his headquarters was still in Nikolaev – and unresponsive to his appeals to provide relief to the Mountain Corps. Avramescu argued this forced him to approach the General Staff and Ministry of Defense directly to address his problems. When the General Staff reproached him, Dumitrescu defended himself by arguing that he was well-aware of the situation on the front and blamed distance, bad roads, and shortage

⁷⁰ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 253, f. 685-686.

⁷¹ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 499, f. 340.

⁷² Ibid., dosar 550, f. 148; dosar 947, f. 785; dosar 951, f. 46; dosar 814, f. 447.

of rolling stock for logistical issues. He reminded the General Staff that German Eleventh Army had previously agreed to supply the Mountain and Cavalry corps, so Third Army was now only responsible for any issues of discipline.⁷³ These recriminations rapidly passed. Dumitrescu was correct and the Germans Army began supplying Romanian combat units on the front in Crimea, on the Azov Sea, or at Izyum. In Crimea, however, Avramescu accrued more authority. Since Romanian forces in the peninsula now consisted of a mixture of mountain, cavalry, and infantry divisions the General Staff created the Command of the Mountain Corps and Romanian Troops in Crimea under Avramescu. He was responsible for discipline, coordinating supply issues with German Eleventh Army, and carrying out von Manstein's operational orders. Avramescu ran it as his personal fiefdom until October 1943. He oversaw local propaganda efforts as well: setting up a radio station, printing *Ecoul Crimeei*, building churches, and increased "moral education." Soon victories, improved logistics, and better rations greatly improved morale.

At the same time, the General Staff decided to sort out the chaotic mess of ghettos and camps in Transnistria to harness the labor of surviving Jews for the war effort. The deportations during the fall and winter had scattered Jews across the province, many were given nothing to do (like the Jews in the Voikovstat ghetto in Crimea), no logistical system existed to feed them had they been given work, and due to a mixture of incompetence and indifference no one was quite sure just how many Jews had been deported or interned. Probably 150,000 Jews survived the massacres and terrible conditions of the winter. Senior officers now agreed that the survivors needed to be concentrated, watched closely, fed enough to keep them healthy, and put to work.⁷⁴

⁷³ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 314, f. 577-578; dosar 1044, f. 33-34, 139-141.

⁷⁴ An SSI report from late February declared, "Aside from the fact that it is inhuman to leave them in the current living conditions, it also constitutes a permanent danger, both for security and the health of the population and soldiers, as it defeats the purpose for which these camps were created," see, *Ibid.*, dosar 452, f. 24.

Third Army's primary concern was the Moghilev ghetto, where a large group of Romanian Jews managed to find refugee, rather than be sent to the Bug – largely by ingratiating themselves to local Romanian authorities by putting their skills to work bringing local factories back to life.⁷⁵ While the General Staff approved, Third Army did not like having so many Jews at one of the main rail crossings on the Dniester. General Traian Cocorăscu, commander of the 9th Cavalry Division, claimed in early April that the number of Jews in Moghilev had grown from 8,000 to 15,000 and (less believably) that 30,000 more lurked hidden in the countryside. He considered it a scandal that Jews could walk freely in the city. He warned that Jews represented a security and a health risk to civilians and soldiers alike, and demanded they be evacuated farther east.⁷⁶ The labor provided by Jews in Moghilev's factories was too valuable to deport them, however, those deemed unnecessary or caught living from illicit trading were deported farther east.

Governor Alexianu had to balance the Antonescu regime's demands to increase industrial and agricultural production in Transnistria and the Romanian Army's complaints about security. Officers blamed gendarmes and Ukrainian police for lax security and endemic smuggling. Many enterprising officers, NCOs, and soldiers traveling through Transnistria brought goods to sell on the black market "at speculation prices," which was not only illegal but embarrassing, since the officer corps considered all commercial activity to be crass.⁷⁷ Third Army complained soldiers were wandering Transnistria, overstaying leave or on forged papers, to smuggle goods, letters, or currency. Illicit trade helped many Jews to survive to liberation. Officers believed civil servants were corrupted by bribes from Jews and often accused them of sleeping, in the literal sense, with

⁷⁵ A Jewish engineer from Rădăuți was prominent among these efforts, see, Siegfried Jagendorf, *Jagendorf's Foundry: Memoir of the Romanian Holocaust, 1941-1944* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 9-18.

⁷⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1127, f. 3, 4, 19.

⁷⁷ Ibid., dosar 570, f. 261.

the “Jewish-Communist” enemy. Third Army put pressure on local prefects to organize periodic roundups of Jews not considered unproductive and send them to labor camps in the countryside. Soldiers arriving on leave from the front had to go through customs at the Dniester or the Prut, officers were not checked, and gendarmes confiscated items considered contraband. Gendarmes were supposed to turn confiscated goods over to the state, but often did not and confiscated many things that were not contraband.⁷⁸ Troops were deloused and turned in weapons, reclaimed later, to prevent abuse at home. Those lucky enough to get leave came to hate the customs process.

As always Odessa was Third Army’s primary concern. II Corps confronted the threat of Soviet partisans operating out of catacombs beneath the city. They consisted of NKVD officers, Red Army soldiers, and desperate Jews seeking refuge. Periodically, they organized attacks, but mainly just tried to survive on fetid water and whatever food they stole. Since October 1941, II Corps had tried to identify and block openings to the caves. In February 1942, the General Staff sent a smoke company, trained to conceal ground attacks or obscure targets from the air, to try to smoke out the estimated 700-800 partisans remaining in the caves. The Germans vetoed any use of poison gas.⁷⁹ In May, after smoking proved ineffective, II Corps returned to identifying and sealing openings, with help from informants, to keep the partisans bottled up.⁸⁰ It was successful in halting attacks. Starving partisans and Jews died, gave up, or got caught scrounging for food. Nonetheless, II Corps remained convinced that more partisans and Jews hid in the city, so Third Army ordered a new round of deportations in April to secure Odessa once and for all. First on the list, Jews, a few hundred remained in the local jail. Second, former members of the Communist

⁷⁸ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 366, f. 420; dosar 307, f. 6;

⁷⁹ Ibid., dosar 1196, f. 1, 4, 10-17, 21, 27, 34, 36.

⁸⁰ On 17 June a group of five Jews, labeled partisans, were caught trying to escape the catacombs, they were in a deplorable state, thin and sick, and were either shot or sent to a camp, see, Ibid., dosar 1122, f. 336.

Party, all factories with 1,000-5,000 workers were kept closely surveilled. Third, any deemed to be “suspicious” in seaside towns. The Odessa Military Command was resurrected under General Trestioreanu with authority over all police, gendarmes, and soldiers in the city. His task was to root all Jews, communists, and partisans, so II Corps could concentrate on guarding the coast.⁸¹

VI Corps at Izyum

While the fighting raged in Crimea, Romanian units crossed the Dnieper to help German Seventeenth Army stop a Soviet breakthrough at Izyum. The 1st Infantry Division, commanded by General Emanoil Bârzotescu, was closest in Kirovograd, and on the front on 21 January. The Rotta Ski Detachment, with two mountain ski battalions, arrived in Krasnograd five days later. General Nicolae Ghineranu’s 2nd Infantry Division had to take over rear security from Nikolaev, in southern Ukraine, to Kirovograd, in central Ukraine. The 1st Infantry Division and Rotta Ski Detachment marched 150-450 km in extreme winter conditions with 40 percent of horses dying and 30 percent of men suffering frostbite. As Romanian regiments arrived in drips and drabs the Germans threw them onto the line near Dnepropetrovsk.⁸² Once all 1st Infantry Division arrived it counterattack on 13 February and won Bârzotescu an Iron Cross. Soviet attacks on 20-21 February against thinly spread soldiers lacking artillery support, since 1st Infantry Division had been spread out for rear security its artillery was slow in arriving from Mariupol, broke the line on 22 February and dazed troops fled 8-10 km. The next day he personally led a counterattack that inspired panicked soldiers and restored the situation. Regardless, General Dragalina sent exaggerated reports of a rout due to poor leadership to the General Staff, so Antonescu ordered

⁸¹ Ibid., dosar 1196, f. 77-78, 82.

⁸² Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 160-164.

an inquiry into Bârzotescu's actions during the retreat on 15 March.⁸³ The mercurial *Conducător* did not countenance any “cowardice” or “incompetence” that came to his attention.

The battle seethed back and forth as the Soviet pushed slowly forward from Izyum and chewed up more Axis forces. The General Staff sent the 2nd Infantry Division in response to new German requests that reinforced the German line on 9 March, again after a long march, and then immediately joined in a local counterattack near Lozovaya. Romanian soldiers took heavy losses from combat and the cold. General Ghineraru reported that in just ten days 2nd Infantry Division suffered 2,000 causalities, around half from frostbite.⁸⁴ Apparently shocked and demoralized by the losses, he wrote four alarming reports during April directly to General Șteflea at the General Staff, bypassing his immediate superiors General Dragalina and General Dumitrescu, reporting that Soviet tanks were too strong, blaming the Germans for not giving support, and claiming his men were utterly spent.⁸⁵ Foreshadowing Stalingrad, he did not exaggerate the weather, Soviet superiority in mobility and firepower, or German inability to make up the difference. However, while he was ready to quit, he repeatedly asked for leave, his soldiers were not. They doggedly held on and turned back a strong local Soviet offensive at the end of March.

Commanders who showed such lack of resolve were not tolerated by others in the officer corps. General Dumitrescu's response to General Ghineraru's letters, which were forwarded to

⁸³ He and three of his staff officers, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 888, f. 204; Bârzotescu was convinced Dragalina had a personal grudge against him and denied any panic, see, f. 223-226, 236-256; the German decision to award him the Iron Cross caused confusion, see, f. 198, 199; General von Kortzfleisch later attested to Bârzotescu's ability and bravery and said he had no reason to regret giving the award for 13 February because after 22 February he restored the situation. He was confused since he discussed the award with Dragalina who did not oppose it or tell him of the investigation. Kortzfleisch blamed mid-ranking officers for the panicked retreat, see, f. 297-298.

⁸⁴ Ibid., dosar 1229, f. 15-18.

⁸⁵ Ibid., dosar 888, f. 167-168, 170-171, 175-177; it was not the first time he went over the head of his superior. Ghinereanu took over 10th Infantry Division after the explosion in Odessa and complained when he was replaced on 8 November 1941. Dumitrescu said he was not a good fit with Alexianu, see, dosar 309, f. 120-126.

him by the General Staff, provides insight into the mindset of most senior officers in 1942. He dismissed even Ghineraru's legitimate concerns, exhorted he that as an officer rather than being the first to complain and doubt he should embolden and encourage, and reprimanded him for his anti-German sentiments. “The vital interest of our country is to give as much support as possible to the German Army to crush the common foe. It is your duty to cooperate most sincerely and in the best manner [*condițiuni*] with the German Army.”⁸⁶ In a letter to “Beloved Șteflea,” written soon after, Dumitrescu told the Chief of the General Staff that Ghineraru’s attitude “leaves much to be desired...The general interest forces us to make sacrifices [in senior officers who lack grit], but we don’t really have anyone to replace the sacrificed.”⁸⁷ As a consequence, the General Staff waited until after the crisis passed to fire Bârzotescu on 9 May, forcing him to retire soon after, and replace Ghineraru on 27 June, rotating him to an administrative post in Romania.

German High Command and Stavka spent April planning offensives to take advantage of the Soviet salient at Izyum. This required more soldiers, so the General Staff sent the 4th Infantry Division from occupation duties in Transnistria, and shortly afterwards the 20th Infantry Division from Romania, both arriving in early May. General Dragalina’s VI Corps was sent to command all four divisions, now consolidated his forces had over 64,000 soldiers, and he was given part of the salient to defend.⁸⁸ After a winter of crisis and uncertainty, the German High Command had big plans, not only to improve the situation, but to utterly crush the Soviet foe. Stuck for months in terrible winter combat conditions a hairsbreadth’s away from disaster, Romanian troops would

⁸⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1206, f. 85-95.

⁸⁷ Ibid., dosar 1206, f. 106.

⁸⁸ Axworthy, *Third Ally, Fourth Ally*, 70-71.

now participate in two of the most incredible counterstrokes in military history that restored their faith in the invincibility of the Wehrmacht and in final victory over “Judeo-Bolshevism.”

Spring Recovery: May 1942

The German recovery began with Operation Bustard Hunt to clear the Kerch peninsula. Despite facing the same obstacles and cramped terrain, plus a defending Soviet force twice the size of the attacking Axis forces, General von Manstein managed the seemingly impossible, to break through, encircle, and destroy most of three Soviet armies. He had two major advantages. First, the whole of *Luftflotte 4* was assigned to Crimea, so his army had enough aircraft for a whole army group. Second, the bulge in the northern sector, won at great cost in previous weeks by the Red Army and where most Soviet troops were concentrated, offered him the chance for an encirclement. At Kharkov Marshal Fedor von Bock planned Operation Fridericus, which aimed to encircle and destroy the Soviet forces in the Izyum salient, but local Soviet attacks, shortages and spring flooding repeatedly forced the start date to be pushed back until mid-May.⁸⁹

Operation Bustard Hunt and Battle for Kharkov

German Eleventh Army performed a veritable military miracle. General von Manstein's attack began on 9 May. In the northern sector, newly arrived VII Corps (19th Infantry Division and 7th Heavy Artillery Regiment) and German XXXXII Corps attacked to pin down the bulk of the Soviet forces, but it was in the southern sector that German XXX Corps, with the support of 22nd Panzer Division, made the main attack to break through Soviet Forty-Fourth Army. It then wheeled to the north to bag the prize: Soviet Fifty-First and Soviet Fourth-Seventh armies. The Grodeck Brigade, a hodgepodge of light motorized units including the Korne Detachment, drove

⁸⁹ For German plans of operations Bustard Hunt and Frederick, see, Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 70-72, 92-94

straight on the city of Kerch as quickly as possible to disrupt any Soviet attempt to reform on two pre-prepared defenses, the Nasyr and Sultanovka lines. Operation Bustard Hunt went almost like clockwork, despite initial difficulties crossing a massive anti-tank ditch, within days panzers had encircled Soviet forces in the bulge and with *Luftflotte 4* turned it into a cauldron of death.

The Grodeck Brigade carried out an epic attack. Its lightly armored units were constantly engaged, soon it lucked into arriving at an unoccupied part of the Nasyr line that let it continue to the Sultanovka line, which it crossed on 10 May. Now low on fuel and ammunition, the Grodeck Brigade's luck ran out the next day when a Soviet counterattack stopped it dead and encircled it. The German-Romanian force used a "hedgehog" defense, drawing itself into a circle, as it came under attack from every side. Colonel Korne was lightly wounded and had to temporarily turn over command to a subordinate. The situation was so dire that supplies had to be dropped by air to the encircled forces on 11 May. Colonel Grodeck took part of force to find a way forward, but on the morning of 14 May Luftwaffe aircraft accidentally bombed it, mortally wounding Grodeck. He was evacuated, dying days later, so Korne took over and directed the brigade's final advance on Kerch with his arm in a sling.⁹⁰ The Axis forces now overlooking Kerch and were treated to a spectacle as the disorganized survivors of three Soviet armies tried to escape across the straits by any means possible. Since *Luftflotte 4* had to be sent north to stop a Soviet offensive at Kharkov the air above was suddenly empty of Luftwaffe aircraft, but General von Manstein brought up his artillery on the heights around the port and began a slaughter that lasted until 16 May. The battle ended with German-Romanian forces capturing 170,000 troops, 1,100 guns, and 250 tanks; at a

⁹⁰ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 146-149; Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 72-75.

cost of just 7,588 Axis casualties, including 988 Romanians.⁹¹ German Eleventh Army did not have a long time to bask in the glory because von Manstein had to turn back to Sevastopol.

General Dragalina's VI Corps had arrived just in time to help German Seventeenth Army hold the southwest part of the Izyum salient after the Soviets beat the Germans to launch a major offensive. Marshal T. S. Timoschenko's forces attacked on 12 May from the northern part of the salient lunging forwards trying to encircle Kharkov, but another pincer further north encountered more resistance causing the Soviets to pause after three days and gave the Germans a chance to take the initiative.⁹² With Luftwaffe forces transferred from Kerch, a nervous Marshal von Bock finally initiated Operation Frederick on 17 May. General Ludwig von Kleist's 1st Panzer Army attacked the southern base of salient, farther west German Seventeenth Army with Dragalina's VI Corps continued to hold the line to keep the Soviets in the bag, and German LI Corps drove down from the north to meet up with the panzers. The salient was pinched off on 22 May, but intense fighting followed as the Soviets tried to break out eastwards, so VI Corps' sector to the southwest became relatively quiet. By 28 May the battle was over. VI Corps had withstood all attacks and then harried the fleeing Soviets. Both the 85th and 93rd *Infanterie* regiments had their flags, the symbol of regimental honor that had been confiscated by Antonescu in April because of alleged cowardice on 22 February during 1st Infantry Division's retreat, restored due to their recent bravery.⁹³ In June, VI Corps helped with mop up operations after the end of the battle for Kharkov and 240,000 Soviet soldiers, 1,200 tanks, and 2,600 guns were netted in the cauldron.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 77; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 68-69.

⁹² Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 71; Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 94-99.

⁹³ Fond Third Army, dosar 888, f. 236, 270-274, 354; dosar 1119, f. 153.

⁹⁴ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 167; Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 103-109.

The news was trumpeted on the radio by Axis propaganda. Sergeant Ionescu excitedly recorded, “here [in Crimea, Romanian soldiers] hope in a decisive victory [for] Christianity.”⁹⁵

General von Manstein turned his attention to preparing for a final assault on Sevastopol. The Mountain Corps would play a major supporting role. After VII Corps arrived at Kerch, the 4th Mountain Division had been transferred to Sevastopol to reinforce the 1st Mountain Division and was soon joined by the 18th Infantry Division. Together with German formations, they kept watch on the Soviet Independent Coastal Army as the blow was delivered at Kerch. The trench warfare, backed by German artillery and aircraft, suited the Romanians. In May the Ministry of Defense issued a new medal called Crusade against Communism, which troops proudly wore on the front.⁹⁶ Morale revived as German Eleventh Army units from Kerch, *Luftflotte* 4 forces from Kharkov, and super-heavy artillery from the Reich took up positions outside Sevastopol.

End of the “Final Solution” in Crimea and Deportation of Gypsies from Romania

After Operation Bustard Hunt, General Avramescu focused on bringing order to Crimea. The Mountain Corps swept up stragglers and deserters (processed for rehabilitation), began anti-partisan sweeps in the Yaila mountains, and carried out raids in cities in cooperation with the SS. Any partisans or Jews they discovered were turned over to the Germans. Partisans were hanged as a warning to locals. Jews were killed by the SS, who increasingly employed mobile gas vans to asphyxiate them, which spared the murders the psychological trauma of shooting Jews.⁹⁷ The General Staff warned troops not to let down their guard. It circulated stories like a Soviet POW being used by 1st Mountain Battalion to care for horses being revealed to be a Jew, the discovery

⁹⁵ He miss-wrote “*o victorie decisivă asupra creștinismului*,” see, Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 94.

⁹⁶ This medal was also issued to civilians for helping the war effort, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 813, f. 335.

⁹⁷ Ibid., dosar 852, f. 168; Feferman, *The Holocaust in Crimea and North Caucasus*, 123, 132.

of two Jewish women from Chișinău posing as Romanians employed as translators by Section II officers who freed them from POW camps on the Bug, and female partisans being left behind by the Soviets at Kerch to carry out sabotage.⁹⁸ Romanian officers and soldiers remained convinced Jews and partisans were everywhere and helped German troops round up the last Jews in Crimea. By June only a few hundred Jews survived in hiding, several thousand protected Karaite Jews in Simferopol or Karasubazar were left alone, and 4,000-5,000 Jews remained in Sevastopol.⁹⁹

On 1 June, as General von Manstein readied his assault at Sevastopol for the next day, the Antonescu regime began deporting nomadic and “criminal” Gypsies to Transnistria. Anti-Gypsy racism was rife in interwar Romania, but in February 1942 Antonescu began increasingly talking about deporting Gypsies, particularly from Bucharest or other large cities. He argued that they were cowards, lazy, and dirty. During May 1942 the Ministry of Internal Affairs began a census to discover just how many nomadic and “criminal” Gypsies existed. Before a proper census was finished, however, the Antonescu regime organized two waves of deportations, the first in June-July and second in September, that interned 25,000 Gypsies in camps in Transnistria.¹⁰⁰ At the same time, Gustav Ritter, an SS representative at the German Embassy, and Radu Lecca, head of the Central Jewish Office, began negotiating in Bucharest to deport all remaining Jews west of the Prut to Nazi death camps in Poland. Despite the fact that tens of thousands of Gypsy soldiers were in the ranks, the deportation of nomadic and “criminal” Gypsies did not trigger protest from officers, instead they requested clarification on what to do with Gypsy soldiers whose families

⁹⁸ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 923, f. 89-90; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1498, f. 3; the Ministry of Defense claimed ships arrived in Kerch with 570 specially trained young women, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 916, f. 63-64.

⁹⁹ Some Karaites joined Tatar police to prove their loyalty, see, Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union*, 204, 211.

¹⁰⁰ The few Romanian eugenicists among the intellectual elite, who believed that Gypsies were “the great racial problem of Romania” also played a major role in this decision, see, Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 268-269, 271.

had been deported. Most Romanians supported the two deportations, first nomadic and second “criminal” Gypsies, but the threat of a third round of deportations targeting assimilated sedentary Gypsies triggered appeals to sympathetic authorities. A few influential liberal elites opposed the deportations as well. Constantin Brătianu, head of the outlawed Liberal Party, sent a protest to Antonescu, the SSI reported disquiet among the shadow National Peasant Party, and liberal elites in Bucharest privately bemoaned the policy.¹⁰¹ The Antonescu regime was sensitive to such elite criticism, Gypsy manpower was needed by the army, and unencouraging news from the front led to a temporary halt order in mid-September of further deportations of Gypsies or Jews.

Fall of Sevastopol

When a massive bombardment on Sevastopol began on 2 June, the situation on the front seemed much brighter. While the Mountain Corps had help keep the 106,000 men of the Soviet Independent Coastal Army bottled up, they had not prevented the Soviets from using five months of trench war to reinforce the already formidable defenses, so General von Manstein now faced a maze of bristling warrens, reinforced by natural obstacles, and back by coastal and naval guns. There was no choice but to attack the defenses head on, but von Manstein again had *Luftflotte 4*, recently returned from defeating the Soviet offensive at Kharkov, plus heavy siege howitzers of 305 mm, 350 mm, and 420 mm, and three super-heavy guns – two 600 mm and an 800 mm gun, the world’s largest with a crew of 2,000 it fired just 48 rounds over 13 days. In total, over 600 aircraft and 611 artillery guns were concentrated on a mere 34 km. He had one more advantage,

¹⁰¹ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 289-290; Brătianu pleaded, “They are Orthodox...and play an important economic role in our country...Why all this cruelty? What crime have thy committed, [unlike the Jews of eastern Romania for 1940] these unfortunates? What advantage will result from this expulsion?” see, Filderman, *Memoires and Diaries*, vol. II, 317; on 20 September, she noted in her journal, “Now start the horrors with Gypsies too. Where will we arrive? When will be stop? More and more I feel that we are myopic!” see Voinescu, *Jurnal*, vol I, 500.

German-Romanian troops sensed victory. An increasing number of Soviets deserted to the Axis, Romanian units used many POWs for menial work or to assist officer's orderlies.¹⁰²

General von Manstein departed from his usual practice and placed Romanian units in the center of the German line. He knew Sevastopol could only be seized by taking the hills over the bay across from the city from the north and passing over the old 1854-1855 battlefields from the south, so assigned 1st Mountain and 18th Infantry divisions, with three heavy artillery battalions, to the center. German LIV Corps, including 4th Mountain Division, took the north and German XXX Corps, including a Romanian heavy artillery regiment, took the south.¹⁰³ The assault made steady progress. Romanian troops used "firecrackers," improvised bombs using tires filled with explosives and grenades, which they rolled down onto Red Army positions. They compensated for lack of firepower by infiltrating forward before attacking to limit exposure to fire as much as possible. Infantry-artillery coordination continued to be difficult, due to a shortage of radios and training, and at times infantry attacked without artillery support.¹⁰⁴ The massive bombardments by German guns and aircraft threw so much dust into the air that it darkened the sun, so Sergeant Ionescu wrote that the battle was, "Something like in the Apocalypse."¹⁰⁵

At midnight on 28/29 June, after his troops seized the northern shore of Severnaya Bay, General von Manstein surprised the Soviets with a landing by a hundred assault boats taking the port. The defenses crumbled on the landward side after news of the German penetration into the rear reached the trenches. Stavka ordered evacuation on 30 June. Soviet soldiers tried to escape west down the Chersonese Peninsula, but ships never came for them. Now, with the road open

¹⁰² Orderlies had 1-2 POWs and each combat group had 2-3, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 369.

¹⁰³ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 78-79; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 152.

¹⁰⁴ Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 341, 345, 355-356, 367

¹⁰⁵ Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 101.

to Sevastopol, von Manstein tried to divert the Romanians: sending 1st Mountain Division to clear the southern shore of the peninsula, 18th Infantry Division to fill its place to prevent Soviets from escaping into the mountains to the east, and 4th Mountain Division simply to halt in place. When his German superior offered General Gheorghe Manoliu, commander of 4th Mountain Division, champagne to toast the Soviet collapse he refused. Manoliu declared he had not come to drink champagne outside Sevastopol but inside the city, so von Manstein quickly let his troops join in the final attack on 1 July and they helped clear the city until it was declared secured on 4 July. The final assault captured 60,000 soldiers in Sevastopol, plus 30,000 POWs in the Chersonese peninsula, in exchange for 35,500 Axis casualties, including 9,500 Romanian soldiers.¹⁰⁶

The fall of Sevastopol was a bloody affair. Romanian soldiers wanted revenge for slain comrades during the assault and were convinced that Jews, commissars, and fanatical communist women were responsible for its continued resistance. Sergeant Ionescu noted rumors of a Jewish female soldier firing a mortar after the rest of the crew fled, Soviets shooting Romanian POWs, and the Red Army forcing women and children to fight. Major Scârneci, leading efforts to clear catacombs on in Chersonese peninsula, believed political commissars, fanatics, and “mad, wild women” were shooting Soviet soldiers who wanted to surrender.¹⁰⁷ Romanian soldiers joining the Germans in rounding up Soviet POWs in the city on the peninsula often shot Red Army Jews on the spot¹⁰⁸ The SS began its butchery of remaining Jews in the city soon afterwards. A large number of female soldiers were taken as POWs. 1st Mountain Division separated them from the

¹⁰⁶ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 80-81; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 154-159.

¹⁰⁷ Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 100; Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 371-373.

¹⁰⁸ The Romanians claimed that they were “trying to escape”, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 916, f. 96.

male prisoners in a collective farm turned POW camp where the women seem to have received better treatment, although some may have been raped.¹⁰⁹ After Sevastopol fell, rumors swirled among Romanian soldiers in Crimea that they would finally be rotated home.

Lull before Case Blue

The start of Case Blue, the German summer offensive, meant that more Romanian troops were needed for the front and soldiers were disappointed to learn that they would either stay in Crimea or join in Case Blue. While the Antonescu regime could not send troops home, it still promised that it would care for soldiers' families if they were killed in combat. Antonescu issued an order on 8 July celebrating Lieutenant Ioan Drăgănescu, who was killed outside Sevastopol in December 1941, in which he declared Drăgănescu's nine children would all be cared for by the state. The *Conducător* was trying to motivate troops with the promise of a military welfare state. This promise was not just rhetoric. Antonescu established special military schools for orphans of men killed in combat, who were to become a new military elite after the war, and increased state financial aid to soldiers' families to keep up with inflation¹¹⁰ Patriotism, anti-communism, hope for a better post-war Romania, and fear of "Judeo-Bolshevism" kept soldiers motivated.

General Avramescu reported a strange phenomenon in June. Beginning in February 1942 a trickle of soldiers arrived in Crimea asking to be assigned to the front, with 45 in March alone, and by August an estimated total of 200-300 soldiers.¹¹¹ A few were stragglers from the battles around Kharkov rounded up by gendarmes, but most came from the 1st Fortification Division and turned themselves in willingly. This division used to build defenses, first in Bessarabia in 1939,

¹⁰⁹ He claimed that they soon became friends, see, Scârneci, *Viața și moarte din linia întai*, 374.

¹¹⁰ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 880, f. 95, 257; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1044, f. 37.

¹¹¹ Ibid., dosar 855, f. 54, 277, 235; dosar 856, f. 198.

then in Moldavia in 1940, and now in Transnistria near Odessa. The conditions in this glorified construction unit were particularly bad. General Dăscălescu took officers in the 1st Fortification Division to task because they were neglecting soldiers, leaving them unsupervised day and night, while they found more comfortable quarters.¹¹² When they turned up in Crimea, the troops cited violent officers and NCOs, verbal abuse, and squalid conditions to explain deserting to the front. A few had tried to patriotically volunteer for the front, instead of sitting out final victory digging trenches, but many were probably attracted by news of better rations in Crimea.¹¹³ Avramescu decided to not to question his luck and assigned them to units in Crimea. He needed every man to clear catacombs, patrol mountain roads, and guard the coasts from Soviet landings.

During the final assault on Sevastopol, Third Army obsessed over securing the rear in Transnistria. Third Army Section II reported on 12 June that it was convinced 20,000 young Jewish men were still hiding in Odessa and questioned the reliability of 10,000 Soviet workers. It accused municipal police of being “[effectively] nonexistent, thieves, and Judaized” who helped “camouflage” Jews in exchange for bribes. Odessa Military Command reported on 20 June that only 1,950 former Communist Party members turned up when required to register, 30 percent of whom were working for the Government of Transnistria. A few Jewish women, children, and elderly presented themselves too. Third Army Section II argued the low numbers were proof of civil servants’ corruption and efforts to hid “Jewish-Communists.”¹¹⁴ These attacks had some

¹¹² He threatened to court martial officers and NCOs, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 369, f. 399; dosar 511, f. 59.

¹¹³ The Mountain Corps began receiving rations from the Germans in February that included higher quality, greater quantity, and more variety of foodstuffs. Mountain Corps reported that troops soon “got used to” these rations, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 855, f. 208; dosar 856, f. 40, 114, 132, 198; the quantity was such that Avramescu held back some and used sugar candy as emergency rations, see, dosar 550, f. 51-53, 510, 517, 524, 668-669.

¹¹⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1236, f. 775, the army used an embarrassing case of a police commissar who was found to have a Jew working in his office to sully the reputation of civilian functionaries, see, f. 776-778.

validity as black-market activities increased in 1942, especially with bumper crops in Romania. The Chișinău Gendarme Inspectorate blamed the Cernăuți Gendarme Inspectorate for contraband flowing across the Dniester, arguing it came from the Cernăuți ghetto where an estimated 21,000 Jews worked in factories. Soldiers of the 4th Bridge Company were caught smuggling goods and medicine, possibly with help from officers who got a cut of profits.¹¹⁵ Black-market activity was too profitable for soldiers, gendarmes, or civil servants to resist, but it fed officers' paranoia that Jews and partisans were a major threat. Raids, deportations, and executions continued.

Summer Offensive: June-August 1942

Case Blue planned for a large Romanian contribution to Army Group South. Third Army initially had operational command of I (2nd Mountain and German 298th Infantry divisions) and Cavalry corps. Additional Echelon II units were to arrive later. Lieutenant Dumitru Teodorescu recalled a celebratory atmosphere in mid-July when 2nd Mountain Division, the first Echelon II unit mobilized, left for the front. The train station in Deva was crowded with people to see off the men with flowers and well-wishes, "All are faithful troops [with a] single desire: to vanquish [the enemy]!" But on one occasion such a farewell was marred when soldiers fired off rifles and panicked civilians.¹¹⁶ They were transported by train most of the way but had to march the last several hundred kilometers to Rostov to join in Case Blue. This was only the first of many long marches, German officers praised the marching ability of Romanian troops, and Teodorescu was proud of "our pedestrian engines."¹¹⁷ Already on the front, VI Corps followed 1st Panzer Army's attack across the Donets River on 22 June to seize better jumping off positions before Case Blue

¹¹⁵ Ibid., dosar 1236, f. 888; Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 210-221.

¹¹⁶ Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte*, 68; Fond CMC, dosar 807, f. 464.

¹¹⁷ Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte*, 72.

officially started six days later. VI Corps stayed on the defensive until 7 July when it followed 4th Panzer Army, marching 25-30 km a day, rounding a measly 3,100 POWs along the way, until it reached the Don River on 27 July, where it defended the Tsimlyansk bridgehead.¹¹⁸ All its effort was in vain because Case Blue failed to encircle and destroy large Soviet forces.¹¹⁹

German High Command split Army Group South and relaunched Case Blue in late-July. Army Group A had the primary goal of attacking into the Caucasus to seize its oil fields. Third Army would support this attack, but lost operational control of I Corps, leaving only the Cavalry Corps, although it was reinforced with two extra heavy artillery regiments, a scout group, and a pioneer battalion. Army Group B had a secondary mission to protect the flank by attacking east to seize Stalingrad on the Volga River. VI Corps would support this attack.¹²⁰ Army Group A, supplied with almost all available fuel and aircraft, began Operation Edelweiss on July 26 and its attack south from Rostov broke through quickly. Army Group B, which had launched Operation Heron several days before, was now robbed of fuel and stalled. After Army Group B fought off Soviet counterattacks and received fuel it advanced. VI Corps marched east in the wake of the 14th Panzer and 29th Motorized divisions, advancing 130 km, to guard bridgeheads and flanks.

In the Caucasus, General Dumitrescu pushed the Cavalry Corps hard in pursuit. The 5th Cavalry Division snaked its way down to clear the Azov Sea coast, taking Yeysk and Primorsko-Akhtarsk on 9 and 11 August, each port was skillfully defended by Soviet marines before being evacuated by sea. The 6th and 9th Cavalry divisions, now joined by the Korne Detachment from Crimea, advanced with the Franc Mechanized Detachment driving straight on the Kuban River to

¹¹⁸ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 83-84; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 167-168.

¹¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of the four-phased plan, see, Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 156-165, 223.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 224-227; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 170.

cut off the Taman Peninsula. The Soviets made a stand on the Kuban at Slavianskaia. A mixed German-Romanian force took the city on 11 August. The Romanians took 600 POWs, but after two soldiers were shot by snipers in the town the cavalrymen executed 50 civilians.¹²¹ General Racovița ordered 5th Cavalry Division, tired from its port hopping, to guard bank of the Kuban, while he regrouped his two other divisions to attack the port of Temryuk. Dumitrescu thought Racovița was taking too long, so on 19 August he sent his chief of staff General Ioan Arbore to organize an immediate attack to take the port and let Axis troops cross from Crimea. The two generals butted heads. The Soviet marines made a stand, inflicted heavy losses, and it took five days to take the port – Arbore and Racovița pointed blame at the other.¹²²

Only a week into the offensive, the German High Command decided that the Caucasus was an operational dead end and switched the main effort to seizing Stalingrad. On 7 August, a refueled Army Group B attacked east and quickly encircled and destroyed parts of two Soviet armies on 8-10 August at Kalach. Now with the path clear it raced east and reached the Volga on 23 August. VI Corps trudged forward another 400 km. In the Caucasus, the Cavalry Corps crossed the Kuban on 27 August attacking southwest to clear the coast to protect the flank of the German lunge for the oil fields at Maikop farther east begun 4 August. The Korne Detachment reached the Black Sea at Anapa on 31 August, taking the port off the march, after turning Soviet heavy artillery on the port. German High Command could not support Army Group B's attack

¹²¹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 81-82; Fond Documentar, dosar 8178, f. 48, 258.

¹²² Racovița wrote to Pantazi and blamed Dumitrescu for being out of touch, giving unrealistic orders, and sending Arbore who made a mess of the attack. He wanted any investigation to blame the losses on Dumitrescu, see, Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 639, f. 169-178; Dumitrescu defended himself and blame Racovița for making the same old mistakes as in previous battles. His accusations against Cavalry Corps are contradictory saying it both attacked off the march too quickly and gave the Soviets too much time to regroup to set up defenses. As an artilleryman, he also blamed the infantry for lack of skill and not giving the artillery accurate information, see, f. 209-215.

towards Stalingrad and Army Group A's advance in the Caucasus, so the farther it went the less fuel, ammunition, supplies, and aircraft it had.¹²³ It also began to lose Romanian units.

Fall of Stalemate: September to November 1942

Case Blue initially electrified Romanians. Antonescu and the General Staff were slightly less credulous of German propaganda than the year before, but not by much. Regardless of what they believed, they had little choice but to provide German High Command as many soldiers as possible. The survival of the Antonescu regime, holding onto eastern Romania and Transnistria, and the return of northern Transylvania were tied to a Soviet defeat. The deceptively successful offensives by Army Group A and Army Group B kept the faith of most Romanian officers and soldiers in German invincibility. One last effort before final victory seemed possible. General Șteflea reactivated the General Headquarters on 8 August and traveled to Rostov to coordinate a massive deployment of Echelon II units. On 20 August, Hitler dangled the prize of resurrecting Army Group Antonescu after the fall of Stalingrad before the *Conducător*.¹²⁴

The Romanian forces at Stalingrad began with Echelon I units. General Hermann Hoth, commander of Fourth Panzer Army, placed VI Corps to cover his front at Tinguta, south of the city, to free up his panzers to swing north and link up with German Sixth Army to create a front just west of Stalingrad. A Soviet attack on 5 September momentarily knocked the Germans off balance, allowing Soviet forces to organize a defense of Stalingrad despite intense bombing by the Luftwaffe, but General Friedrich Paulus soon organized an assault. Within a week German Sixth Army cut off General Vasily Chuikov's Sixty-Second Army in the city. On 13 September

¹²³ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 246-247, 233-237.

¹²⁴ An obvious ploy, but Hitler also wanted his steady influence, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 84.

launched a new assault to overrun Stalingrad, but it soon degenerated into a multitude of nasty battles on bombed-out streets that provided perfect cover for Red Army troops.¹²⁵ As Stalingrad sucked in German Sixth Army, Army Group B required more Romanian soldiers for its flanks.

During September, the General Headquarters deployed another army from Romania and transferred soldiers from other fronts. At Rostov, it funneled Echelon II units from Romania to the Don, and ordered a few available Echelon I units, the 5th Cavalry and 18th Infantry divisions from the Caucasus and Crimea, to reinforce VI Corps, although it took until October before they arrived. On 16 September, General Șteflea ordered General Dumitrescu to transfer Third Army headquarters to the Don, leaving behind the Cavalry Corps which was subordinated to German operational control. Before these forces arrived, VI Corps had to stretch itself over 60 km of the Kalmuk steppe south of Stalingrad. VI Corps' line was east of a series of lakes oriented north-south, but a Soviet attack on 29 September inflicted heavy losses on VI Corps and pushed it back to the lakes. Subsequently, Fourth Panzer Army sent the German 14th Infantry Division to take over part of the VI Corps line allowing it to hold the line through October.¹²⁶ On October 10, after enough Echelon II units arrived, Third Army took over a section of front west of Stalingrad on the bank of the Don from German Sixth Army and Italian Eighth Army. Dumitrescu's forces included I, II, IV, and V corps, comprising eight infantry and two cavalry divisions, and totaled 171,000 men.¹²⁷ General Headquarters could not supply these troops, so Army Group B under General Maximilian von Weichs was to provide ammunition, supplies, and other materials.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 248-251.

¹²⁶ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 212; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 85.

¹²⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 86; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 188.

¹²⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1416, f. 169.

Soldiers arrived on the front after a long train ride, officers in third class passenger cars and soldiers often in cattle cars with just hay or benches, and a long march from the railhead at Mariupol.¹²⁹ During the march to the front, whenever Romanian soldiers stopped for a break or to rest for the night local villagers would bring babes, children, and even youths up to 15 years old to be baptized by the chaplain or even by lay soldiers. Romanian soldiers saw this as proof of local piety and their crusade against “godless communism,” but Soviet peasants had a material motive too. Soviet civilians knew Romanian officers and soldiers, like good godfathers, would provide some sort of baptismal gift, even if it was just a small amount of food or soap. Captain Dumitru Păsat, a company commander in the 991st Independent Infantry Battalion that was the first of three battalions sent to the Don from Sărata Training Camp, baptized at least ten on his way to the front and christened them with the names of his loved ones at home.¹³⁰ After a long march, periodically harassed by Soviet aircraft, soldiers were thrown into battle on the Don.

October was a grueling month of positional warfare between Romanian and Soviet troops battling over small hills on German Sixth Army’s flanks. The details of the fighting on the Don can be summed up as an attritional battle akin to the First World War, but with Soviet tanks and aircraft opening the way for infantry to seize key positions. Third Army’s Echelon II forces on the Don were fresh and rearmed, but in mid-October the Red Army began strong probing attacks from the Serafimovich and Kletskaya bridgeheads over the Don that mauled divisions. Captain Păsat records that in his sector there was a military cemetery 200 m long and 50 m wide where

¹²⁹ Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitanului Dumitru Păsat*, 65; being treated as second class travelers on trains was a constant complaint by Romanian soldiers, in July 1942 a soldier said, “We Romanian soldiers are only good enough for Sevastopol, Kerch, Kharkov, but [not for] rapid trains that we don’t have permission to use, even while for German soldiers special wagons are attached [to the train],” see Fond Armata 4-a, 1243, f. 68.

¹³⁰ Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitanului Dumitru Păsat*, 77-78.

German and Italian dead from earlier battles lay buried in either end. Over the next month the empty area in the middle, which troops nicknamed “Cernăianu’s neighborhood” after the colonel that ordered them to retake hills lost to the Soviets, began to fill up with the crosses of Romanian dead.¹³¹ Romanian soldiers, veterans of Odessa, resented these casualties because they knew attacks were doomed to fail because they could not overcome firepower by sheer force of will, but determined to defend they dug in to neutralize Soviet firepower.

VI Corps position on the Kalmuk steppe was worse and despite being engaged longer its veteran troops showed no signs of cracking. It desperately needed reinforcement, however, since 1st and 2nd Infantry divisions had been fighting the longest, some battalions were down to 39-45 percent strength, and 4th and 20th Infantry divisions, which had been engaged slightly less, were marginally better with battalions down to 57-63.¹³² On 22 October, Antonescu complained to Hitler that Army Group B did not consider that Romanian divisions on the Don, and especially the Kalmuk steppe, were short of manpower, firepower, and material – he highlighted that the 4th Infantry Division was required to hold 60 km of front.¹³³ German High Command offered only vague assurances. On 31 October, the 5th and 8th Cavalry divisions arrived battle worn from the Caucasus and Crimea and formed VII Corps, which took over the southern part of VI Corps’ line during 1-12 November. This shortened VI Corps’ front, it was reinforced with the 18th Infantry Division, but meant it had 82,000 soldiers to feed and supply with ammunition.¹³⁴

Third Army faced a constant threat from the Kletskaya and Serafimovich bridgeheads on the Don. General Dumitrescu asked Army Group B to help him destroy the bridgeheads once he

¹³¹ Ibid., 103-104.

¹³² Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1332, f. 70-72.

¹³³ Arimiae, *Antonescu-Hitler*, Vol. I, 189-190.

¹³⁴ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 85.

took over the position, but the General von Weichs did not have soldiers to spare and knew that the Red Army had held the bridgeheads against previous German or Italian attacks – so doubted the Romanians could succeed. The Germans assigned the Romanians part of the rear to exploit to feed their troops. 2nd Lieutenant Alexandru Teodorescu-Schei was sent to a village south of the Don for requisitioning. After being attacked by partisans on the way, he took an enlightened approach to try to keep his throat from being cut in the night and sat down with the local Cossack mayor who told him there nothing was left to take. Teodorescu-Schei worried seizing anything would drive the Cossacks to the partisans. He asked General Nicolae Mazarini, commander of 5th Infantry Division, not to order reprisals before first consulting him, “Because of a murdered officer in Rostov, a whole street of men, women, and children were executed [weeks earlier]. An action of this type produces a reaction of hatred, creating in the rear a permanent festering source [*focar*] of revenge, not useful to an army of occupation.”¹³⁵ There was little on the barren steppe around Stalingrad as everything of value had either been evacuated by the Soviets or taken by the Germans before the arrival of Third Army. Priest Octavian Friciu reported that on the Kalmuk steppe there were even fewer villages, and that many locals were Buddhists uninterested in his spiritual ministering. He acted as a propagandist, “standing to speak with soldiers giving them nerve [*îmbărbătându-i*] and encouraging them” against “pagan fanaticism.”¹³⁶ Dumitrescu’s rear was chaotic. Partisans attacked, hungry Soviet villagers simply tried to survive, and Romanian deserters or stragglers lived like vagabonds. A soldier from the 991st Independent Battalion was

¹³⁵ Alexandru Teodorescu-Schei, *Învins și învingător: 1941-1949, Campania din est și prizonieratul* (Bucharest: Editura Allfa s.r.l., 1998), 50-52.

¹³⁶ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1578, dosar 300, c. 203-213.

shot by a Cossack, a policeman previously armed by the Germans, while breaking into a house to rape or steal.¹³⁷ While things in the rear were confused the situation on the front was hellish.

Soviet pressure on the Don continued into November. The trenches left by Italian and German soldiers were shallow and incomplete. Third Army had few materials to improve them, ground grew increasingly more difficult to dig as the days got colder, and what supplies it did receive were used to construct command posts. All of this was made harder because Romanian units were constantly bombarded by artillery. Romanian troops grew adept at destroying tanks without anti-tank guns during Soviet probing attacks that occurred a several times each week. Captain Păsat records that tank hunting became a hobby for soldiers motivated by the promise of promotion and a month of leave for each tank destroyed.¹³⁸ Third Army faced shortages of all kinds. V Corps complained the bread ration had been cut, some soldiers were reduced to eating boiled wheat or rye, mail arrived infrequently, soldiers again lacked winter gear, few newspapers were delivered, radios were in short supply (V Corps suggested that radios in Romania should be requisitioned not just from Jews but Christians as well), and financial aid to soldiers' families too little.¹³⁹ Ammunition was in increasingly short supply. As the weather grew colder, Romanian commanders squabbled over who got towns to use for headquarters and the materials in them.¹⁴⁰ At the end of October, Gerneral Dumitrescu wrote several detailed reports on the Third Army on the Don. He recognized the Soviets had only carried out local attacks that should have favored the defenders and resulted in heavy Soviet casualties, but instead it was the Romanians who were

¹³⁷ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1046, f. 10, 74, 399.

¹³⁸ Magnetic mines were disliked by Romanian tank hunters since they exploded too quickly and burst eardrums or blinded eyes of those who wielded them, see, Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitanului Dumitru Păsat*, 93-94.

¹³⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1138, f. 13.

¹⁴⁰ General Headquarters had to step in and act as Solomon at times, see, Ibid., dosar 1299, f. 136.

taking heavy losses. Dumitrescu blamed a shortage of shelters and trenches, poorly prepared fire plans – exacerbated by a shortage of radios and reliance on telephone communication – failing to concentrate artillery fire in support of the infantry, poorly trained infantry who attacked without properly using the terrain, and insufficient “patriotic education.” He believed (mistakenly) many soldiers were throwing away weapons or deserting, so he threatened to punish officers who took losses over 25 percent. Dumitrescu’s reports show that these Echelon II units had not improved on their performance much since Odessa, training and professionalism remained limited, and the shortages of modern weapons and equipment meant Third Army was fighting a First World War defense against a Second World War offense.¹⁴¹

By the end of October, General Headquarters began losing faith that Stalingrad would fall soon and prepared for a Soviet winter counteroffensive. In Crimea, General Avramescu already had ordered his soldiers guarding coasts to be extra vigilant at the beginning of the month, so that they would not be taken by surprise as they had been in 1941.¹⁴² The Black Sea Fleet, despite its decrepit condition and exile to distant ports in the Caucasus, was still a great concern at General Headquarters. Mountain Corps assured it that the partisan movement in Crimea was now “non-existent” due to previous “radical measures,” the local Tatars and Russians seemed happy, and the destruction of the Jewish population meant that there was little concern about a fifth column uprising.¹⁴³ General Constantin Constantinescu-Claps, whose Fourth Army headquarters was preparing to take operational control of VI and VII corps on the Kalmuk steppe, warned to his commanders in mid-October to be on guard against partisans, parachutists, and infiltrators.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1299, 146-147, 163-165.

¹⁴² Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 888, f. 34-37.

¹⁴³ Ibid., dosar 951, f. 46.

¹⁴⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1335, f. 46-50.

The longer Stalingrad stood against German Sixth Army's onslaught, the greater doubts grew among Romanian (and German) soldiers about a final victory against the USSR.

While their comrades stood on the defensive outside Stalingrad, Romanian soldiers with Army Group A advanced deeper into the Caucasus. In early hours of 2 September, Axis forces crossed the Kerch straits, a Romanian infantry company with German pioneers landed on Kossat Tusla island halfway across the narrow body of water, allowing German and Romanian troops to take the Taman peninsula and link up with Axis forces in Kuban.¹⁴⁵ Soon German V Corps, with General Racovița's Cavalry Corps, attacked Novorossiysk. Before transferred to Stalingrad, the 5th Cavalry Division helped storm the port at Novorossiysk. Outside the city, an ambush killed Colonel Carp, commander of 7th Roșori Regiment blamed for ordering the creation of "execution squads" in June 1941. His cavalrymen shot 15-20 Soviet POWs in revenge.¹⁴⁶ Soviet defenses stiffened Novorossiysk never completely fell. 1st and 4th Mountain divisions remained in Crimea carrying out occupation duties, but 2nd and 3rd Mountain divisions were brought from Romania to fight in the Caucasus. 3rd Mountain Division continued down the coast trying to take the port of Gelendzhik as part of a German effort to force the forested mountains protecting the coast before being halted at the end of September. 2nd Mountain Division advanced eastwards, playing a part in taking Nalchik on the way towards Grozny, one of the last successes of Army Group B. The German advance slowed to a crawl and a Soviet counterattack on 6 November ended the dream of seizing the rich oil fields of the Caucasus.¹⁴⁷ Corporal Cârlan, a radio operator in 38th Infantry Regiment with the 19th Infantry Division under the Cavalry Corps on the front in the Caucasus,

¹⁴⁵ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 237; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1299, f. 7-8, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 82; Fond Documentar, dosar 4098, f. 48.

¹⁴⁷ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 240-243; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 82-83.

noted the richness of the land in his diary on 8 November, but complained that “the women here – as in all of the USSR – are very depraved and lazy.” He threatened the woman he was staying with for not cleaning well enough, and the soldiers had to spend one night off and one night on guard because “we must keep our eyes peeled, since there are partisans here too.”¹⁴⁸

In early November, General Headquarters worried about morale of soldiers outside of Stalingrad. General Dumitrescu fretted that outer signs of discipline, such as dress, salutes, and soldierly comportment, were slipping. Section II reports of soldiers’ conversations with defeatist sentiments were more concerning with comments like Germany will lose the war because of its losses and Soviet growing strength, Romania will not receive northern Transylvania and lose the rest of it, and reports of severe shortages at home. Romanian generals blamed demoralization on “kikes, Polish refugees, and [their] henchmen.”¹⁴⁹ General Headquarters ordered commanders to increase propaganda efforts. Dumitrescu reiterated orders that officers stay with their men in the trenches, commanders should visit the front often, and soldiers be reminded of consequences if they deserted (execution, financial aid cut off to families, and confiscation of soldier’s property). He believed Echelon I soldiers who had been on the front longer “appear[ed] much better” than newly arrived Echelon II soldiers who showed “apathy” and “lack of motivation” [*tragere de inima*]. Dumitrescu complained they attacked without *élan* and halted at the first enemy fire.¹⁵⁰ The veterans were proud of being on the front for so long and due to experience fought better than soldiers who had been demobilized after Odessa and spent their time farming. A IV Corps report complained that poorly trained infantry expected the artillery to do most of the work and a

¹⁴⁸ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 36.

¹⁴⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 881, f. 6-7; Corpul de Munte, dosar 951, f. 73.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., dosar 1299, f. 211, 224-225.

few mortar units held their fire during attacks to avoid revealing their positions to the Soviets and being bombarded themselves.¹⁵¹ Soviet firepower dominated Third Army. Dumitrescu worried a spike in the number of missing reported after battles signaled demoralization, however, many “missing” soldiers were later reported killed, evacuated wounded, or mixed in with other units.¹⁵² Poor training, lack of modern equipment, and supply shortages combined with lessons learned at Odessa about Soviet firepower did affect morale.

Soviet resistance at Stalingrad probably convinced the Antonescu regime to halt plans to collaborate with the SS in deporting Jews to death camps in Poland. In a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 13 October, Mihai Antonescu announced that his temporary halt order from mid-September was now a permanent halt order of all deportations to Transnistria. This was a drastic reversal of the policy up until that point. Yet with the German offensive clearly stalled it seemed that the best-case scenario was another winter of trench warfare on the Eastern Front. If the Nazi and Soviet giants became locked in a stalemate, a negotiated end to the war seemed possible, so the Antonescu regime wanted to keep its options open and international opinion would matter in peace talks. In September diplomats from the United States and Switzerland both protested the treatment of Jews in Transnistria. The General Staff was not involved in negotiations between Ritcher and Lecca about deporting Jews west of the Prut but reports from the front significantly influenced the decision of the Antonescu regime to not commit to sending Jews to Poland.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ It also blamed distance from Romania for poor morale, see, Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 191.

¹⁵² General Dăscălescu, commanding II Corps, pointed out in a report on 13 November that initial casualty figures were often wrong, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1299, f. 216-217.

¹⁵³ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 291-298; David Cesarani, *Becoming Eichman: Rethinking the Life, Crimes, and Trial of a “Desk Murder,”* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2004), 137, 152.

Romanian soldiers had to put their trust in another German military miracle because the situation on the front was dire. On 9 November, after inspecting VI Corps, a Romanian colonel reported there were almost no anti-tank ditches, only a few thousand mines, barely 30 percent of the trench system was finished, only command posts and artillery positions had concrete shelters and emplacements, and particularly worryingly the lakes that had acted as an obstacle were now freezing and would support soldiers or tanks.¹⁵⁴ Luftwaffe reconnaissance reported a build-up of Soviet forces on the Don. German Sixth Army expected local attacks against Third Army but ignored General Hoth's warnings about a growing Soviet threat to VI and VII corps.¹⁵⁵ On 14 November, General Pantazi issued an order communicated only to officers that called attention to "defeatist currents in the interior that have no other purpose but the conscious disintegration of national solidarity and army discipline." He ordered officers to provide energetic leadership and unwavering support to soldiers to maintain discipline.¹⁵⁶ Two days later, the first snow fell at Stalingrad, and Third Army reported German supply trains were failing to arrive. This growing supply crisis affected VI and VII Corps worst and no trains arrived during 7-17 November.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Romanian commanders could be forgiven for feeling a bit of déjà vu by November 1942. They had advanced, endured scorching heat and choking dust, suffered heavy losses, combated partisans, and executed "Jewish-Communists," but they were again stuck in trenches facing an implacable enemy as winter approached. The General Staff had weeded out senior officers who

¹⁵⁴ Fond Armata 4-a, 1273, f. 173-175.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 1273, f. 173-175; Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 230, 232.

¹⁵⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 881, f. 19.

¹⁵⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 85; in desperation Fourth Army asked for supplies and materials be brought from warehouses in Rostov or even as far as Romania, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1273, f. 156-161, 163-167, 169.

doubted in victory or were unwilling to push their men to the limit, however, even dedicated men like General Dumitrescu realized Third Army's situation was desperate. A sense of foreboding grew among the Romanian commanders on the Don and on the Kalmuk steppe. German liaisons passed along increasingly alarmist reports from Third Army. Third Army Section II was sure the Soviet counteroffensive would come on 8 November, anniversary of the October Revolution, but the date came and went without incident.¹⁵⁸ Just maybe the Soviets had no strategic reserves for another winter counter offensive and the Germans were on the cusp of taking Stalingrad.

The Romanian Army had continued to carry out atrocities throughout 1942. Wherever it in the USSR Jews, civilians, and POWs were massacred. The winter crisis of 1941-42 resulted in a period of genocidal murder in collaboration with the SS in certain areas of Transnistria, and mass death from starvation, cold, and disease elsewhere, which was the peak of the Holocaust in Romania. Soldiers' motivation did not stop at the Dniester. They continued to fight committedly, even in terrible conditions, and provided the SS support for the "Final Solution" whenever asked. Third Army pressured the Government of Transnistria to continue harsh treatment of Jews. The stalemate in the fall of 1942 acted as a break on plans by the Antonescu regime to deport Jews to Poland. In November 1942, the Romanian Army still believed that the war might be won, and that Stalingrad might fall, although on 20 October the General Headquarters quietly dissolved the Army Group Antonescu headquarters it had set up because Stalingrad did not fall and the at the time the *Conducător* was too ill to command. A Soviet winter counteroffensive shattered Army Group B, including Third and Fourth armies, but did not break Romanian soldiers' motivation.

¹⁵⁸ Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 230.

CHAPTER VIII

PROPAGANDA, EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION, AND MORALE

During the Second World War, the Antonescu regime – like every belligerent state – did not trust in intrinsic motivation alone to keep officers and soldiers fighting, so the General Staff actively worked to reinforce the motivation of Romanian officers and soldiers through various extrinsic means. This chapter will show that extrinsic motivation (propaganda, coercion, and remuneration) played a supporting role in sustaining combat motivation of soldiers on the front. Propaganda was used extensively, and the General Staff believed that it also could improve the morale of soldiers, thus motivation. Morale is not motivation, however, while morale fluctuated, motivation remained sound. The threat of coercion was used much more than actual coercion, and remuneration was indirect. Extrinsic motivation played a minor role in sustaining atrocity motivation, and the influence it exerted was indirect. Propaganda was the most important factor helping to sustain atrocity motivation, but only pointed out previously accepted threats. Officers and soldiers decided to make the leap from alleged threats to murder of Jews, partisans, POWs, or civilians. Coercion played essentially no role in atrocity motivation, and any form of personal remuneration from the murder of Jews was illicit. Intrinsic motivation is the primary explanation as to why Romanian soldiers continued to fight, but extrinsic motivation helped.

Propaganda had several main themes: “holy war,” the defense of European civilization, anti-communism, and German-Romanian “brotherhood of arms.”¹ The army’s military justice system was old-fashioned, still based on corporal punishment to enforce discipline, and in times

¹ Mioara Anton, *Propagandă și Război, 1941-1944* (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2007), 116.

of crisis threatened capital punishment, but executions were relatively rare. The General Staff initiated a policy of rehabilitation to give deserters and criminals a chance to redeem themselves in battle. Lastly, material rewards were used to motivate. Remuneration took on many forms: promise of land grants, discounted sale of expropriated Jewish property, and even cash prizes. Illicit looting of Jewish and Soviet property was another material motivation, but the Antonescu regime wanted such spoils for the state. The General Staff attempted to shore up motivation, and morale, of Romanian soldiers through these means between June 1941 and August 1944.

The importance of these extrinsic motivators should not be overemphasized. The use of propaganda and its prioritization by the Antonescu regime does not mean that Romanian officers and soldiers lacked motivation or did not understand why they were fighting. For the most part, official propaganda simply confirmed pre-existing beliefs and biases of troops. Coercion played a minor role in combat motivation and no role in atrocity motivation. Aside from self-serving testimony of officers and soldiers, claiming they were following orders or were threatened if they did not cooperate, there is no proof that anyone was ever punished for refusing to murder Jews.² Officers did use the threat of punishment to deter soldiers from aiding Jews to avoid or escape persecution.³ Coercion was primarily used to enforce discipline in the rear. While discipline in the Romanian Army was strict, it was far less murderous than in the Wehrmacht or Red Army. The policy of rehabilitation had mixed success in motivating soldiers in combat. Remuneration was an ancillary motivator, although the Antonescu regime threatened denying financial aid to soldiers' families to motivate may have had some effect.

² Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 172.

³ The German Army had a similar problem with growing indiscipline, on an even greater scale, and also turned to increasingly harsh punishments to restore discipline in units, see, Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 63-64.

Propaganda

In the Second World War, all governments (democratic, fascist, communist, or otherwise authoritarian) fashioned various systems to control and direct the production of propaganda. The Romanian state first practiced disseminating propaganda on a mass scale during the First World War, but after the war it focused limited resources on propaganda abroad to aid its diplomats in legitimizing *România Mare*. Romania became embroiled in propaganda battles in capitals across Europe over territorial claims, primarily with the Soviets in the 1920s, then with the Hungarians in the 1930s.⁴ Despite calls by the SSI to create a separate ministry to coordinate these efforts, propaganda remained a sub-secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 3 October 1939 when King Carol II ordered the creation of a centralized ministry for propaganda, but it was disbanded less than a year later on 20 September 1940 by Antonescu after the king's exile. The National Legionary government made Alexandru Constant, editor of the Legionary newspaper *Buna Vestire*, or *The Good News*, the Sub-Secretary of Propaganda until January 1941.

On 30 April 1941, Mihai Antonescu re-established the Ministry of National Propaganda. The Antonescu regime modeled it on Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda in Nazi Germany. Alexandru Marcu, an intellectual chosen for his Italian contacts, was officially Minister of Propaganda, but as Vice-President of the Council of Ministers Mihai Antonescu constantly involved himself in matters of propaganda. In September 1940, Mihai Antonescu stated that his goal was to centrally control the press so that "all journals attack at the same time the same problem. This is how it works in Germany."⁵ His success in realizing this

⁴ Nicolae Ureche, *Propaganda Externă a României Mari, 1918-1940* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2015), 215.

⁵ Ciucă, *Stenogramele ședințelor consiliului de miniștri guvernarea Ion Antonescu, Vol. I*, 57.

goal is debatable. The Ministry of National Propaganda had serious problems: disorganization, confused institutional structure, poorly trained staff, and departments replicating efforts. Mihai Antonescu tried to raise standards, increase funding, and improve coordination of propaganda.⁶ The Ministry of National Propaganda trumpeted Mihai Antonescu's speeches on "holy war," but it would be mistaken to depict his rhetoric as merely cynical propaganda that was foisted upon a skeptical public to justify an unpopular war. While Mihai Antonescu may not have believed the "holy war" rhetoric he pushed, as some assert, it reflected the existing consensus of society.

Mihai Antonescu had little difficulty in directing the Romanian press because he found many willing propagandists among Romanian journalists, authors, and academics who had long espoused nationalist, pro-Orthodox, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist views. There were a great number of right-wing and anti-Semitic mouthpieces dating back to before the First World War. In the 1930s as the populist right wing emerged a whole host of new nationalist and anti-Semitic publications began to be published, with titles like: *Pământul strămoșesc*, or *The Ancestral Land*; *Garda Moldovei*, or *The Guard of Moldova*; *Calendarul*, or *The Calendar*.⁷ Beginning under the two-month Goga government, the state increased censorship and shut down left-wing papers, especially those that were Jewish-owned or had Jewish editors, such as *Adevărul*, or *The Truth*; *Lupta*, or *The Struggle*; and *Dimineața*, or *The Morning*. The Goga government believed that Jews had an unwarranted influence over the national press and official reports in 1938 claimed that a quarter of all journalists were Jews.⁸ After Carol II declared his royal dictatorship he also shut down Liberal and National Peasant presses, so the only press still functioning in Romania

⁶ Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 72, 10.

⁷ Eaton, *The Origins and Onset of the Romanian Holocaust*, 22; Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 121-126.

⁸ Filderman, *Memoirs and Diaries*, Vol. 1, 494; Bolitho, *Roumania under King Carol*, 42.

was center- or far-right. After the Soviet ultimatum in 1940, however, center-right newspapers, including the two most popular *Universul*, or *The Universe*, and *Curentul*, or *The Daily*, carried inflammatory anti-Semitic stories.⁹ The Antonescu regime maintained the bans initiated by King Carol II, so those who tried to criticize Antonescu, his pro-German foreign policy, or the conduct of the war after 1941 could do so only by surreptitiously circulating letters by hand to trusted friends and other like-minded elites.¹⁰ After 1941, with few exceptions, the Romanian press followed the lead of the German press in its reportage of events on the front.¹¹

The General Staff created and distributed its own propaganda. Section II-Intelligence initially had an office called the Propaganda Service that busied itself with collecting, producing, and distributing propaganda materials to soldiers. On 1 December 1941, the Propaganda Service was elevated to an independent, co-equal part of the General Staff and renamed the Propaganda Section. The permanent staff of the Propaganda Section numbered 45 officers and NCOs who worked in Bucharest, except for one representative respectively in Cernăuți and Chișinău, and three in Odessa. In addition to its office staff, the Propaganda Section had at least 17 various types of propaganda groups carrying out activity on the front and in occupied territories.¹² These included two- or three-man photo/journalist teams, film crews, mobile cinemas, theatre groups, loudspeakers, and the Army Choir. The resources of the Propaganda Section were limited, but as the Romanian Army advanced into the USSR the Germany Army provided it additional material,

⁹ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 161-162; these papers were so anti-Semitic that Ancel has claimed that its editors were paid by the Nazi Party, which seems unlikely, see, Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 63.

¹⁰ Hollingworth, *There's A German Just Behind Me*, 188.

¹¹ David Stahel, *Kiev 1941: Hitler's Battle for Supremacy in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 270.

¹² AMR, Fond Secția Propaganda, dosar 51, f. 21-22; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1173, f. 16.

personnel, and funds – especially in Crimea where the two forces shared occupation duties and worked closely for over two years. The Propaganda Section did all it could to reach the troops.

Radio theoretically offered the Romanian Army the chance to influence every soldier, the General Staff had advocated more robust radio propaganda to combat Soviet efforts since 1927, but radio receivers were in short supply on the Eastern Front.¹³ On 1 May 1941, there were only 116 radio receivers in the whole army, far from sufficient for propaganda needs, so on 7 June the General Staff requested units to be equipped down to the battalion level with 900 radios recently confiscated from Jews.¹⁴ The majority of these radios, however, were plug rather than battery powered, so required a building with functioning electricity. Therefore, while regimental offices, army headquarters, and hospitals soon had radios, frontline regiments often went without. After June 1941, Third Army repeatedly asked for battery-powered radios, so in December 1942 the Propaganda Section began to purchasing radios wherever it could because they were “necessary to maintain the morale of the soldiers, who have been observed manifesting longing for family and home.”¹⁵ Soldiers greatly valued radio programs like: “The Soldier’s Hour” (beginning as a weekly program in December 1940 it increased to three times a week after March 1942), “The German-Romanian Hour,” “The Italian-Romanian Hour,” “The Casualties’ Hour,” and “Radio Mail.” Eventually music only stations were added for soldiers’ enjoyment.¹⁶ Those units with radio receivers had difficulty picking up radio signals from Romania the deeper they advanced into the Soviet Union. In consequence, German Eleventh Army began broadcasting Romanian language programs from Simferopol in Crimea, with daily news and twice weekly variety shows

¹³ Ureche, *Propaganda Externă a României Mari*, 131.

¹⁴ Fond Secția Propaganda, dosar 33, f. 153-154, 270-271.

¹⁵ Fond Secția Propaganda, dosar 33, f. 54.

¹⁶ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 40; Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 94.

with live and recorded music, on 7 February 1942. These broadcasts continued for two years.¹⁷

There were never enough radios in Romanian formations, but when officers and soldiers could tune in there was usually something for them to listen to.

Film was a powerful propaganda tool, but Romania had few cinemas. Moreover, during the interwar period soldiers were usually assigned to the frontier or other remote locations, so the General Staff created mobile cinemas transported by trucks to project films outdoors to soldiers. They were used after the retreat from eastern Romania in 1940 to help raise morale.¹⁸ After the invasion of the USSR in June 1941 the mobile cinemas were constantly on the road in Romania. During 22 June-3 August 1941, they set up scores of screenings in villages for 10,830 soldiers and 9,300 civilians, plus for 13,422 wounded soldiers in hospitals in Bucharest and the Prahova Valley. They moved east after the liberation of eastern Romania. During 20 September-12 October 1941 they showed films to 52,000 soldiers and 22,600 civilians in Transnistria.¹⁹ The films shown included: newsreels, often with footage provided by the German Military Mission in Romania; documentaries on various subjects, such as, "Our Holy War," "Petrol," "The Fall of Odessa," "Transsylvania," "Bukovina," and "Bessarabia;" and entertainment consisting of both Romanian films like "The Merry Women" or "The Bears' Paradise" and German cinema imports like "Pat and Pataschon" or "Truxa."²⁰ These mobile cinemas did not travel east of the Bug. In German-occupied regions of the USSR the Axis forces used Soviet cinemas and screened films

¹⁷ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 921, f. 1.

¹⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 277, f. 343-344.

¹⁹ Fond Secția Propaganda, dosar 32, f. 13, 37-38.

²⁰ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 914, f. 15; Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 96; Fond Secția Propaganda, dosar 170, f. 34-35.

to German or Romanian soldiers in shifts. Soldiers preferred comedies and dramas but received a steady diet of nationalist and anti-communist propaganda.

Music and spectacle were used to entertain and propagandize. In July 1941, peacetime performance groups were used to entertain the troops, for example, the six-member “Struggle and Light” theater troupe was exempted from mobilization until November 1941 (suggesting that the Propaganda Section expected the war to be over by then) and ordered instead to provide entertainment “for workers in militarized factories as well as wounded soldiers in hospitals.”²¹

When the war did not end, the army created theater teams to entertain troops on the front, first in Transnistria and Crimea during the summer of 1942. These theater teams were so successful that the Propaganda Section organized “mixed” theater groups, comprising 22 men and 11 women, to carry out 45-day tours to entertain the troops all across Ukraine and southern Russia, beginning in October 1942.²² The 60-member Army Choir joined them too. By the end of January 1943, the four groups had put on 145 shows, again in Transnistria and Crimea, but also so far afield as southern Russia and northern Caucasus.²³ The shows put on by these theater groups consisted of patriotic songs, folk songs, dances, poems, recitations, and plays. These spectacles brought a bit of Romania to soldiers far from home to remind them why they were fighting.

The printed word was the most common form of propaganda and four newspapers were the most important means of delivering it. *Sentinela*, or *The Sentry*, was a weekly distributed for free to soldiers (and then passed on to civilians) that ran from December 1939 to September 1944 under King Carol II, the National-Legionary State, the Antonescu regime, and King Mihai I post-

²¹ Fond Secția Propaganda, dosar 14, f. 86-88

²² Ibid., dosar 82, f. 25-27, 70-71.

²³ Fond PCM: CM, dosar 124/1943, f. 166.

23 August 1944, so it provides an important window into how the Romanian Army navigated the changing politics. *Soldatul*, or *The Soldier*, was a single page (front and back) given to soldiers for free that appeared thrice weekly from June 1941 to August 1944. *Armata*, or *The Army*, was a bi-monthly magazine published by and for officers that had to be purchased and ran from May 1942 to April 1944. Lastly, *Eoul Crimeei*, or *The Echo of Crimea*, was a weekly given for free to soldiers in Crimea that ran from March 1942 to March 1944. As a report from March 1943 shows, the print run of each was never near enough to provide a copy to every soldier: 117,500 copies of *Sentinela*, with over half sent to the front; 10,000-39,600 copies of *Soldatul*, with over half sent to the front; 12,000 copies of *Armata*, with a third sent to the front; and 4,000 copies of *Eoul Crimeei*, all in Crimea.²⁴ Soldiers were supposed to pass around each paper or read them aloud other soldiers, but the Propaganda Section struggled to distribute newspapers on the front.

The supply of newspapers to the front was chronically low throughout the war, but in late 1941 it temporarily broke down completely. In 1940, in a few places, indifferent or overworked officers did not prioritize propaganda, so initially stacks of copies of *Sentinela* sat in regimental offices undistributed. The General Staff upbraided officers and the newspaper was distributed. During 1941, the farther troops advanced the more difficult it was to distribute newspapers from Bucharest to the front due to distance, bad roads, and shortages in transport. In mid-July 1941, after crossing the Dniester, Third Army complained it only received 800 copies for 100,000 men. Further advances made things worse, especially when roads turned to mud in the fall or froze in the winter. The few available aircraft carried a limited number of copies, but weather completely

²⁴ RG-25.003M, Fond Ministerul de Război: Cabinet, dosar 273, f. 59A-60A; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 921, f. 24.

grounded flights. When Axis logistics nearly broke down in the winter of 1941-1942, practically no newspapers were delivered to the front. The situation was so bad that in February 1942 one general offered to personally pay for 500 copies of *Sentinela* and their transport to his division.²⁵ The improvement of logistics in the spring of 1942 and the joint initiative of Mountain Corps and German Eleventh Army to print *Eoul Crimeei* in Simferopol, the Germans provided the printing press (captured from the Soviets) and the Romanians provided paper and editors, meant that soon soldiers had access to a reasonable amount of printed materials on the front through 1944.²⁶

Pre-war Propaganda

Sentinela first appeared on Christmas Day 1939 to provide entertainment and propaganda to 800,000 soldiers guarding the borders of *România Mare* during the winter. The initial tone of the newspaper was defensive, even its name emphasized standing guard; a postcard at the same time shows a soldier with his back to the viewer watching over a map of *România Mare*.²⁷ The editors selected letters between soldiers and their families that showed the support of the nation and the determination of soldiers to fight if called upon to defend Romania.²⁸ They also printed patriotic poetry and songs written by readers. *Sentinela* soon incorporated “The Cheerful Page” with cartoons and jokes for the soldiers, later copied in the other army newspapers. For the next six months *Sentinela* carried patriotic articles and speeches promising that if Romania were attacked the army would fulfill its duty and defend every last furrow of Romanian soil.

²⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 222, f. 238; dosar 438, f. 25; dosar 410, f. 13; Fond Corpul de Munte, fond 947, f. 502.

²⁶ Fond PCM: CM, dosar 137/1942, f. 109-158; the type was a legacy of Soviet interwar “Latinization” policy, see, Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*, 182-207; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 921, f. 1-2, 9.

²⁷ Case, *Between States*, 82.

²⁸ Ion Măghiran, “Scrisori dela oaște,” *Sentinela*, 25 Decembrie 1939, 4.

After Soviet ultimatum and occupation of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia, the tone of *Sentinela* changed. While the editors supported Antonescu's call for soldiers to be patient and to accept further territorial losses in Transylvania and Dobrogea, they still included a message of future revenge. In September 1940, *Sentinela* published an old First World War song with new lyrics altered by Sergeant Valceanu. "Land, you still seek neighbor, Land! You want us to give you our land. Because we have enough...and [by] Lord! If we don't have enough to make you a grave!"²⁹ In the following months, under the National Legionary State, *Sentinela* celebrated Mihai I, who had succeeded his father, and the return of Queen-Mother Helen from exile abroad as a purification of the monarchy from the corruption of Carol II. It also extolled the supposed virtues of the Legion, particularly its spirit and discipline, dedication to duty, self-sacrifice, and order.³⁰ This infatuation with the Legion soon passed. By November 1940, *Sentinela* began to focus more on Antonescu and his efforts to reform and re-train the Romanian Army with the help of the German Military Mission to prepare to fight to restore *România Mare*. In December 1940, the editors declared, "The German soldier knows he fights for a new order of honesty and work, not just for [his] nation, but for many more. The victory that he achieved over those corrupted [nations in Western Europe – who are] also caught in the nets of Judaism – is a victory for honor and happiness in the world."³¹ After New Year's 1941 the message of the coming "resurrection" of *România Mare* increasingly crowded the pages of *Sentinela*.³²

²⁹ Plt. Mj. Adm. C. Valceanu, "Pământ cere dușmanul," *Sentinela*, 8 Septembrie 1940, 5.

³⁰ *Sentinela*, "Pe prima pagina," *Sentinela*, 15 Septembrie 1940, 1; Nelu Constantinescu, "Duhul și disciplina legionară," *Sentinela*, 29 Septembrie 1940, 5.

³¹ *Sentinela*, "Soldatul German," *Sentinela*, 1 Decembrie 1940, 3.

³² The New Year's front page had Decebal, king of ancient Dacia, presenting soldiers with a map of *România Mare* restored to its previous borders, see, *Sentinela*, "Darul de Crăciun pentru ostași," *Sentinela*, 5 Ianuarie 1941, 1.

The Legionary uprising of 21-23 January 1941 and its aftermath had to be addressed by the editors. The front page of *Sentinela* on 26 January declared, “the Romanian soldier ensures the union and tranquility of the country,” with an illustration of a soldier holding hands with a worker and a peasant flanking him to each side.³³ Inside, a declaration by General Gheorghe Băgulescu, a prominent Legionary sympathizer, defended the anti-Judeo-Masonic credentials of the officer corps, accused Horia Sima and the Legionaries of being communists intent on causing anarchy, and warned Romania might share the fate of partitioned Poland if Legionary disorders continued.³⁴ This was followed by a message from Antonescu who congratulated the soldiers for their loyalty and saving Romania. After having reiterated the need for order and reassured the anti-Semitic credentials of the Antonescu regime, *Sentinela* focused on preparing the army for war. In the months leading up to the invasion of the Soviet Union, articles focused on the harsh conditions facing *bucovineni* and *basarabeni* in the “lost territories” under Soviet occupation.

Wartime Propaganda

On Sunday, 22 June 1941, even as the first groups of soldiers crossed the Prut River to carry out local raids and seize bridgeheads, *Sentinela* trumpeted the decision to invade the USSR.

“Comrades in battle, the German soldier elbow to elbow with the Romanian soldier, both handsome and brave hawks, have thrown themselves upon the greatest enemy of the world: Bolshevism...[and fight in the cause of] freeing the earth of Bessarabia and the mountains of Bukovina from the communist yoke. Forward, brave comrades! The God of righteousness is with you!”³⁵

The image of a Romanian soldier paired with a German soldier, both with fixed bayonets, was repeatedly featured on the front page of the newspaper over the next month: advancing together,

³³ Pe prima pagina, “Soldatul asigura unirea și linștea țării,” *Sentinela*, 26 Ianuarie 1941, 1.

³⁴ Gheorghe Băgulescu, “Chemarea bravilor veterani,” *Sentinela*, 26 Ianuarie 1941, 3.

³⁵ *Sentinela*, “Camarzi în luptă,” *Sentinela*, 22 Iunie 1941, 1.

breaking the chains of Bolshevism, and attacking a hydra-headed dragon with a Star of David. Articles declared that the dream of restoring *România Mare* was coming to pass. The Cheerful Page had cartoons of Stalin booted out of Europe by a kick to his hindquarters, and a rotting skeleton of a Red Army soldier with the caption, “Land he wanted, land he got!”³⁶ On 28 June 1941, the first issue of *Soldatul* carried a speech given by Mihai Antonescu six days earlier, in which he declared the beginning of Romania’s “crusade against communism.”

The war, this war, is a great battle of Christian civilization against the new barbarians. Today European states do not face off against each other but races and worlds...Family, property, church, all are to be burned in the demiurgic flames of the insane communist religion...I believe that since the sacred war of the Crusaders, no other battle has been holier, greater, and more epic than that which Adolf Hitler, the apostle of our new civilization, began today.³⁷

For the rest of 1941 this apocalyptic anti-communist rhetoric was splashed across the pages of *Sentinela* and *Soldatul* with headlines like: “Christian Armies penetrate deep into the Land of Hell,” “Kikes: The Tools of Bolshevism,” and “The European Crusade against Bolshevism.”³⁸

Revenge and atrocity propaganda reinforced the anti-communist bombast. Immediately after the Soviet occupation of eastern Romania in 1940, the General Staff avoided focusing on the humiliation of the Romanian Army because it wanted to cool emotions and convince soldiers to support the state’s decision to cede territory, but now in 1941, its propaganda was designed to inflame the pent-up anger of officers and soldiers. Its articles focused not only on the events of 1940, but also the subsequent Soviet occupation. In an article entitled “A Year Ago,” Private I. Dumitru called 28 June 1940 the “black page in the calendar of the Romanian nation,” but then

³⁶ Frunță t. r. Toma Vladescu, “Visul nostru care se împlenește,” *Sentinela*, 22 Iunie 1941, 2.

³⁷ Mihai Antonescu, “Războiul sfânt a inceput,” *Soldatul*, 28 Iunie 1941, 1.

³⁸ Pe prima pagina, “Oștile creștine pătrund adânc în țara iadului,” *Soldatul*, 1 Iulie 1941, 1; Soldat Grigorescu Mircea, “Jidovii, Unele ale Bolșevismului,” *Soldatul*, 3 Iulie 1941, 1; Mihai Antonescu, “Cruciada europeană contra bolșevismului,” *Soldatul*, 10 Iulie 1941, 1.

rejoiced at the thought that the blood of Romanian soldiers spilt on the battlefield that Bessarabia would be “reborn in all its ancient virtues, under the correct leadership of a great soldier and Romanian, General Ion Antonescu.”³⁹ Both officers and soldiers believed in this war of “heroic revenge” that they thought would be over by Christmas.⁴⁰ Images were published of supposed “Judeo-Bolshevik” crimes: persecution, torture, murder, destruction, and profaned churches. Propaganda further accused the Red Army of torturing or murdering Romanian POWs; these reports may have made soldiers more fearful than angry, but also justified mass reprisals against “Jewish-Communists” blamed for the alleged atrocities.⁴¹ Atrocity propaganda contributed to the effectiveness of nationalist arguments about the need to liberate so-called *transnistrieni* in the USSR from the oppression of “the Bolshevik yoke.” There were articles of soldiers discovering *transnistrieni* (Moldovan) communities as far east as in the Caucasus through 1943.

The Romanian press, following the lead of German propaganda and greatly enthused by the apparent success of the Wehrmacht, was extremely optimistic in its reportage of the war in the summer and fall of 1941. Furthermore, in the first weeks the Axis advances seemed to match the propaganda that depicted Operation Barbarossa as an ever-victorious march against an enemy in complete disarray. Romanian-German forces quickly overran both northern Bukovina and Bessarabia while the Red Army retreated to avoid being flanked by German successes elsewhere. A series of propaganda films were made to celebrate this rapid advance with titles like: “Soldiers cross the Prut,” “The Liberation of Bukovina,” “The Liberation of Bessarabia,” and “Romanian

³⁹ Soldat I. Dumitru, “Acum un an,” *Soldatul*, 28 Iunie 1941, 1.

⁴⁰ Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 188.

⁴¹ Caporal Constantin Salcia, “Bolșevicii continuă să ucida prizonierii,” *Soldatul*, 20 Septembrie 1941, 2; Axworthy, “Peasant Scapegoat to Industrial Slaughter,” 230; Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linieă întai*, 118.

Troops across the Dniester: Penetrating the Stalin Line.”⁴² While Third Army continued to romp eastwards with the Germans, Fourth Army became embroiled in the bloody siege at Odessa.

Propaganda claimed that the Red Army was on its last legs, but soldiers’ experience in combat belied this. Fourth Army casualties mounted at Odessa, even as *Sentinela* and *Soldatul* claimed it was about to fall week after week, and Third Army crossed river after river, Dniester, Bug, then Dnieper, deeper into Soviet Ukraine, so the General Staff felt it had to explain why Soviet resistance seemed only to increase the farther German-Romanian forces pushed into the USSR. A week after the combined land-sea-air Soviet counterattack against V Corps halted the third major assault on Odessa, an article in the 30 September 1941 issue of *Soldatul*, written by a German war correspondent, asked in its title “Why are the Bolsheviks resisting?” His answer was simple, “Jewish-Communists.” He wrote that “kikes” made up 90 percent of Red Army political commissars who carried out “animalistic” propaganda and prosecuted a “sub-human” war based on the use of terror to motivate Soviet soldiers by shooting any who retreated or tried to desert.⁴³ He described Odessa as a “nest of Bolsheviks” that was filled with fanatical communists willing to fight to the last man. On 5 October 1941 *Sentinela* published an article written by Professor S. Mehendinți called, “Why are we fighting?” He responded with his own question, “What would happen if we do not keep fighting?” He argued that if the Red Army was not utterly destroyed it would return “ten times stronger” and in a monster version of 1940 would “break all the borders, from Finland to the shores of the Dniester” except that this time the Red Army would continue to advance across Europe all the way to Spain. In its wake, communism would bring “permanent

⁴² Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 202.

⁴³ Wilfried E. Ott, “De ce rezista bolșevicii?,” *Soldatul*, 30 Septembrie 1941, 2.

war” between the classes including abolishing the family (no more marriage, baptism, or parent-child relationship), destroying churches but not synagogues, and seizing peasants’ land thereby making them serfs on “the state’s estate.”⁴⁴ Odessa finally fell to great fanfare and Fourth Army had a victory parade in Bucharest – the massacre of the city’s Jews was unreported.

Third Army remained on the front in Ukraine and Crimea, but as fall turned to winter, the “decisive” battle remained elusive. The defeat of the German Army outside Moscow and Soviet winter counteroffensive against Crimea in December 1941 stunned Romanians and alerted them that the war would continue for much longer than anyone had anticipated. Yet, contrary to the conventional wisdom that portrays Romanian soldier as increasingly unmotivated and confused about why they were still fighting, Third Army soldiers were kept acutely aware of what they were fighting for, even if they wished they could return home like their Fourth Army comrades. In fact, Antonescu proactively ordered that the General Staff intensify propaganda efforts after crossing the Dniester River.⁴⁵ The Propaganda Section relentlessly appealed to soldiers’ intrinsic motivations (nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, anti-communism) through printed word, film, and radio to remind soldiers – if they had ever forgotten – why they were fighting.

In March 1942, as part of the nationwide re-mobilization for what was expected to be a decisive summer campaign, Mihai Antonescu initiated a major propaganda campaign to reassure Romanians of the need to continue the war alongside Germany.⁴⁶ Already on 2 February 1942, at the Ministry of Defense, General Pantazi ordered that greater efforts be made to “educate the army through images – photographs, cinema.”⁴⁷ It was no mere coincidence that *Ecul Crimeei*

⁴⁴ Profesor S. Mehendinți, “De ce ne batem?,” *Sentinela*, 5 Octombrie 1941, 5.

⁴⁵ Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 200-201.

⁴⁶ Case, *Between States*, 81.

⁴⁷ Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 210.

and *Armata* first began publishing in the spring of 1942. The General Staff stressed that soldiers had to continue fighting, not only to restore *România Mare*, but to make sure that the sacrifices of soldiers already fallen in combat to liberate *basarabeni*, *bucovineni*, and *transnistrieni* would not be in vain. Propaganda depicted Romanian troops as liberators of oppressed Soviet peoples, especially their “brothers in faith” the Russian Orthodox believers.⁴⁸ In spring 1942, the military press encouraged renewed optimism that the coming summer offensive would deal the Soviets a death blow. The German defeat at Moscow in winter 1941 was depicted as a near victory that the Soviets only survived because of the Russian winter. Now with snow melting optimism had returned. A cartoon from the Easter issue of *Soldatul*, captioned “General-Winter has retreated,” showed a melting Soviet snowman revealing a pile of bones of slain Red Army soldiers, and the snow melt was drowning living Soviet soldiers who shouted, “Our last hope has gone to hell!”⁴⁹ Romanian soldiers leaving with Echelon II units for the front could still believe in the promise of the new summer offensive and that 1942 might be the decisive year.

While it fostered hope in the future, army propaganda reminded soldiers of past victories and celebrated new successes. As the year progressed, the anniversaries of the beginning of the war, the liberation of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, and the fall of Odessa were prominently commemorated. The recent German successes, Operation Bustard Hunt in Crimea in May 1942, the Second Battle of Kharkov in May 1942, and the fall of Sevastopol in July 1942, including the important role played by Romanian formations in these battles, were widely reported. When the German Army finally began Case Blue, the army press encouraged hopes with articles like: “The

⁴⁸ Natalia Nabokova-Vasilkova, “Odesenii recunoscător fraților români liberatori,” *Soldatul*, 3 Februarie 1941, 1.

⁴⁹ V. Stamati, “General-Iarna a trecut în retragere,” *Soldatul*, 5 Aprilie 1942, 2; for another example, see, Capitan N. Trandafir, “Victoria Germaniei,” *Eoul Crimeei* (Simferopol), 8 Mai 1942, 1.

Situation of the Soviets is desperate,” “In Pursuit of the Enemy from the East,” and “The Fatal Blow.”⁵⁰ As summer turned to autumn and German forces became embroiled at Stalingrad, the tone of propaganda remained optimistic. An article in *Armata* compared the battle for Stalingrad with the battle for Odessa, predicting the city on the Volga would also eventually fall.⁵¹ Finally, during 1942 articles continued to harp on themes developed in 1941: why Romanians fought, the plight of *transnistrieni*, Bolshevik atrocities, and German-Romanian comradeship.

Post-Stalingrad Propaganda

After Stalingrad, fearing a slump in morale and negative effects on combat motivation, the General Staff ordered preventative measures to try to control what information reached Romania from the front and neutralize Soviet propaganda.⁵² Between March 1943 and August 1944, Romanian propaganda doubled down on all the themes that it had been using since June 1941, especially atrocity propaganda, with an added sense of foreboding because every Soviet victory brought a vengeful Red Army closer to Romania. The February 1943 issue of *Armata* was dedicated to the “fight against communism.” The cover showed a death’s head wearing a Bolshevik cap with a red star grinning over a cityscape in flames, decaying bodies of murdered civilians, and names of cities Chișinău, Cernăuți, Odessa, Kharkov, Sevastopol, Smolensk, and Riga.⁵³ *Eoul Crimeei* carried a story the same month describing the “bestial revenge” taken by the Soviets on the people of the Caucasus after the Axis retreat from the region, implying that Romanian soldiers’ families would experience the same treatment if the Red Army entered their

⁵⁰ “Situatăția bolșevicilor e disperată,” *Eoul Crimeei*, 27 Iulie 1942, 2; *Sentinela*, “În urmărie dușmanului dela răsărit,” *Sentinela*, 26 Iulie 1942, 1; “Lovitura de moarte,” *Soldatul*, 17 August 1942, 1.

⁵¹ Generalul Georgescu Pion, “Odesa – Stalingrad,” *Armata* (Bucharest), 15 Octombrie 1942, 5.

⁵² Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 214-216.

⁵³ *Armata*, 1 Februarie 1943, copertă de față.

homeland.⁵⁴ A March 1943 article from *Soldatul* was even more blunt. Its title declared in big bold letters, “The Bolsheviks will never forgive any people.”⁵⁵ The discovery of the mass grave of thousands of Polish officers at Katyn in April 1943 gave the Germans a valuable propaganda tool and the fate of the Polish officers was soon splashed across the pages of military and civilian newspapers. Clearly the reasons Romanian troops went to war for in the first place (nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism) remained powerful motivators after Stalingrad.

Officers and soldiers feared a terrible Soviet vengeance for the crimes they committed in the USSR if the Red Army reached Romania. Army propaganda warned Soviet victory would be a disaster for Europe and openly spoke of the threat of Soviet revenge, but never actually directly addressed the crimes committed by soldiers after 1941. The Propaganda Section counted troops knowing about atrocities because the pogroms, deportations, and mass executions of 1941-1942 were an open secret. Army propaganda continued to play on soldiers’ intrinsic motivation: fears of an existential threat to nation and religion, loss of property or land, and “Jewish-Communist” retribution that was sure to follow in the wake of the Red Army. Propaganda messages became increasingly shrill and repetitive as the General Staff tried to keep faith in final victory. Articles had titles like: “On Guard between Two Worlds,” “Victory or Death,” “Only Germany can save Humanity from Bolshevism,” and “What Soviet Liberation Means.”⁵⁶ Despite these efforts, by fall 1943 it was clear that the war was being lost and, as Mioara Anton put it in her recent history

⁵⁴ “Bestialele răzbunari sovietice în Caucazul evacuate,” *Ecole Crimeei*, 21 Februarie 1943, 2.

⁵⁵ “Bolșevicii nu vor ierta niciun popor,” *Soldatul*, 25 Martie 1943, 1.

⁵⁶ “De Straja între Două lumi,” *Armata*, pe copertă de față; “Numai Germania poate salva omenirea de bolșevism,” *Ecole Crimeei*, 20 Ianuarie 1944, 1; Slt. Rez. Horia Nițulescu, “Izbânda său moarte,” *Sentinela*, 6 Februarie 1944, 1; “Ce înseamnă eliberare sovietică,” *Soldatul*, 8 Iunie 1944, 1.

of the Ministry of Propaganda, Romanian soldiers were “not fighting from conviction [in final victory], but from duty.”⁵⁷ Yet the strength of duty as a motivator should not be discounted.

The Misadventures of Private Neață

Before concluding this examination of Romanian army propaganda, it is worth looking at the most iconic and beloved figure of the war, Private Neață. Neață was an invention of Neagu Rădulescu, an interwar writer, playwright, and caricaturist hired by the General Staff to produce material for *Sentinela*’s cheerful page. He created a four-panel comic strip “The Misadventures of Private Neață” that ran from January 1940 to September 1944. The hijinks of the irrepressible peasant soldiers became immensely popular with troops and civilians alike. It was such a hit that two volumes of Neață’s misadventures were published, in 1942 and then in 1943, totaling 20,000 copies. Neață inspired a host of copycats that included a children’s book and a short-lived comic strip called “The Life of Private Stan” in *Soldatul*.⁵⁸ Neață was someone peasant soldiers could identify with and laugh at as he navigated army life – and later life on the front.

“The Misadventures of Private Neață” was initially supposed to provide entertainment to bored soldiers. *Sentinela* did not focus on propaganda under Carol II as much as it did under the Antonescu regime and Neață was still in a peacetime army, correspondingly the comic strip was primarily just humor. Most of the jokes were made at Neață’s expense, mocking his clumsiness, bad luck, and stupidity. Rădulescu’s comic on the cheerful page, before Neață fully took shape, showed vignettes of army life; regimental doctors inspecting the poor specimen of recruits from rural areas with bent backs and flat feet, regular officers trying to find a role for reserve officers,

⁵⁷ Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 231.

⁵⁸ Dodo Niță și Alexandru Ciubotariu, *Istoria Benzii Desenate Românesti, 1891-2010* (Bucharest: Editura Vellant, 2010), 48; “Viața Soldatului Stan,” *Soldatul*, 18 Octombrie 1941, 3.

a soldier caught in the kitchen with female cook by an officer, and a Gypsy recruit, colored black as coal, being asked by a sergeant, “Who stole my bread, hey [there] Gypsy?” “Respectfully mister sergeant, what serial number did it have?”⁵⁹ During the Carlist period, Rădulescu’s comic strip focused on the humorous trivialities of peacetime army life to the chuckles of his readers.

After the Soviet occupation of eastern Romania in 1940, propaganda became prominent in “The Misadventures of Private Neață.” On 30 June, Neață learned about communism. Neață asks his friend Private Stan, “What is this thing communism?” Stan then asks Neață give him his cap, coat, puttees, and even his pants, causing him to exclaim “Why are you making me do this Stan, you are not a doctor”!? Finally, with Neață stripped down to an undershirt, Stan proclaims “Look, this is communism Neață, you get it? What is mine is mine and what is yours is also mine. So now we are comrades.” “Now I understand friend Stan, so if my wife [*muierea*] would be here, you would take her too!”⁶⁰ Rădulescu pushed the theme of restoring *România Mare*. In the New Year issue, Neață’s wife Marițica bides him farewell, “Dear Neață because your holiday leave has ended and you are returning to the barracks, look, here is a sprig of basil. Put it under your pillow for Epiphany and you will dream of what you desire for the New Year.” Arriving at his barracks, he dreams a map of “*România Mare!* From the Dniester [in the east] to the Tisza [in the west]!”⁶¹ In another strip, Rădulescu used an object lesson, an officer finds Neață crying over a wagon wheel with several broken spokes and asks, “What is with you Neață, why are you crying, is a tooth hurting you, or have you got too many chores?” Neață responds he was crying because his “heart hurts” after “standing and looking at this wheel and seems I saw our Romania.

⁵⁹ Neagu Rădulescu, “Pagina Vesela,” *Sentinela*, 30 Iunie 1940, 7.

⁶⁰ Rădulescu, “Pătanile Soldatului Neață,” *Sentinela*, 14 Iulie 1940, 7.

⁶¹ Interestingly, he not only dreams of the return of the territories lost in 1940, but also reaching the Tisza River, not achieved after the First World War, see, Rădulescu, “Pătanile Soldatului Neață,” *Sentinela*, 5 Ianuarie 1941, 7.

Like her, it is missing a few spokes...Bukovina, Transylvania, and Bessarabia.” He keeps the it as a reminder of what he was fighting for, “to put the spokes of the country back in place.”⁶²

Rădulescu turned his pen to explain politics after the repression of the Legionary uprising in January 1941. Neață is shocked to see his wife at the front of a crowd of Legionary rebels and says, “what the devil does she think she’s up to, harrumph, because she isn’t good at anything except cooking and cleaning?” He singlehandedly halts the mob by shouting, “Stop! I am the country and no one gets by me!” Then he yells at Marițica, “Get over here monkey! Today you leave *mămăliga* [polenta] unmixed and join a demonstration!” Neață puts Marițica over his leg and spanks her with his rifle promising, “I will teach you to behave! You won’t be able to sit on a chair for six months!”⁶³ Rădulescu thereby gendered the Legionary rebellion, associating it with women, believed to be inferior and lacking the intelligence to participate in politics, and depicted Romanians who participated in the uprising as being misguided, thus requiring minimal punishment. Rădulescu succinctly summed up a complex issue, provide a clear message to the troops, and supported the *Conducător* – all while also getting a laugh.

After June 1941, Private Neață underwent a subtle transformation. His character, which in peacetime had been buffoonish, became cunning on the front. Rădulescu depicted the Soviet soldier as a “simpleton” [*ciołovec*]: cowardly, dirty, unprofessional, demoralized, and drunk. He also racialized them, giving some Asian features – notably Rădulescu never depicted a Jew or incorporated anti-Semitism. Neață outsmarts the Red Army “simpletons” through a mixture of peasant cleverness and bravery. In one case, Neață neutralizes a Soviet machinegun nest outside

⁶² Rădulescu, “Pățanile Soldatului Neață,” *Sentinela*, 19 Ianuarie 1941, 7.

⁶³ Ibid., 2 Februarie 1941, 7.

of Odessa in 1941 by spraying vodka on it, which the Red Army soldiers lap up, causing them to fall into a drunken stupor and allowing Neață and his buddies to take the trench.⁶⁴ A couple of the troops were repeated in the comic strip. Neață being surprised unarmed by Soviet troops and having to find his way out of the situation or Neață finding a way to surprise Red Army soldiers to capture them on his own. At Stalingrad in 1942, Neață masquerades as a woman to lure sex-starved Soviets back to Romanian lines to be captured.⁶⁵ Rădulescu never depicted Neață killing the enemy, mutilation or death is always out of sight, but since soldiers saw plenty of both in real life they enjoyed the escape of reading Neață's bloodless antics.

Romanian soldiers on the front were concerned about the situation facing families on the home front. Inflation, shortages, and wives or daughters left to work family plots were all major concerns for Romanian soldiers.⁶⁶ Rădulescu tried to allay these fears. Therefore, unlike most soldiers, Private Neață got regular leave to visit home and each time the opportunity was used to reassure readers of the conditions in Romania. In one strip, after arriving home, Marițica has a massive meal prepared for him and Neață gorges so much that his belly is distended. In another, when it is time for him to leave, Marițica humorously gathers food for him to take with him back to the front, sweet breads, meats, and alcohol, all piled into a sack two or three times bigger than Neață!⁶⁷ This reassuring sequence of events occurred each time Neață got leave.

Additionally, Rădulescu presented an idealized vision of German-Romanian relations in the comic strip. When Private Neață meets the German soldier "Fritz" they are equals, brothers-

⁶⁴ Ibid., 19 Octombrie 1941, 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 15 Noiembrie 1942, 7.

⁶⁶ Fond PCM: CM dosar 129/1943, f. 63.

⁶⁷ Lambiek Comiclopedia, "Neagu Radulescu," Lambiek Comiclopedia, accessed 17 April 2013, http://www.lambiek.net/artists/r/radulescu_neagu.htm.

in-arms, sharing food and cigarettes before going off to fight Bolsheviks together.⁶⁸ In another strip, Neață and Fritz take turns firing a sub-machinegun, passing the weapon back and forth as they tired. Neață always remembers to bring a present from home to Fritz when he comes back from leave. He interacts with “Giovanii,” an Italian soldier, on several occasions. Neață teaches both Fritz and Giovanii a Romanian *hora*, a folk circle dance.⁶⁹ Hungarians, unsurprisingly, are not depicted as allies. Rădulescu did his best to reinforce German-Romanian comradeship.

Finally, “The Misadventures of Private Neață” commented on the progress of the war and it was always shown as going well. The closest Rădulescu came to addressing Stalingrad and the disaster on the Don and Kalmuk steppe was in a comic strip from April 1943, when Neață is told his recent promotion to corporal was a mistake. The news is so disappointing, that he attempts to hang himself, but after he kicks out the stool the rope breaks. Neață survives and exclaims, “A good sign! The one above doesn’t want me to upset Marițica or let the simpletons escape.”⁷⁰ It seems the noose was a metaphor for the encirclement at Stalingrad and suggested to Romanian survivors of Third and Fourth armies they had escaped from Stalingrad due to divine providence. They needed to fight on against the communist menace just like Neață. On 22 June 1943, second anniversary of Operation Barbarossa, Rădulescu drew Neață standing atop the body of the Soviet giant, not yet defeated, but breathing his last.⁷¹ For soldiers this message must have rung hollow. At that time, the Cavalry Corps was the only formation left fighting on the front after Stalingrad, in a tough defense of the Kuban bridgehead, and soon after the Germans were defeated at Kursk. When Rădulescu first introduced Neață his character was funny and relevant, but once the war

⁶⁸ Rădulescu, “Pașaniile soldatului Neață,” *Sentinela*, 6 Iulie 1941, 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 24 Ianuarie 1943, 7.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 25 Aprilie 1943, 13.

⁷¹ Ibid., 20 Iunie 1943, 7.

turned against the Axis he became divorced from reality and the comic strip became boring and pedantic, simply conveying the same tired message of fighting to the last for final victory.

Propaganda and Motivation

In evaluating the efficacy of propaganda, one must be careful not to give it inflated value because soldiers can only be convinced to believe so much by such efforts. Most historians have been dismissive of the intrinsic motivation of Romanian soldiers and argue that they were easily swayed, and thus demoralized, by Soviet propaganda after 1941.⁷² On the contrary, the Soviets were unsuccessful in convincing soldiers the “holy war” was unjust, to lay down their arms, or desert in large numbers. The only success it had was informing Soviet soldiers of its victories in 1943-1944. Romanian propaganda was effective in reinforcing soldiers’ intrinsic motivation and remind them why they needed to keep fighting. By fall 1943, the Propaganda Section could not convince soldiers that the Axis was winning the war or that German-Romanian comradeship was stronger than ever after, but it did contribute to a continued fear of communism that motivated Romanian soldiers to keep fighting in a lost cause. Romanians remained committed to the war against the USSR to the very end.⁷³ They hoped for a miracle or some sort of negotiated peace to deliver them from the impossible position they found themselves in. What is true for combat motivation is valid for atrocity motivation. Army propaganda may have reinforced pre-existing anti-Semitism in the ranks and legitimized anti-Semitic violence, but it was primarily intrinsic motivation that compelled soldiers to carry out atrocities against Jews during the war. Fear of Soviet retribution probably contributed to a slacking in anti-Semitic violence in 1943-1944.

⁷² Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 181; Anton argues the Soviets had more sophisticated and thus effective propaganda that prevented collapse in 1941 and demoralized the Romanians, see, Anton, *Propaganda și război*, 13, 69, 206, 215.

⁷³ Ibid., 125.

Coercion as a Motivating Tool

All military institutions, even democratic ones, are inherently coercive. Coercion relies on a soldier's own self-interest to function; as John Lynn put it, a "soldier's concern for his own well-being makes the punishments associated with military discipline necessary and effective."⁷⁴ Modern armies have developed military law and courts to punish soldiers for disobeying orders, criminal behavior, or dereliction of duty. Punishment can vary substantially, depending on the severity of the infraction and accepted disciplinary practices, from deprivation of privileges to imprisonment, or in the worst cases execution. The Romanian Army had a traditional system of military discipline that still used corporal punishment, including flogging. This was not unusual as other armies in the region still maintained the practice. Nonetheless, the Romanian Army has been unfairly stereotyped as being particularly brutal towards its men.

Corporal Punishment

By the First World War many European armies no longer used corporal punishment. The German Army outlawed flogging in the late-nineteenth century, but corporal punishment did not completely disappear (NCOs still unofficially used it during training) and other practices, such as binding, tying an offender to a wheel or tree, were still in official use until 1917.⁷⁵ A temporary breakdown of discipline on the Western Front in the last days of the war prompted a rethinking of discipline in the German Army during the interwar years. It decided to try to break down the social class barriers between officers and soldiers using the myth of a *Frontgemeinschaft*, or a egalitarian "front community," which meshed with later Nazi ideology of *Volksgemeinschaft*, to

⁷⁴ Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 25.

⁷⁵ Dennis E. Showalter, "Army and Society in Imperial Germany: The Pains of Modernization," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, No. 4 (Fall 1983), 600-601.

break down class divisions and cement bonds between officers and enlisted men.⁷⁶ If German soldiers no longer endured corporal punishment, under the Nazi regime military justice became, in the words of Omer Bartov, “positively murderous.” Approximately 13,000-15,000 German soldiers were officially executed during 1939-1945 because martial law under the Nazi regime was politicized and classified desertion or self-inflicted wounds as treason, not demoralization. This was a huge increase compared the few hundred executed during 1914-1918.⁷⁷

The Red Army also rid its military justice system of corporal punishment. The Russian Army had outlawed flogging in the late-nineteenth century but reintroduced it in 1915 in an attempt to coerce troops to fight, contributing to discontent in the ranks. In 1917 one of the first demands of soldier soviets was an abolition to flogging and all forms of corporal punishment.⁷⁸ The new Red Army lambasted the old tsarist army and assured its soldiers that they would not be exploited. The abolition of flogging was symbolic of this promise. Other punishments were also strictly limited, but the Red Army began to progressively strengthen its code of military justice in the 1930s and soon included stronger punishments: prolonged imprisonment, a term in a labor camp, or execution with confiscation of property.⁷⁹ After 1941, the Red Army liberally used execution as a punishment for the crimes of cowardice, self-mutilation, desertion, and even just failure in combat. It began employing “blocking detachments” and penal battalions to try to force soldiers to fight. The Stalinist regime decided to target the families of soldiers accused of

⁷⁶ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 60.

⁷⁷ This number does not include all the unrecorded summary executions, see, Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 95-96.

⁷⁸ Steven R. Welch, “Military Justice,” 1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War, accessed 9 March 2016, http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/military_justice.

⁷⁹ Reese, *Stalin's Reluctant Soldiers*, 18, 61-62.

treason, including simply being captured.⁸⁰ It should be noted none of these brutal measures, German or Soviet, were ever completely successful in deterring the behavior they punished.

The Romanian Army had to deal with these same problems of cowardice, self-mutilation, and desertion, but used flogging or imprisonment – not executions – to punish. Before the First World War, regular officers were notorious for severely beating their men when they felt like it, but during the interwar period the General Staff made a concerted effort to end this tradition of informal beatings that too often resulted in injured or incapacitated soldiers in favor of regulated flogging that resulted in manageable welts, bruises, or lacerations. Under the Carlist regime the General Staff tried to further minimize abuse of corporal punishment. In March 1939, an article in *România militară* instructed that while officers had the right to punish soldiers they needed to be aware that punishments “instead of being a means of education, many times degenerate into abuse, on a whim [*bun plac*] and arbitrary.”⁸¹ Some in the officer corps resisted these efforts and in times of crisis their first impulse to restore discipline was to recourse to corporal punishment. General Țenescu, then Chief of the General Staff, reported on 1 August 1940 that commanders had asked for permission to use flogging to restore discipline after the evacuation from eastern Romania, but Țenescu did not agree because he believed the state of discipline had not reached a point where flogging were needed, moreover, “ten days of effectively executed incarceration constitutes for he who carries it out a physical punishment much greater than 25 lashes.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Roger Reese demonstrates that blocking detachments primarily policed shirkers and stragglers from fleeing too far from the front and returned them to their units as soon as possible; they never were given carte blanche to carry out summary executions. Additionally, penal battalions were not a death sentence as commonly believed and saved the lives of many soldiers who may otherwise have simply been executed by offering them a second chance to redeem themselves through a brief period of service in a penal battalion, see, Reese, *Why Stalin's Soldiers Fought*, 162-169.

⁸¹ Capitan Ermil Vasiliu, “Prerogătiva pedepselor disciplinare,” *România militară* LXXVII, Nr. 3 (Martie 1939), 73.

⁸² Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 24, f. 119.

After Antonescu took power, forcing General Tenescu and other Carlists into retirement, flogging became more common, especially after June 1941 once soldiers began pillaging. Senior officers worried about physical abuse. At the Ministry of Defense, General Iacobici complained on 21 July 1941 that even though unregulated beatings had been “totally banned” some officers were still using them and cited the case of a captain who beat a subordinate so badly that soldier had to be hospitalized with a broken jaw. Consequently, Iacobici warned that all officers guilty of physical abuse would be punished and a few weeks later reiterated that even flogging required a “long procedure” following army regulations. Flogging should use a belt, applied to the back or buttocks, under supervision of a doctor, and only for “lack of respect and grave mistakes.”⁸³ Numerous cases of officers beating soldiers can be found in army records showing that abusive officers were indeed punished, at least when it resulted in serious bodily injury, officers who left only minor cuts and bruises probably never faced investigation. The General Staff periodically repeated warnings since physical abuse did not end. This was in part due to the fact that military justice never severely punished officers. Officers were never flogged; they were subject only to “arrest” or “severe arrest.” This meant confinement to quarters or imprisonment with reduced rations, depending on the offense, for several days – soldiers could be similarly punished.

Despite General Staff efforts to limit flogging, it continued to be used to punish relatively minor offenses, such as brawling, theft, and drunkenness, but also serious ones like rape.⁸⁴ Often being absent without leave or desertion was punished by flogging. On 15 April 1942, General Dumitrescu, frustrated with the backlog of cases due to what he considered the glacial pace of

⁸³ Fond Armata 3-a, fond 306, f. 188, 186.

⁸⁴ ANIC, Fond MR: IGA, dosar 75, f. 73.

Third Army courts martial, ordered that deserters should simply be flogged immediately after their detention and then escorted back to the nearest frontline combat unit.⁸⁵ Dumitrescu had a record of favoring swift and harsh punishment, but in this instance, he did not get his way and soon had to countermand the order. On 24 May 1942, he reminded commanders that while the floggings had ended, the recent changes in the military justice code still required desertion cases to be decided within three days, “They will follow the path of justice – with rapid procedure.”⁸⁶ Flogging remained common until it was finally outlawed in September 1944 under the influence of the Romanian Army’s new (coerced) alliance with the Red Army.

The Romanian military justice system functioned relatively effectively during the war. Small infractions, such as drunkenness, brawling, or inattention in an assignment, were punished with a few days or a week imprisonment or flogging, if the officer wanted to make an example of the soldier. In December 1943, two corporals at the Tiraspol prison camp hospital received 15 lashes “for inappropriate dress and failure to supervise the prisoners that they were escorting.”⁸⁷ Soldiers caught smuggling or profiteering faced long prison sentences. In early 1943, following Stalingrad, Private Mihai Lubescu, who had deserted a year earlier, pretended to be a sergeant gathering stragglers and deserters (sometimes enlisting actual Romanian stragglers and deserters to help him deceive the Germans). After entering a village, he would ask local German officers to issue rations for the men he was supposedly shepherding to collection points. They provided vouchers to German commissaries and Lubescu then sold the supplies on the black market. A suspicious Cossack auxiliary (*HiWi*) soon uncovered the subterfuge and Lubescu was taken to

⁸⁵ Fond MR: CM dosar 210 vol. III, f. 190; dosar 210 vol. II, f. 60.

⁸⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1473, f. 298.

⁸⁷ Fond MR: IGA, dosar 75, f. 116-117.

Mariupol for court martial, but the investigators found nothing when they looked for evidence except for a pretty Ukrainian girlfriend. He was charged with impersonating an NCO.⁸⁸

Those who broke the law in efforts to help or protect Jews faced especially harsh prison sentences. After the fall of Odessa, Sergeant Nicolae Tănase began a relationship with a local Jewish woman Vera Sepel in hiding, bringing her food, clothing, and fuel. In January 1942, after gendarmes began to deport Jews to camps on the Bug, he tried to help her escape on a night train to Buzău to the relatively safety of Moldavia, since west of the Prut Jews faced less persecution, but they were discovered by a suspicious ticket collector. Tănase was sentenced to three years imprisonment for “falsifying the documents of a Jew” and another five years for “attempting to remove a Jew from internment in the ghetto.”⁸⁹ Sepel received five years and was probably sent to a camp in Transnistria. Thereby, courts martial punished such cases harshly to discourage any other soldiers (few were so inclined) from aiding Jews.

Flogging was generally accepted as a legitimate punishment by soldiers, but if an officer was considered abusive he faced resistance from soldiers. Soldiers could and did denounce any officers deemed abusive, citing the General Staff’s official stance against unregulated beatings. There are many examples of investigations into officers accused of abuse – often simultaneously accused of corruption – in army records. Such denunciations were usually anonymous because soldiers feared further beatings from the abusive officer, especially in cases when investigators vindicated the accused because they trusted the word of an officer over that of an enlisted man.

⁸⁸ Giorgio Geddes, *Nichivó: Life, Love and Death on the Russian Front*, trans. Natalie Lowe (London: Cassell & Co, 2001), 128-130.

⁸⁹ King, *Odessa*, 215-216.

All “false” denunciations were punished.⁹⁰ A few soldiers on the front took retribution into their own hands. A report from Crimea in June 1943 recorded that after a lieutenant slapped a soldier some nearby soldiers muttered, “Why does Mr. Lieutenant not come to fight on the front, rather than hit innocent people here. [Because] many officers who were used to hitting [their men], were shot by their own troops [at the front].”⁹¹ While corporal punishment may have deterred petty infractions or even motivated some soldiers to keep fighting rather than risk being punished for desertion, it had its limits and officers who employed it too liberally put themselves at risk.

Capital Punishment

In times of crisis officers used the threat of capital punishment. From Antonescu down to commanders of divisions, officers threaten soldiers with execution “on the spot” for indiscipline or cowardice appears. The threat appeared in orders so often that it became a cliché almost from the start of the war. On 12 July 1941, General Dumitrescu reported his soldiers were treating liberated northern Bukovina like enemy territory pillaging as they advanced, even misusing army trucks to transport looted items back to Romania. He warned that these were “especially grave” crimes against the “population liberated from the Bolshevik yoke” and threatened soldiers with severe punishment. The General Headquarters agreed. A week later General Ioanițiu reported continued complaints of soldiers “and even officers” looting occupied areas. He ordered, “Those guilty of such an act that debases a civilized army will be executed on the spot.” On 20 August, Antonescu ordered that Romanian soldiers should be seen “as liberators from the bolshevik yoke,

⁹⁰ In July 1941, General Iacobici complained that soldiers had denounced officers “falsely” and did not defend their honor energetic enough and threatened to punish officers who did not defend “their personal honor,” see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 766, f. 91; in March 1942, the 10th Infantry punished some troops, “influenced by bad elements,” who denounced their officers by writing to the Council of Ministers, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1119, f. 7.

⁹¹ Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin văzută de români*, 126.

and not as barbarians” and declared any soldier caught pillaging east of the Dniester should “be executed on the spot without mercy.”⁹² These harsh orders, however, were not carried out

While the General Headquarters favored swift and brutal justice, frontline officers needed living soldiers, not executed ones. Officer magistrates serving on courts martial, many of whom were reservists who worked as legal professionals in peacetime, resisted all efforts to ignore the Code of Military Justice, whether orders to expedite punishment or order summary execution. In September and October 1941, Fourth Army headquarters complained that its courts martial were too “indulgent” in sentencing soldiers. Between July and September 1941, Fourth Army courts martial carried out 336 trials with only 11 resulting in death sentences (most were commuted), prompting Fourth Army headquarters to upbraid them for not following Antonescu’s orders to “apply the maximum penalty.” General Ciuperca’s staff pushed for more death sentences, but officer magistrates stood firm against this pressure, saying they were well within their authority and following army law.⁹³ Only in the case of self-mutilation did courts martial regularly order executions. The officer corps saw acts of cowardice as the same as treason and kept an eye on possible cases. After a spike of minor wounds hands or feet among soldiers during the battle for Odessa, Antonescu ordered doctors to verify that the wounds were not self-inflicted. He wanted any confirmed cases to be executed in front of their unit as an example. Fourth Army ordered nine soldiers from three different units executed on 27 September 1941.⁹⁴

The threat of capital punishment was invoked in times of crisis and periodically soldiers were executed to show that the threat was real. In January and February 1943, during the retreat

⁹² Trașcă, “Chestiunea evreiască” în documente militare române, 161; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 325, f. 42; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 639, f. 33.

⁹³ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 784, f. 162, 81, 120.

⁹⁴ Ibid., dosar 629, f. 274, dosar 658, f. 145, dosar 860, f. 128.

from Stalingrad, General Dumitrescu authorized commanders of divisions or ad-hoc groups that were isolated on the front to carry out executions until regular court martial proceedings could be restored because it was impossible to send soldiers to the nearest court martial in Mariupol.⁹⁵ On 8 February 1943, the General Staff announced that 12 deserters arrested near Kiev in December 1942 had been sent to Bucharest for a court martial and all but one were sentenced to death – it ordered this news be publicized to soldiers.⁹⁶ At the same time, General Pantazi visited units in the Caucasus because alarming reports from German High Command claimed Romanian troops' morale was collapsing. During the inspection, he granted division commanders the authority to carry out summary executions to maintain discipline because Romanian divisions were scattered across the region and cut off from Third Army courts martial. This period of crisis passed and an investigation by a joint Romanian-German commission reported that Romanian soldier's morale in the Caucasus was shaken after the disaster on the Don but was not collapsing as reported. On 10 March 1943, having successfully finished shepherding the remnants of both Romanian armies outside Stalingrad to Transnistria, Dumitrescu's Third Army headquarters again took charge of administration and discipline of all Romanian troops east of the Dniester.⁹⁷

As the situation deteriorated in 1943, the General Staff increasingly used the threat of capital punishment and authorized even mid-ranking officers to carry out executions. After the Red Army occupied northeastern Romania, in April 1944 Antonescu issued Order No. 10.523 that authorized execution without court martial for desertion, cowardice, looting, self-mutilation, rebellion, insubordination, or striking an officer. Again, officer magistrates pushed back against

⁹⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 992, f. 96, 183-184.

⁹⁶ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 933, f. 374.

⁹⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 126-127.

such a radical order. Fourth Army Court Martial clarified that only commanders of regiments or detachments “operating isolated” could order executions – and even then, they had to obtain final approval from the division commander first.⁹⁸ Therefore, Romanian military justice did become more brutal as the war continued, but the death penalty was still not used extensively.

The Antonescu regime, unlike the Nazis or the Soviets, was not particularly bloodthirsty towards its people – aside from Jews and Gypsies. The SSI was relatively small and did not use terror on the scale of the Gestapo or NKVD. During 1940-1944, only 10,617 people were tried and imprisoned for political crimes: 4,830 sentenced to less than 15 years; 5,185 sentenced to 15-25 years; 277 sentenced to life of hard labor; 313 sentenced to death (all but 72 commuted to life in prison); and 22 killed during interrogation – another 5,463 were interned.⁹⁹ A precise number of soldiers executed during the war is difficult to determine as there is no centralized record, but taking into account the nature of the Antonescu regime and a random sampling from the archives the total was probably in the hundreds, probably a maximum of around a thousand. The officer corps executed just enough soldiers to maintain capital punishment as a realistic threat.

Rehabilitation

The General Staff developed the policy of rehabilitation to provide the Romanian Army with desperately needed manpower. Like the German Army, the Romanian Army was already having serious shortages in manpower in early 1942 due to heavy losses on the Eastern Front, so it decided to expand the policy of rehabilitation that it had initiated in 1941.¹⁰⁰ Articles 415-418 of the Code of Military Justice allowed officers judged guilty of cowardice or crimes in time of

⁹⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1533, f. 31, 59.

⁹⁹ 10,617 “anti-fascists” (maximum 2,300 communists), see, Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 98.

¹⁰⁰ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 153; Romania was a small country with limited manpower, but post-war Șteflea claimed he tried to purposely limit the contribution to the Axis, a lie, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 75.

war to have their sentences suspended, be stripped of rank, and be given a chance to rehabilitate themselves through bravery in combat. On 26 June 1941, the Ministry of Defense first applied this section of the Code of Military Justice to reserve officers arrested in January for supporting the Legionary rebellion, releasing them from prison to fight on the front. Since they had shown “moral incapacity” by they were restricted from ever commanding soldiers and were supposed to remain privates for at least five years, even after being rehabilitated.¹⁰¹ In 1941 rehabilitation was voluntary and authorized on an individual basis by the General Staff. Officers accused of cowardice or incompetence, usually after their unit had retreated in panic and disorder, petitioned for a chance to restore their honor – and their pensions. For example, on 1 September 1941 two second lieutenants from 5th *Grăniceri* Regiment awaiting court martial in Chișinău on charges of cowardice asked to be sent to the front for a chance to redeem themselves. Antonescu personally approved their request, even letting them to keep their rank, but warned that if the officers again proved to be cowards they would “be shot in front of their companies.”¹⁰² As the war continued into 1942 the rehabilitation policy was expanded to include NCOs and even privates.

The Ministry of Defense issued General Order No. 240 on 2 March 1942 to clarify and expand the policy of rehabilitation. Based on Articles 415-418, commanders at army and corps level were empowered to suspend court martial sentences imprisoning soldiers for a period of a month to 12 years. They would then be assigned to a frontline infantry or cavalry unit. If they distinguished themselves in combat, by being praised in a daily order at the army or corps level,

¹⁰¹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1236, f. 902; the army’s need for officers (plus a combination of poor communication and misunderstanding of policy) meant that many of these Legionary reserve officers not only were not degraded, but were placed in command or staff positions against orders, which triggered complaints from the General Staff in October and December 1941 to reaffirm the orders, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 306, f. 277; dosar 1351, f. 74.

¹⁰² Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 773, f. 85.

they would be rehabilitated by a decree. If a soldier was killed before the process was complete, families could request post-mortem rehabilitation and benefit from the soldiers' pension.¹⁰³ All soldiers arrested east of the Dniester were sent to the nearest Third Army court martial, after the court martial General Dumitrescu approved the suspension of the sentence and the reassignment. Rehabilitation soldiers were sent as individuals or small groups to infantry or cavalry regiments. While there was little volunteerism in the process, most rehabilitation soldiers were willing.

The General Staff decided on a different variant of rehabilitation for soldiers or criminals being held in prisons east of the Dniester. During 1940-1941, military and civilian prisons filled up with political prisoners, beginning with several thousand socialists and communists, joined by hundreds of liberals and Carlists, and finally thousands of Legionaries.¹⁰⁴ After the war started in June 1941, groups of imprisoned Legionaries sent petitions to Antonescu that declared their patriotism, hatred of bolshevism, and asked to be sent to the front.¹⁰⁵ Although they were not all immediately sent to the front, the Legionary requests planted the idea of expanding the policy of rehabilitation to political prisoners, also soldiers sentenced for desertion, theft, and other cases of indiscipline west of the Dniester, and even common criminals in state penitentiaries. In February 1942, General Șteflea decided that the army needed these men for replacements, especially with plans for spring counteroffensives and later the Case Blue summer offensive. Some that asked to

¹⁰³ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 358, f. 132.

¹⁰⁴ While over 9,000 Legionaries were initially arrested, not all were found guilty, and many had their sentences suspended later, especially after June 1941, except for those deemed too dangerous to release, see, Heinen, *Legiunea "Arhanghelul Mihail,"* 491, 426; in August 1942 a group of 500 actual Jewish communists were deported to Vapniarka camp in Transnistria, 407 from Târgu Jiu and 87 from Caransebeș camps, joining hundreds of "Jewish-Communists" from Transnistria, see, Paul A. Shapiro, "Vapniarka: The archive of the International Tracing Service and the Holocaust in the East," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2013), 120.

¹⁰⁵ For example: in June 1942 Legionaries in Lugoj Prison asked to be sent to the front to fight for the fatherland, see Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 748, f. 105; in September 27 Legionaries in Suceava Prison and 81 Legionaries in Târgu Jiu internment camp also declared the loyalty to the regime and asked to be sent to the front, see, dosar 793, f. 972, 981;

be rehabilitated came to regret their decision. Sergeant Ionescu recorded a rumor on 29 May 1942 that a deserter sentenced to 10-12 years who had volunteered for rehabilitation on the front had “returned to prison to carry out the punishment, [because] he is unwilling to fight.”¹⁰⁶

In April 1942, the General Staff ordered the creation of a special infantry training center for rehabilitation in southern Bessarabia. Initially, the center was going to be located in Arciz, a large town located on a railway line that had been emptied of its German and Jewish populations in 1940 and 1941, but worries about having recently released convicts too close to a railway that might be used as a possible means of escape – and the Antonescu regime’s plans to colonize refugees from northern Transylvania or southern Dobrogea in Bessarabia – meant that it was moved 20 km further east to the smaller, more isolated, town of Sărata.¹⁰⁷ On 8 May 1942, the General Staff established Training Center No. 5 in Sărata. It had also been emptied of ethnic Germans and Jews, leaving infrastructure for the center, although many buildings had been damaged in fighting and had to be repaired. Soon officers, NCOs, and materials were on their way to the town to prepare for the first wave of rehabilitation soldiers released from prison.

General Alexandru Poenaru was placed in command of the Sărata Training Center and oversaw the training, organization, and departure of four battalions between June and December 1942. Each independent infantry battalion (991st, 992nd, 993rd, and 994th) eventually numbered roughly a thousand men gathered from military prisons, the majority were soldiers condemned for desertion, theft, or other crimes. For example, from a total of 1009 men in 992nd Independent Infantry Battalion almost half or 486 were deserters, followed by 123 condemned for theft, only

¹⁰⁶ Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 93.

¹⁰⁷ AMR, Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 108, f. 1-2.

88 imprisoned for rebellion (Legionaries), and the rest were guilty of striking officers, beating troops, falsifying papers, rape, and manslaughter.¹⁰⁸ After being released from prison on their own recognizance and received ten days of leave before they had to report to Sărata. Poenaru defended the practice to the General Staff, arguing that seeing their families would improve the morale of rehabilitation soldiers and weed out the untrustworthy because they could desert from or commit crimes at Sărata just as easily as they could on leave.¹⁰⁹ Desertion or going absent without leave was a constant problem at Training Center No. 5. Captain Păsat, newly transferred to take over a company in the 991st Independent Infantry Division, recalled that, “Weekly 2-3 of those who had deserted were brought back to me, again weekly, another 2-3 left, almost as if they were on a rotation.”¹¹⁰ By December 1942, an estimated 300 soldiers had deserted from Sărata or from one of the battalions at the front.¹¹¹ Poenaru described a glum atmosphere in Sărata. The officer and NCO instructors were unhappy with their assignment, political prisoners were uncomfortable being lumped together common criminals, and the criminals “do not seem dedicated to renouncing [their] bad habits.”¹¹² Each battalion was formed successively in June, July, August, and September; after about three months of training each left one after the other in September, October, and November for the Don front – except for the 994th Independent Infantry Battalion in December that was sent to the Caucasus.¹¹³ After departing Sărata every battalion

¹⁰⁸ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 73, f. dosar 69, f. 43; Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 183.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., dosar 69, f. 40.

¹¹⁰ Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitanului Dumitru Păsat*, 54.

¹¹¹ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 72, f. 188.

¹¹² Ibid. Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 69, f. 41.

¹¹³ Arriving just in time to take part in the disaster outside Stalingrad, so after the war Legionaries claimed that these were “suicide battalions” designed to kill them for their political beliefs, see, Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth*, 234.

became “independent” of the training center, hence their designation, and came under command of a frontline division. The performance of these battalions in combat was surprisingly steady.

While the soldiers of these independent battalions were unruly and had higher desertion rates, when buttressed by regular units on either flank and put in the situation of kill or be killed, they fought fiercely. General Poenaru believed around 20 percent of the soldiers who came to Sărata could not be counted on, but most were weeded out by the time the battalions left for the front; Captain Păsat thought 70 percent of the soldiers were just “brutes, without law, without God,” but he believed he earned their trust and they fought well on the Don.¹¹⁴ The most reliable rehabilitation soldiers were Legionaries who were the most motivated and least likely to desert. The 991st and 992nd Independent Infantry battalions were completely destroyed on the Don in November 1942, the 993rd Independent Infantry Battalion was severely mauled too but managed to withdraw with the remains of Third Army before being assigned to the 24th Infantry Division guarding the Azov Sea coast. The 994th Independent Infantry Battalion fought determinedly in the Caucasus.¹¹⁵ Over 100 soldiers in the 994th Independent Infantry Battalion were awarded Iron Crosses for bravery while fighting for the German 97th Mountain Division during the winter of 1942-1943, however, in the rear these soldiers were undisciplined and if the officers and NCOs who trained them at Sărata were killed desertions increased.¹¹⁶ Despite these issues the General Staff’s need for manpower was so dire that imprisoned soldiers continued to be rehabilitated.

¹¹⁴ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 72, f. 107; Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitanului Dumitru Păsat*, 55.

¹¹⁵ 991st was encircled with the 5th Infantry Division in November and 992nd suffered heavy losses with 7th Infantry Division during its epic anabasis with Italian survivors in December, both battalions were later disbanded, the Sărata commander suggested all survivors be rehabilitated, but the Directorate of Military Justice decided mere survival did not merit it, see, Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 30, f. 47; 993rd joined the ad-hoc Nistor Detachment in early December, retreated a shorter distance, and most survived, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 100.

¹¹⁶ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 40, f. 102; dosar 230, f. 192.

The General Staff expanded rehabilitation in 1943. Third Army set up Training Center No. 3 in Tiraspol where deserters, stragglers, or other criminals arrested east of the Dniester were collected and retrained before being reassigned to frontline infantry or cavalry regiments – some regiments created separate rehabilitation companies or platoons. Back in Sărata, Training Center No. 5, now under a new commandant General Simion Coman, expanded its efforts. It retrained replacements for the 993rd and 994th Independent battalions respectively guarding the Azov Sea coast or fighting in the Kuban bridgehead, formed the 995th Independent Battalion that was sent to reinforce the 24th Infantry Division on the Azov Sea, and began organizing labor battalions for construction projects west of the Bug. As Romanian prisons emptied, the Sărata Training Center began to have difficulties finding manpower. In April 1943, the Târgu Jiu internment camp sent 164 Legionaries (112 were designated “notorious Legionaries”) from its dwindling population of political prisoners. The Sărata Training Center also began be sent mistrusted minorities culled from prisons. By October 1943, it had organized the 1001st-1017th Labor battalions. Each of the 16 battalions had approximately 500 men, totaling 8,189. Nearly half were minorities: 1,338 Hungarians, 1,634 Russians, and 961 Jews (placed in the segregated 1016th-1017th Jewish Labor battalions).¹¹⁷ The General Staff ultimately used 7,053 in Transnistria and 1,812 in Romania (see Table 4) but did not trust minorities to fight – or with valuable weapons and equipment.

The large number of stragglers and deserters after Stalingrad meant that Third Army had plenty of men to assign for rehabilitation as replacements to the Mountain and Cavalry corps still fighting on the front. Many officers in these elite units were not unhappy with this. In August 1943, Major Scârneci bemoaned the further dilution of 3rd Mountain Battalion. He had already

¹¹⁷ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 24, f. 90, 173.

received cavalrymen, gendarmes, *grăniceri*, even sailors, as replacements, and now rehabilitation soldiers. “If it is said that the frontline is the ‘Altar of the Fatherland,’” Scârneci quipped, “What kind of altar, with such angels as these?”¹¹⁸ When they reached the front, they were presented to the regiment’s colonel and then its chaplain may have made a speech like the one given by Priest Nicolae Petrache with 1st Mountain Division in August 1942 on the “sublime gesture of parental indulgence of the Marshal *Conducător*, who wants their reformation [*îndreptarea*], and the duty they have to distinguish themselves through acts of arms, which will wash away [their] mistaken deeds.”¹¹⁹ Then assigned to a platoon, the other soldiers greeted them coolly. This hostility was not just due to rehabilitation soldiers’ background as political prisoners, deserters, and criminals. Lt. Colonel Victor Isăceanu, commander of 13th *Călărași* Regiment in Crimea in 1943, pointed out that mountain and cavalry units not only had a strong *esprit de corps*, but had been together for two years and during that time formed strong bonds. Therefore, tight-knit veterans looked on all replacements “like some foreigners,” a common reaction in any army.¹²⁰ The value of these troops as replacements was mixed. For example, Private Sârghie, an officer demoted since he was a Legionary and sent to Scârneci’s unit, and two others sacrificed themselves using grenades, bayonets, fists, and even their teeth to cover 3rd Mountain Battalion’s retreat after a Soviet counterattack at Sevastopol in June 1942. On the other hand, two rehabilitation NCOs sent to Scârneci in August 1943 deserted the same night after they arrived.¹²¹ At the end of October 1943, the 993rd and 995th Independent Infantry battalions under 24th Infantry Division were blasted apart by a Soviet attack at Mariupol, so many had fled that, after gendarmes

¹¹⁸ Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linea întai*, 443.

¹¹⁹ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.41579, dosar 301, c. 638.

¹²⁰ Fond Manuscrite, MSS 676, f. 42.

¹²¹ Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linea întai*, 364.

gathered the survivors up, both the independent infantry battalions were disbanded and their rehabilitation soldiers spread out several regiments.¹²² This left only the 994th Independent Infantry Battalion, still fighting with the 19th Infantry Division in Crimea, but it was disbanded after the losses suffered during the evacuation in April 1944.

In March 1944, as the Red Army approached, both Training Center No. 3 in Tiraspol and Training Center No. 5 in Sărata were dismantled, evacuated in barges up the Danube, and set up near the Yugoslav border in the town of Tirol. Now the Tirol Training Center it formed the 996th and 997th Independent Infantry battalions in June 1944, but short of weapons and equipment they did not see combat before 23 August 1944. Between May 1942 and June 1944, a total of 23,082 men passed through Sărata (see Table 4), with 7,770 sent to the front (see Table 5).

Table 4. Soldiers sent for rehabilitation to Sărata, May 1942-June 1944.

Returned to prison or judged unfit for rehabilitation	2,356
Sent to the front for rehabilitation	7,770
Sent to Labor Battalions east of the Dniester in the operational zone	7,053
Sent to Labor Battalions west of the Dniester in Romania	1,812
Organized and prepared to immediately leave for the front	1,956
Remaining at the Training Center	2,135
Total	23,082

Table 5. Soldiers sent to the front from Sărata, May 1942-June 1944.

Proposed for rehabilitation and returned to their original units	1,544
Special rehabilitation based on the Code of Military Justice	38
Renounced rehabilitation and completed sentences after returning from the front	87
Remaining on the front	1,822
Killed on the front	775

¹²² In the ad-hoc 111th and 112th Infantry regiments, see, Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 30, f. 66.

Table 5 Continued. Soldiers sent to the front from Sărata, May 1942-June 1944.

Missing on the front	3,269
Recovered at the Training Center and situation being clarified	235
Total	7,700

Source: AMR Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 40, f. 100.

To the 7,770 from Sărata Training Center must be added soldiers sent for rehabilitation by Third Army courts martial east of the Dniester, in April 1944 another 2,292 rehabilitation soldiers were serving individually or in small groups in Third Army, so the real total was closer to 10,000.¹²³ While almost half those sent to the front for rehabilitation from Sărata were eventually declared missing, most were casualties at Stalingrad, not deserters. The rehabilitation policy let officers and NCOs restore their reputations, Legionaries to escape prison, spared many deserters worse punishment, and provided the General Staff with desperately needed manpower.

Blocking Detachments

There is evidence the Romanian Army sporadically used ad-hoc blocking detachments in times of crisis. On 20 July 1941, Third Army reported that some cowardly soldiers panicked and fled at the first contact with the enemy, so General Dumitrescu authorized commanders to shoot troops who panicked other soldiers and to place machinegun units behind units that hesitated to attack and “to fire without mercy on all fleeing soldiers.”¹²⁴ A month later, on 20 August 1941, the General Headquarters issued a similar order. General Ioanițiu claimed that at Odessa some units “hesitated to attack or attacked without *élan*” and retreated after counterattacks by a smaller

¹²³ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2968, f. 6.

¹²⁴ Ibid., dosar 325, f. 68

number of Soviets. He ordered that machineguns squads make blocking detachments and fire on fleeing troops.¹²⁵ This order did not create permanent blocking detachments, but such orders were repeated during crises. 2nd Lieutenant Ion Lăzărescu remembered that on 20 August 1944, at the start of the Second Iași-Chișinău offensive, a major told him over the phone to machinegun retreating soldiers, but he refused. The major yelled, “You want to give me advice? I fought at the Don! ...Take the measures!” Lăzărescu could not bring himself to fire on the troops and let them pass.¹²⁶ This illustrates how hard it was to try to enforce these orders. On 22 August 1944, citing orders from Antonescu, General Șteflea ordered Fourth Army, who took over because the front was collapsing and General Racoviță was one leave, to shoot troops fleeing from the front. Lt. Colonel Nicolae Dragomir, Fourth Army’s chief of staff, refused to countersign Șteflea’s order.¹²⁷ Such orders were desperate threats, infrequently invoked, and not usually carried out.

Remuneration as a Motivation Tool

If coercion was the stick, then remuneration was the carrot. Despite popular stereotypes regarding the venality of Romanians, personal enrichment was at most an ancillary motivator for Romanian soldiers, however, those who could often enriched themselves through unsanctioned pillaging of Jewish and Soviet property.¹²⁸ Additionally, some soldiers turned to smuggling or black marketeering to earn quick cash. Yet neither of these activities was officially sanctioned and in fact troops could be punished for both. Instead, the General Staff promised decorations with material benefits, land grants, and in a few cases cash prizes or leave for bravery.

¹²⁵ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 90.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 296-298.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 305.

¹²⁸ Grant Harward, “First among Un-equals: Challenging German Stereotypes of the Romanian Army during the Second World War,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 3 (July 2011), 442-444.

Many military decorations came with a material reward, so there was as double attraction to winning a medal. The most prestigious (and valuable) was the Order of Michael the Brave – only for officers – that came with a knighthood and 25 acres of land. The General Staff awarded troops land too. Military Virtue – the highest medal for NCOs or soldiers – came with 10-15 acres of land in eastern Romania. Officers were intent on not missing out on a supposed bonanza of Jewish property expropriated in cities, especially Bucharest. Reports on army morale during the first year of war are filled with complaints from officers about civil servants, who were not risking their lives, unfairly benefiting from Romanianization. The Antonescu regime eventually retained Jewish property to be made available to officers to purchase under “more advantageous conditions” than average Romanians.¹²⁹ At the end of the war, the General Staff adopted a more direct form of reward. In May 1944, responding to reports that German troops were requesting a cash prize for every aircraft that they shot down, Antonescu authorized 10,000 *lei* for every tank or aircraft destroyed by Axis soldiers.¹³⁰ Coming so late in the war this incentive had negligible influence. Furthermore, as Roger Reese notes in the case of the Red Army that extensively used cash prizes to try to motivate, given the already poor odds of survival on the Eastern Front “it is hard to imagine men taking undue risks simply for a wad of [cash].”¹³¹ It is easier to imagine, however, men taking risks for the continued financial well-being of their families.

Pensions or financial aid for their families was an important motivation for some soldiers. Both regular officers and *reangajat* NCOs looked forward to a pension as a benefit of choosing a

¹²⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 312, f. 211, 868; dosar 1131, f. 248; on 11 July 1942 Pantazi declared that 25 percent of all expropriated Jewish property would be reserved for “our heroes on the front,” Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1246, f. 2; Ionescu, *Jewish Resistance to “Romanianization,”* 90.

¹³⁰ Fond PCM: CM, dosar 35/1944, f. 82, 84, 78.

¹³¹ Reese, *Why Stalin’s Soldiers Fought*, 206-207.

career in the Romanian Army, the money would support them and their family in retirement, and the General Staff used the threat of losing it to motivate. Soldiers sentenced by court martial for cowardice, incompetence, abuse, or other crimes lost their pension, but rehabilitation offered a way to win it back. Sergeant Major Ioan Meița was thrown out of the army for “incapacity” after 17 years of service and later sentenced to two months in prison for “calumnious denunciation” of his captain in 1941. He volunteered for rehabilitation and was assigned to the 54th Transmission Battalion. After joining his unit joined Case Blue, he wrote a letter in August 1942 to beg that his telephone or telegraph repairs under fire might count as combat, so he could be rehabilitated and “not remain expelled from the Army and without a pension...as well as to be able to care for my family.”¹³² Privates could also be so motivated. In 1940, the state began providing financial aid to the families of soldiers concentrated for long periods of time. This policy was expanded after the start of the war and many families depended on it – especially due to wartime inflation. The General Staff threatened to cut off such aid to their families if soldiers were judged guilty of crimes, especially desertion, and even to confiscate their property.¹³³ Private Ioan Bortică was sentenced to a year in prison in August 1942 for beating a civilian, subsequently he volunteered for rehabilitation, but he was assigned to a non-combat unit. In June 1943, he wrote a petition saying his wife had been living with her parents in Cernăuți with no means to provide for herself and asked if he might be transferred to a frontline unit “to have the possibility, even [with] the sacrifice of [my] life, to pull [her] out of squalor.”¹³⁴ Since soldiers could be rehabilitated post-mortem, soldiers knew that even in death they could help their family if they died bravely.

¹³² Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 840, f. 6-8.

¹³³ Ibid., dosar 1299, f. 211,

¹³⁴ Ibid., dosar 2152, f. 89.

Looting was another way that soldiers materially benefited from the war, but they faced stiff competition from the state. Under the Antonescu regime Romanianization was supposed to use “legal” means, without resorting to random violence and terror like the Legionaries, and the state expected to benefit from the ethnic cleansing of Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia.¹³⁵ Romanian soldiers (and civilians) on the ground in eastern Romania and Transnistria, however, had other ideas. The Romanian Army faced a similar problem as the German Army, in that the economic exploitation and devastation of Jews was officially sanctioned and was supposed to be carried out by the organs of the state, but soldiers took the initiative to pillage Jewish property.¹³⁶ Materially benefiting from murdering Jews was more of an afterthought than a primary goal, but if they could benefit materially during the process soldiers did not shy away from thieving from their Jewish victims.¹³⁷ Romanian soldiers, however, stole from Jews in eastern Romania and Soviet civilians after crossing the Dniester as much from logistical shortages as greed.

As the war continued, opportunities to personally profit diminished. Romanian soldiers fought campaigns in increasingly harsh geography, from the semi-barren peninsula of Crimea to the dry, empty steppe of Ukraine and southern Russia, and the unforgiving mountainous terrain of the Caucasus. Due to poor Axis logistics and German prioritization of their troops, Romanian soldiers had to live off the land and the impoverished populations of these regions just to survive. Additionally, few soldiers received regular leave home, particularly those with the Mountain or Cavalry corps who were in almost constant combat during 1941-1943, so they lacked the chance

¹³⁵ Jean Ancel, *The Economic Destruction of Romanian Jewry* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2007), 135-137.

¹³⁶ Bartov, *Hitler's Army*, 75-76.

¹³⁷ Dumitru, *The State, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust*, 145, 151.

to personally transport goods home that German soldiers had.¹³⁸ Moreover, the General Staff put restrictions on how much soldiers could mail home to their families. These mail restrictions, due in large part simply to limited Romanian logistics, were also the result of class divisions and the lack of *Volksgemeinschaft* ideology that Nazi leadership used to justify the practice of German soldiers' looting. The soldiers' ability to send looted goods home was simply not a priority of the Antonescu regime, which still officially denounced looting of "liberated" Soviet peoples.

Soldiers and officers who tasked with occupation duties in Transnistria and later Crimea – for roughly 16 months during 1942-1943 it was not on the front line – had the chance to enrich themselves through black-market activities. Odessa enjoyed an economic resurgence under the permissive conditions of Romanian occupation that resulted in the growth of private businesses, which relied to a large degree on corruption and bribes, thereby becoming a center of smuggling and the black market.¹³⁹ Unlike the German Army that stripped Ukraine bare of food and goods, Transnistria remained relatively well-stocked, but only partly due to Romanian Army policies. Romanian civilians, soldiers, and civil servants smuggled foodstuffs produced in Romania into Transnistria in exchange for goods including clothing, footwear, blank travel documents, rope, cigarettes, chocolate, vitamin candy, cameras, and all manner of things to trade in Romania.¹⁴⁰ Smuggling was not unique to the Romanian Army; neither was the hostility it fostered between frontline and rear area soldiers. One report from 1943 recorded a soldier suggesting that "all officers and the rest of the personnel staffing field hospitals, guide centers, and 'Red Cross' canteens ought to be shot, because they busy themselves only with [black-market] business and

¹³⁸ German soldiers could bring back pretty much anything they could carry when on leave and even send packages over 1,000 grams through the mail home to their families, see, Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries*, 104-105.

¹³⁹ Dallin, *Odessa*, 87, 119.

¹⁴⁰ Fond MR: CM, dosar 137 vol. II, f. 204; dosar 210 vol. III, f. 213.

dirty things on the backs of soldiers and wounded.”¹⁴¹ Some even blamed their poor rations, not on shortages or bad logistics, but on corrupt officers selling them on the black market.

Clearly, many soldiers were motivated by material gain, especially when committing atrocities, but it played a much smaller role in combat. The Romanian Army offered some official material rewards for bravery on the front decorations that came with land grants and simple cash prizes. The state indirectly allowed soldiers to benefit from the persecution and murder of Jews, however, it claimed all the profits from Romanianization for the state. Soldiers participated in black market activities on the front but were punished by superiors when caught and despised by frontline soldiers. Therefore, while greed was widely evident in the actions of many Romanian soldiers, it was not the primary reason that they murdered or fought.

Morale and Motivation

Morale is notoriously hard to define and even more difficult to try to measure or evaluate. John Lynn accepts S. L. A. Marshall’s definition of morale as “the whole complex of an army’s thought.”¹⁴² This definition can encompass thoughts and emotions about almost anything: losses in combat, material situation of soldiers, relationship between soldiers and home, rest, quality of leaders, understanding of the cause or goals of the war, primary group cohesion, and so forth. Clearly, morale is a difficult (probably impossible) phenomenon to measure with accuracy, yet historians have been remarkably cavalier in concluding that the morale of Romanian soldiers was weak, and rapidly collapsed after liberating northern Bukovina and Bessarabia in July 1941. The Antonescu regime was acutely concerned about the morale of the army, making great efforts to

¹⁴¹ Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin vazută de români*, 125-126.

¹⁴² Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 26.

gauge it and try to reinforce it, but despite the General Staff's concerns, Romanian soldiers' morale actually appears to have been quite resilient through late-1943, primarily due to their intrinsic motivation, but reinforced by propaganda, coercion, and remuneration.

The relationship between morale and motivation is complex. They overlap, but are not equivalent, as troops with poor morale can still be motivated to fight. Motivation is more stable than morale. John Lynn has identified three forms of motivation: initial, sustaining, and combat. Atrocity motivation can be linked to these too. Motivation is dependent on strong underlying intrinsic factors that convince a soldier to agree to become a soldier, endure military life, and fight in combat.¹⁴³ Motivation also influences if a soldier carries out atrocities. Morale is the day to day variation in soldier's mood on the surface of deeper motivation, which can fluctuate wildly due to a multitude of reasons. One only needs to peruse his diary to see how a soldier's morale can change from moment to moment and learn that even soldiers with strong intrinsic motivation can experience bouts of low morale. Major Scârneci is a good example. As career officer in an elite arm, literate with access to army propaganda, he was highly motivated, but at times he feared for his sanity during the battle for Sevastopol and became demoralized, but he never stopped fighting. In addition, he ordered reprisals against innocents, but in a different mood he took pity on Jews. Morale exists not only on an individual level, but on a group level. A unit can have good or bad morale at different times depending on its situation and experience. Poor morale can influence soldiers' motivation whether initial, sustaining, combat, or atrocity.

Any examination of morale in the Romanian Army must begin the army's own attempts to measure it. Indeed, the army generated a lot of documents while trying to gauge the morale of

¹⁴³ Ibid., 35.

soldiers (and civilians); unfortunately, its reports are inherently problematic. First, reports used the material situation of officers, NCOs, and soldiers as the primary criterion to evaluate morale. Evaluating morale this way was a common practice, it followed the Napoleonic maxim that an army marches on its stomach, and it is relatively easy to obtain figures on rations, clothing, mail, etc.¹⁴⁴ Yet soldiers having a good material situation does not necessarily mean that they have good morale, or vice versa. Second, reports focus on the complaints of officers, those of NCOs or troops are perfunctory, some reports simply record a single word, “good.”¹⁴⁵ Clearly, these reports do not actually tell much about the morale of the average enlisted man and are more a bureaucratic exercise. Some reports deviate from this pattern. In the summer of 1944, reports began describing morale as “satisfactory” or “mediocre” rather than “good;” such bureaucratic understatement should be interpreted as widespread demoralization of soldiers in those units.¹⁴⁶ Other reports include specific anecdotes or examples, but it is difficult to determine just how representative they are. Nonetheless, official army reports indicate that morale remained fairly high in the army until mid-1943, when it became clear that the German Army was not going to recover from the Stalingrad defeat after its defeat at Kursk and Soviet counteroffensive.

The conventional wisdom that morale in the Romanian Army was poor is primarily based on the work of Mark Axworthy who accepts apologist nationalist accounts. He argues the battle for Odessa in 1941 was a pyrrhic victory that destroyed the morale of the army for the rest of the

¹⁴⁴ A great example of the material focus of reports on morale is an intelligence report of 15th Infantry Division of January 1942, see, Fond MR: CM, dosar 137 II, f. 71-73.

¹⁴⁵ Often the conditions and morale of NCOs are just lumped in with the officers in reports and only a few lines are dedicated to that of simple soldiers, for examples, see, Fond MR: CM, dosar 137 I, f. 182, 342; Fond MR: IGA, dosar 75, f. 85-90, 155-161.

¹⁴⁶ This comes from an intelligence report of July 1944 for *Regimentul I Vânători*, see, Fond MR: CM, dosar 256, f. 85-89; although some delusional reports continued to report “the best” morale as well, such as the July 1944 report of *Batalion 3 Pionieri*, see, f. 140-141.

war.¹⁴⁷ He describes Romanian soldiers as “peasant scapegoats” with no idea of why they were fighting because “no effort had been made to explain to the troops precisely why Romania had to cross the [Dniester] and confront Bolshevism in its own home.”¹⁴⁸ This is wholly inaccurate and ignores both the strong intrinsic motivation of Romanian soldiers and army propaganda efforts. Furthermore, Axworthy exaggerates the long-term effects of the battle on the Romanian Army, which was conducted by Fourth Army and not Third Army. Odessa’s capture was a propaganda coup for Antonescu and was followed by the demobilization of most of Fourth Army that gave formations a chance to rest, refit, and recover. In early 1942, Romanian propaganda promises of victory seemed realistic, Third Army endured its winter battles well, and Fourth Army was well-rested. During July-August 1942 when formations left for the front, they left with good morale in a celebratory atmosphere and expecting to defeat the USSR and be rewarded with the return of northern Transylvania for their sacrifices to the Nazi war effort. It was only after Stalingrad that Romanian propaganda rang increasingly hollow and soldiers began to doubt that “final victory” was possible. Officers and soldiers’ morale began to erode during 1943-1944.

Nonetheless, despite falling morale after September 1943, soldiers were motivated by an increasingly fatalistic attitude because it was their duty to defend Romania. The threat of Soviet occupation strengthened the resolve of Romanian soldiers to fight on in defense of their families, faith, and nation. In mid-July 1943, the German defeat at Kursk and Anglo-American landings in Sicily undermined propaganda messages about “final victory,” but reinforced fears of Soviet revenge for Romanian crimes in the USSR. While true that in 1943, soldiers in Crimea became

¹⁴⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 57-58, 71-72.

¹⁴⁸ Axworthy, “Peasant Scapegoat to Industrial Slaughter,” 231.

fearful of making “useless sacrifices” in a “second Stalingrad,” this does not mean they lacked motivation to fight, only that they doubted the wisdom in bottling up the Mountain and Cavalry corps in such an obvious trap.¹⁴⁹ The “encirclement” of Crimea in late-October 1943 hurt morale, but propaganda justified the continued defense of the peninsula by claiming that the goal of the Soviet counteroffensive at Stalingrad had been to seize Crimea to use it as a base for air attacks and naval landings against Romania.¹⁵⁰ Soldiers held on in their trenches to April 1944.

Flogging sometimes had negative effects on morale in frontline formations, but its effect should not be exaggerated. Axworthy has argued that physical and verbal abuse by officers somehow prepared Romanian soldiers psychologically to be defeated in battle by the Soviets. Yet considering how recently Western armies had employed corporal punishment and the long (not to mention the still healthy) tradition of verbal abuse by officers and NCOs, this argument is unpersuasive.¹⁵¹ It was not a shortage of encouragement, but of modern weapons that mattered. Flogging was an accepted practice by soldiers who reserved their ire for officers who used their power to physically abuse soldiers against regulations. Rehabilitation recalled comparisons of military service to a form of punishment. A June 1943 intelligence report recorded a soldier complaining that sending Legionaries for rehabilitation had turned “the field of honor” into “the field of exile.”¹⁵² Due to manpower shortages the General Staff could do little to assuage the negative effect on morale from the policy of rehabilitation, except to omit mentioning it in

¹⁴⁹ Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin văzută de români*, 143; Romanian units showed “unexpected determination,” but it is not so unexpected if the motivation of soldiers properly understood, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 136.

¹⁵⁰ Lt. Col. Braun, “Scutul Crimeei pentru Mareșalul Antonescu,” *Armata*, 15 August 1943, 2.

¹⁵¹ Axworthy, “Peasant Scapegoat to Industrial Slaughter,” 229.

¹⁵² Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin vazută de români*, 125.

propaganda, try to isolate rehabilitation soldiers in battalions or companies, and reassure the rest of the soldiers that all those fighting on the front were heroes sanctified by combat.

The different opportunities for remuneration based on class could also hurt morale. Some mid-ranking field officers resented the winners of the Order of Michael the Brave because they believed that it usually went to senior officers (often boyars) in the rear who did not merit it and quickly found a way to be reassigned away from the front once they won the coveted award.¹⁵³ The fact that the opportunity to profit from looting was based on class and rank also angered troops. In a diary entry on 28 May 1942, Sergeant Ionescu complained that privates and NCOs were limited to sending home three postcards a month, but officers were sending “trainloads” of goods, including sheep and cows, “for personal ends.”¹⁵⁴ The soldiers were helped to send their pay home to help their families, if mail delivery was functioning. Antonescu himself publicly abhorred corruption and those caught red-handed were punished, so soldiers could take comfort in the hope that officers or NCOs guilty of corruption would eventually be punished.

Conclusion

The Romanian Army used many tactics to try to prop up the combat motivation and buoy the morale of Romanian soldiers. The Propaganda Section did its best to reach as many soldiers as possible and flooded the front with printed materials, radio programs, films, and even patriotic entertainment stressing the righteousness of the “holy war,” the threat of the enemy, and need to continue fighting. The military justice system tried to enforce strict discipline through corporal punishment and to discourage soldiers from deserting by the threat of capital punishment. On a

¹⁵³ Fond Manuscise, MSS 676, f. 23; Scârneci, *Viața și moarte în linea întai*, 213.

¹⁵⁴ Ionescu, *Însemnări din război*, 93.

few occasions commanders resorted to using blocking detachments, but few subordinates carried out the orders to shoot other soldiers. The General Staff expanded the policy of rehabilitation and organized the Sărata Training Center that formed political prisoners, deserters, and common criminals into combat battalions. The General Staff promised to reward soldiers with land that came with medals, but much more importantly provided financial aid to families that could be taken away. Soldiers looting was not officially sanctioned, but widespread.

All extrinsic motivators (propaganda, coercion, and remuneration) had limitations and a modern army lacking a firm foundation of intrinsic motivation cannot keep fighting in the field for long. Propaganda can only convince soldiers of so much and is useless against firepower. Flogging or threats can only intimidate soldiers to risk their lives for so long and soldiers did not want to machinegun their comrades if they broke under Soviet attacks. The promise of cash can only purchase so many mercenaries. Romanian officers and soldiers believed in the virtue of their cause and threat of “Judeo-Bolshevism,” which bound them together, and duty to the nation motivated them to make sacrifices that words, whips, or cash could not.

CHAPTER IX

MOTIVATION OF ROMANIAN WOMEN AND MINORITIES

The traditional Romanian narrative of the war is male-centric and nationalist. It ignores the contribution of tens of thousands of women, most of whom served as Red Cross volunteers, who offered medical treatment and succor to wounded or dying soldiers on the front. An history of the Romanian Red Cross exists but does not focus on the motivation of female volunteers.¹ The service of tens of thousands of religious, ethnic, and racial minorities in the ranks of the Romanian Army is also almost completely overlooked – with the exception of ethnic Germans, but in this case, historians focus on those who volunteered to fight for the *Waffen-SS*.² The service of women and minorities deserves to be recognized. The reality that some women and minorities participated in the Holocaust must be acknowledged as well. The perspectives of women and minorities offer more evidence for the strength of intrinsic motivation and extent of support for the “holy war” throughout the whole of Romanian society.

Women provide an interesting case of motivation because, unlike men that were drafted, all women who served were volunteers. Female volunteerism illustrates all the facets of intrinsic motivation previously illustrated to have motivated Romanian soldiers in the ranks. Romania’s traditional society, however, greatly circumscribed the extent and ways in which women could provide service to the military. Class was the decisive factor in determining who volunteered, mostly wealthy middle-class or boyar women, although a few peasant women volunteered too.

¹ Andrei Șiperco, *Crucea Rosie Internațională și România (1939 - 1944)* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997).

² Axworthy transmits this narrow Romanian nationalist focus, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 144.

Contemporary gender roles meant that almost all these volunteers would only serve as nurses.

Romanian women who volunteered provided the General Staff with womanpower used to fill rear service roles because manpower reserves were limited, and every man needed for combat.

During the war minority men served both in the ranks of combat units at the front and in labor battalions in Romania. The rhetoric of “holy war” was somewhat less effective with these men and the General Staff so distrusted certain minorities that it restricted them from combat, but these fears were largely overblown because most minorities shared similar intrinsic motivation – a fact unappreciated by most officers. Obviously, Romanian nationalism was not a major factor, but religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism were still powerful motivators. The threat of “godless communism” worried all Christians – and Muslims – not just Orthodox believers. Anti-Semitism was as common among minorities as it was among Romanians; the same was true with the fear of “Judeo-Bolshevism.” Most minorities, regardless of class, feared communism for the same reasons as Romanians. The SSI and Section II greatly exaggerated minorities’ connections to communism before and during the war. Only a small number, mostly from the small working class, were sympathetic to the ideology emanating from Moscow, particularly promises of social justice and national self-determination – including the revision of the borders of *România Mare*. Therefore, most minority soldiers dutifully reported for service in the Romanian Army.

This chapter will also examine the Gypsy racial minority and Gypsy soldiers’ service in the Romanian Army. *România Mare* had a large Gypsy minority that despite being assimilated into the national culture – most spoke Romanian and were Romanian Orthodox Christians – were reviled because of the color of their skin. However, unlike Jews, or other ethnic minorities, the General Staff never considered Gypsies a serious threat to national security, so did not keep them under close surveillance. Romanian Army reports never listed Gypsies as a separate category of

minority or gathered intelligence on them like suspected minorities, so Gypsy soldiers are nearly invisible in army records. They were conscripted no differently than Romanians, assigned to combat units, and most were motivated by the same basic intrinsic factors as their Romanian comrades. Nevertheless, the Antonescu regime decided to target “unproductive” members of the Gypsy minority in mid-1942 for persecution unequaled by any other minority – except Jews.

Romanian Feminism, the First World War, and Female Volunteerism

Romanian women, particularly those from the upper classes who made up the bulk of the volunteers during the war, were penetrated with the same intrinsic motivation as Romanian men. Boyar women led the feminist movement in Romania, wielding their social influence to develop a conservative brand of feminism to advance the rights of elite women.³ Romanian conservative feminism promised to uphold the social status quo if allowed to participate in building a healthy, modern nation. Princess Alexandrina Cantacuzino embodied Romanian feminism. She was an ultranationalist, xenophobic, and authoritarian. Originally born into a minor boyar family from Moldavia in 1876, she was educated in France, and then married into the princely Cantacuzino family. In 1910 she helped create *Societatea Ortodoxă Națională a Femeilor Române*, or The Romanian Women’s National Orthodox Society, which she dominated until she died in 1944.⁴ Middle-class Romanian women shared conservative politics and joined the feminist movement to improve the position of socially elite women in Romanian society. When the Romanian Army invaded the USSR in 1941 many of women enthusiastically volunteered their time and service.

³ Eastern Europe had the less successful feminism but did carve out a small role for elite women, see, Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 272, 217-218.

⁴ Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskolova and Anna Loutfi, ed., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women’s Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 92.

The First World War established the precedent of using female volunteers as nurses on the front. The Romanian Red Cross was established in 1876, just in time to support the Russo-Turkish War of 1877, it and another female organization in Bucharest provided funds and a few female personnel for three ambulance companies – a fourth was financed by Jews in Bucharest.⁵ Female volunteerism reached new heights in 1913, during Romanian Army's brief campaign in Bulgaria during the Second Balkan War, and in 1916-1919 during the First World War. The demands of total war mobilized more female volunteers than ever before. They served as nurses working in hospitals, running network of canteens for the starving poor, and fighting the spread of disease in unoccupied Moldavia. Princess Cantacuzino volunteered for the Red Cross, and controversially remained in Bucharest under German occupation.⁶ Queen Marie set the example by donning the uniform of a nurse and visiting wounded soldiers in hospitals; she was venerated as the “mother of the wounded.” The memory of Queen Marie set the stage for a competition in the Second World War that developed between Queen-Mother Helen and Maria Antonescu, the wife of the *Conducător*, over who would take her place as the female saint to the nation.

In interwar Romania class still determined women's roles, rights, and opportunities more than did gender. Elizabeth Wood argues that the cult of domesticity was much weaker in Eastern Europe due to the absence of a large middle class. The cult of domesticity claimed there were separate spheres for men and women; one of female passivity, leisure, and domestic life; another of male activity, career, and public life. Society in Eastern Europe was largely divided between nobles (men and women) who did not work and peasants (men and women) who worked – by

⁵ Alin Ciupală, *Bătălia lor: Femeile din românia în primul război mondial* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2017), 95; Scafeș, *Armata română în războiul de independență*, 208.

⁶ Ciupală, *Bătălia lor*, 225; Bucur, *Heroes and Victims*, 83-85.

the *fin de siècle* a small bourgeoisie and even smaller working class had developed.⁷ Feminists used the cult of domesticity to argue for increased rights as virtuous mothers of the nation and pointed to their service during the First World War to strengthen their claim. Feminists' efforts bore fruit during the interwar period: women with education or training, members of important societies, members of the civil service, or war widows 21 or older could vote and even stand for office in municipal elections after 1929. An independent and short-lived political party, *Grupul Femeilor Române*, or the Romanian Women's Group, was set up, and in 1938 King Carol II gave elite women a chance to stand in elections that resulted in the first female ministers in Romanian history. Peasant women did not benefit much from Romanian feminism and remained subject to the traditional peasant patriarchy of the village. The number of female workers was minuscule and considered suspect by elite women.⁸ During the war both peasant and working-class women were needed to work in fields or factories and not encouraged to volunteer.

The fall of Carol II did not change the situation of women because the Antonescu regime largely maintained the gender status quo. On 28 September 1940, shortly after the creation of the National Legionary State, Antonescu proclaimed to Romanian women at a Legionary rally that "the men who are building Romania will be warriors. Warriors in every moment. At home they must find goodwill, warmth, and order. You must make this happen... Then shall we ask you to fulfill three great tasks: raising children, social welfare, and defending our borders."⁹ In the 1930s, the Legionary movement attracted women as well as men. Legionary women formed

⁷ Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 16.

⁸ The female-dominated textile industry had 67,968 workers in 1938, but not all workers were women, see, N.N. Constantinescu, *Situația Clasei Muncitoare din România, 1914-1944* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1966), 290.

⁹ Translated quote taken from Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 227.

groups that were supposed to promote female self-improvement, support Legionaries, improve female morality, maintain an active life based in Christian tradition, and form a “new woman” to fight for a purified Romania.¹⁰ Princess Cantacuzino became a firm devotee of Codreanu in the 1930s, but after the Legionary uprising in 1941 she took a leadership position in the Red Cross again and worked for the Antonescu regime until her death in 1944.

Antonescu needed women to support his vision of a military welfare state. In April 1941 a law created *Consiliul de Patronaj al Operelor Sociale*, or the Council of Patronage for Social Works, headed by Maria Antonescu, which was tasked with providing financial aid to the nation by bringing all social welfare organizations, public and private, under unified leadership. It was set up in competition with the Red Cross and adopted a Blue Cross as its symbol, but it remained the junior organization. The Blue Cross focused on providing care to the families of soldiers as well as invalids, orphans, and widows. On 15 May 1941, the Decree-Law for the Organization of National Labor gave the state the right to conscript citizens for labor service, including women who did not have regular employment.¹¹ Nevertheless, there was never a female counterpart to *Munca Tineretului Român*, or Romanian Youth Work, a paramilitary labor group comprised of pre-military aged young men that was modeled on the *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, or the Reich Labor Service, because Romanian society would not tolerate it – peasants wanted daughters close to home and social elites did not want daughters forced to work. Antonescu feared the political consequences of alienating the middle class or peasantry. Jewish women, on the other hand, had little political clout, so on 27 June 1942 the General Instructions on Jewish Forced Labor issued

¹⁰ Legionary “fortresses” for women, compared to male “nests,” see, Clark, *Holy Romanian Youth*, 115-116.

¹¹ Bărbulescu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România*, 73-77.

by the General Staff allowed the territorial corps to mobilize Jewish women between 18-40 as seamstresses or washerwoman if they needed them.¹² Yet while thousands were mobilized at different times, most Jewish women west of the Prut were not used as labor.

During the Second World War, female volunteers again responded to the call to provide service for the war effort. Most women carried out their labors west of the Dniester near home with the Red Cross, often aided by the Blue Cross, and played an important role in Antonescu's efforts to motivate soldiers in combat by delivering on promises of a military welfare state that would care for their families while they fought or if they died in battle. In April 1943, a pair of officers took the initiative to set up a canteen for poor or orphan high school students (serving 60 a day) in a village in Prahova County. General Pantazi ordered all garrison commanders to copy them, request support from the Blue Cross, and have local boyar women or officers' wives help prepare and distribute the food. A few months later, Pantazi upbraided officers' wives and daughters for being too preoccupied with their own amusements and not setting an example by volunteering for the Red Cross or the Blue Cross. "Officers' wives must work on the internal front to be equal to the sacrifice of the country's soldiers that are fighting on the front."¹³

The Red Cross was the primary institution that Romanian women served in to support the war effort. Queen-Mother Helen was its honorary patron and a few women sat on its board, but its leadership consisted mostly of men. In anticipation of the need for nurses if war broke out, the Red Cross offered free courses that taught basic nursing skills to young women in Bucharest and other major cities during the year after the Soviet occupation of eastern Romania to create a

¹² Ibid., 255, 376, 498.

¹³ Fond Corpul Granicerilor, dosar 3513, f. 26; RG-25.003M, Reel 15, dosar 1480, c. 205.

pool of trained nurses. Unfortunately, few women chose to attend classes before June 1941.¹⁴

Nevertheless, 2,754 volunteer nurses and 2,430 female medical auxiliaries served with the Red Cross in hospitals or canteens on the front in the operational zone east of the Dniester.¹⁵

Women on the Front

Red Cross Volunteers

The declaration of war on 22 June 1941 triggered a wave of patriotic volunteerism among middle-class and boyar women. The heavy casualties in the first weeks of the war overwhelmed the existing medical infrastructure and compelled the General Staff to rush to establish up more hospitals and train new staff. Emil Dorian, a Jewish doctor from Bucharest, was sent to the town of Găiești at the outbreak of the war where he supervised soldiers converting a local agricultural school into a hospital with the assistance of the older ladies (including a baroness) and the young women of the town elite who set up beds, collected supplies, and scrubbed windows and floors. He remembered wryly, “They made their appearance dressed in the proper Red Cross uniform, expressing their regret that there were no wounded.”¹⁶ There was no shortage of wounded men in Bucharest. For the first months of the war the front was so close that most wounded were sent to the capital where the largest, best-equipped, and best-staffed hospitals were concentrated. It also had many Red Cross female volunteers, including the theater critic Alice Voinescu. As she changed bandages of the wounded or tended the sick she conversed with the peasant soldiers and found herself attached to “these simple, but very intelligent and good people,” however she was

¹⁴ AMR Fond Asociația Surorilor de Caritate de Război, dosar 27, f. 38.

¹⁵ Crucea Roșie Română, “Istoria Crucii Rosii Române 1940 – 1945,” <https://crucearosie.ro/cine-suntem/istoria-crucii-rosii-romane/istoria-crucii-rosii-romane-1940-1945/>.

¹⁶ Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 163, 165.

horrified by their frequent use of the word kike “that encapsulates the worst in them.”¹⁷ Veteran nurses of the First World War volunteered too. *Asociație Surorile de Caritate de Război*, or The Association of War Nurses, with around 800 aging members, offered their services for the front, the General Staff demurred. They were undeterred, raising funds and collecting materials for the war effort.¹⁸ Women made up for military unpreparedness in these important areas.

The Red Cross followed the Romanian Army as it liberated eastern Romania. In early August 1941, Maria Moruzi-Brăescu, a Red Cross representative, toured newly freed Bessarabia, inspected the medical facilities there, and suggested the establishment of canteens and hospitals to the General Headquarters.¹⁹ The General Staff preferred older, married nurses whose morality was unquestioned, but the Red Cross needed young, unattached women who could deal with the great physical demands and mental stress required of them. On 23 August 1941, Elise G., a Red Cross nurse recently arrived in a hospital in Bălți, crowded with wounded from Odessa, reported,

We each have a pavilion where we try to do all that is humanely possible to comfort so much misery that it is terrible. For the moment, we are holding up well, but I do not believe that [nurse] Dina will be able to support much more of this hell...No one should be sent here who doesn't have an iron will and a strong work ethic and [an] exceptional physique.²⁰

The General Staff continued to demand morally irreproachable women, so application forms for nurses included income, ethnicity, and moral conduct sections to select married middle-class and boyar women. These strict standards, however, left patriotic Romanian nurses who followed the Third Army across the Dniester into Soviet Ukraine understaffed and overworked.

¹⁷ Voinescu, *Jurnal*, vol. 1, 318, 322, 326.

¹⁸ Fond Asociația Surorile de Caritate de Război, dosar 27, f. 2; dosar 29, f. 8.

¹⁹ ASNCRR Fond Organizare, dosar 14/1941, f. 22-23, 38.

²⁰ Ibid., dosar 14/1941, f. 66.

Since the General Headquarters believed the war would be over by Christmas 1941 it did not prioritize the shortage of womanpower on the front. Therefore, the Red Cross doctors and nurses took the initiative and began recruiting Moldovan, Ukrainian, or Russian women to assist them in the hospitals and canteens set up east of the Dniester. Every field hospital had a chief nurse, a section supervisor, and one nurse for every 20 sick or wounded men (usually a capacity for 300 soldiers); the chief nurse had authority to make personnel changes.²¹ The chief nurses hired Soviet women to help in tending the wounded, cleaning, and cooking. Middle-class or boyar Red Cross nurses treated these Soviet female laborers much as they did peasant women at home. After the Soviet winter counteroffensive proved that the war would not soon end, Third Army began sorting out its rear in Ukraine, including Red Cross hospitals and canteens. General Dumitrescu ordered in April and June 1942 that the Red Cross could not keep hiring more non-Romanian women and asked for lists of those Soviet women already hired – they could stay but only under close supervision by Section II.²² These women were seen by paranoid officers as potential Soviet agents who could spread defeatism, spy, or even poison soldiers. Nevertheless, Red Cross nurses had to rely on these women as the need for nursing staff only increased as the war continued. The General Staff never relaxed its high standards for female volunteers.

By June 1942, the Red Cross had established canteens east of the Dniester in Nicolaev, Lemberg (L'vov), Birzula, Radelania, Njecajanoje, and Odessa with 5 more teams in reserve for locations further east.²³ Each canteen was marked in Romanian and German (*Cantina Crucea Roșie Română – Rumanische “Rote-Kreuz Kantine”*) and usually located in a train station. They

²¹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1236, f. 11.

²² Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1126, f. 132, 134-135, 136.

²³ Ibid., dosar 1732, f. 73-74.

provided soldiers with a hot meal (usually just tea or coffee in the morning, but a full meal for lunch and dinner), a kind word, and a bit of home deep in Ukraine. A canteen set up in January 1942 in Odessa under a Mrs. Golescu, with help from Mrs. Carp – who had followed her officer husband to occupied Transnistria – began serving 600-1,000 cups of tea or coffee, found enough supplies for 200 portions of soup, and later 100 loaves of bread a day. They were proud to help “our frozen soldiers” who “had not tasted anything hot in 5-6 days.”²⁴ Without such canteens, troops would have gone without because Axis logistics were overstretched.

Women working at Red Cross canteens had to find ways to augment the paltry supplies provided by Third Army. Funds and supplies donated in Romania were sent to the front, but not all of it made its way to the troops. Some soldiers thought that the canteen staff pocketed much of the money and sold off goods for their own profit, but this happened less often than soldiers believed. There are examples of false Red Cross collections, in one case a lieutenant asked for donations from passengers on trains that then he pocketed.²⁵ Third Army charged fees – more for officers, less for NCOs, and very little for enlisted men – for special events or entertainment to raise funds for the Red Cross. For example, proceeds from admission to a soccer match on 12 July 1942 in Simferopol was donated to the Red Cross in Crimea.²⁶ By April 1943, additional canteens had been set up in Kherson, Dzhankoy, Simferopol, Kerch, and Taman.

Often the only Romanian women for hundreds of kilometers, nurses became the object of amorous attention of soldiers. While the army preferred mature married women as nurses in the operational zone east of the Dniester, there were plenty of single young women as well, and of

²⁴ Mrs. Carp’s husband provided the basement space, see, Fond Organizare, dosar 14/1941, f. 285.

²⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 3447, f. 662.

²⁶ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 914, f. 382.

course the bounds of matrimony did not always remain sacred under the dual strains of time and distance. Nurses usually associated with officers because they were from the same social milieu, and officers had the freedom to visit Red Cross stations. Many of the relationships were merely platonic friendships between married officers far from their wives and married nurses far from their husbands. February 1943, as 3rd Mountain Battalion occupied Crimea, Major Scâncici soon developed a friendship with Red Cross staff in nearby Feodosia, particularly nurses Mrs. Șendrea (“a trueborn Moldavian, from Iași”) and Ms. Milcoveanu (“one hundred percent Oltenian”), and not only did he and officers visit Feodosia, but the nurses frequently visited his headquarters. In fact, officers and nurses participated in Islamic ceremonies to win local goodwill, “Together with them, we marry pair after pair of Tatars. We are *Kum* (godfather) and *Kuma* (godmother). It will be more difficult at the baptism of the newborns, as we have to assist in the circumcision and that we do not like.”²⁷ Not all officer-nurse relationships were so innocent.

Despite official discouragement, sexual relationships did develop between officers and nurses. In April 1943, the General Staff reiterated the need for “exemplary” discipline, decency, and morality from nurses.²⁸ Soldiers’ comportment at Red Cross canteens was often far from gallant. Third Army reported in August 1943 that officers and NCOs did not exhibit “a proper attitude” to nurses: using disrespectful language, spreading of salacious rumors about them, and if nurses sat with soldiers the officers calling them whores. The nurses had “made the sacrifice of leaving their families to serve the army far from home...day and night, without taking notice of fatigue...For this reason the female personnel of the R.[ed] C.[ross] not only should not be

²⁷ Oltenia is a name for the western part of Wallachia, see, Scarnesci, *Viața și moarte în linia întări*, 396

²⁸ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2158, f. 18.

subjected to offences and insults, but they will be given all due respect required by decorum.”²⁹

Nurses were supposed to be pure vessels of patriotic service and not sexual objects.

The Antonescu regime’s re-mobilization of Romanian society in the spring of 1942 again called for female volunteers. Fewer answered the call this time around because most willing to volunteer for service east of the Dniester had done so in 1941, but the General Staff successfully attracted a steady trickle of volunteers that met its high standards for nurses to provide Red Cross personnel for the expanded number of canteens and hospitals east of the Dniester. It was much easier for the Red Cross to recruit volunteers in Romania. Even if enthusiasm among women to volunteer to serve with the Red Cross on the front had waned when the front again approached Romania at the end of 1943, the Antonescu regime was able to count on female volunteers ready to do their part to defend the homeland. During 1943-1944, leading up to Romania’s exit from the Axis alliance, army newspapers began printing lists of soldiers who volunteered for the front, including nurses. *Soldatul* recorded 14 female volunteers in March 1944.³⁰

Entertainers

A small number of Romanian women, a few dozen, experienced the front as entertainers. These women were singers, dancers, and actresses hired by the Propaganda Section to entertain troops by traveling the expanses of Ukraine, Crimea, and southern Russia as members of several theater groups. After an initial trial run of two all-male theater groups sent to Transnistria and Crimea in the summer of 1942, the Propaganda Section decided to send two “mixed” theater

²⁹ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1414, f. 26

³⁰ “Alți Voluntari cer să lupte pentru patrie,” *Soldatul*, 21 Martie 1944, 5.

groups with 11 women entertainers each to the front beginning in September 1942 and ending in January 1943. These women crisscrossed the occupied territories performing hundreds of shows.

While these female entertainers were paid, their motivation went beyond mere lucre, as traveling through occupied territory was both difficult and exhausting, especially with a packed schedule of performances at each stop. Moreover, while they originally signed on for 45 days, most stayed twice as long, some took no leave for holidays, and returned home only after falling ill; like Any Lupașcu on the front for 101 days.³¹ They normally performed for groups of 1,000, but sometimes up to 3,000 soldiers. Soviet civilians, excited for entertainment, swelled groups further. These young women had professional training as entertainers; sung traditional folk tunes, contemporary songs, and classic opera; performed folk dances, waltzes, foxtrots, and even acrobatics. A sample program from fall 1942 illustrates the kinds of entertainment.

1. entrance of the group, 2. The Royal Hymn (played by an orchestra), 3. Prayer for Romania (recited by an NCO), 4. *At the well with a bucket* (female singer), 5. [Private] Neață at Concentration (comic sketch), 6. *Donia* and *Ciocârlia* (pan flute solo), 7. *Who will take me?* (couplet by a female singer), 8. The Japanese [Duo] (juggling and acrobatics by a husband-wife team), 9. *Hey pal who stands watch?* (duet), 10. Tyrol Ballet (male and female dancers), 11. peasant joke sketches, 12. magic tricks, 13. imitations, 14. *It was Fatel to me* (comedy couplet), 15. comedic acrobatics, 16. *You cannot hit us* (comedic couplet), 17. *Badea told me*, 18. Tri-conference (comic sketch), 19. Romanian dances, 20. [Major] Agrici left to hunt, 21. *Am I right? I am!*, 22. parade of the whole theater group, 23. patriotic recitation, 24. closing words, and 25. final choir.³²

The White Squadron

A group of a dozen women actually served in uniform as pilots in the Royal Romanian Air Force transporting wounded soldiers in *Escadrila albă* (the White Squadron). The exploits

³¹ Fond Secția Propaganda, dosar 115, f. 13, 20.

³² Ibid., dosar 82, f. 6-7.

of the squadron's female pilots were celebrated by the Romanian military press and repeatedly interviewed by German and Italian war correspondents. The White Squadron ferried over ten thousand wounded Romanian, plus a thousand German, soldiers by air from field hospitals in Bessarabia, Odessa, Crimea, and even Stalingrad to hospitals in Romania.

This squadron was established in 1940 due to the efforts of Princess Marina Știrbey as part of Romanian Civil Aviation. Princess Știbey was inspired by the Finnish female volunteer paramilitary organization called *Lotta Svärd* that supported the Finnish Army during the Winter War.³³ The Romanian Royal Air Force desperately needed trained pilots in 1940. The squadron had eight pilots: Mariana Drăgescu, Virginia Duțescu, Virginia Thomas, Nadia Russo, Victoria Comșa, Jeana Iliescu, Maria Adam, and Maria Voitec. Half of them were noblewomen (Russo was a Russian exile) who had the wealth and leisure to earn their pilot's license. Unfortunately, on 21 July 1940, four of them (Comșa, Iliescu, Adam, Voitec) were killed in a training accident at the Băneasa airfield just outside Bucharest.³⁴ As volunteers they could quit the unit whenever they decided that they had done enough. The other four survived the war, leaving the squadron at different points between 1941 and 1943, except for Drăgescu who remained for the whole war, even after 23 August 1944. They were joined in 1942 by the newly trained group of Smaranda Brăescu (a peasant turned famed interwar parachutist), Victoria Polkol, Maria Nicolae, and Stela Huțan. They held the rank of Pilot 2nd Lieutenant, received an air force salary, and wore grey-blue air force uniforms – except for Russo who usually wore civil aviation white. They trained on transport aircraft and were initially named *Escadrila Sanitară*, or the Sanitary Squadron.

³³ Daniel Focșa, *Escadrila albă: o istorie subiectivă* (Bucharest: Editura Vremea, 2008), 22.

³⁴ Sorin Turturică, *Aviațoarele României: Din înaltul cerului în beciurile Securității* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2013), 94-95.

Italian journalist Curzio Malaparte made the squadron famous after seeing it during his visit to the front in July 1941. He was the first to coin the nickname the White Squadron because their aircraft were painted white with a Red Cross.³⁵ Italian media fawned over the squadron and a joint Italo-Romanian production made a film based on it in 1943. The Romanian military press followed suit and depicted their “flying ambulances” as a continuation of the traditional auxiliary medical role fulfilled by socially elite women since they first financed ambulance companies in 1877, but these women were first and foremost pilots, not nurses, and lacked even basic medical training until early 1943.³⁶ Parts of Russo’s journal were published in *Armata* in 1942 and her description of prepping and flying the plane while her medical assistant Ernest loaded and cared for wounded presented readers with a case of role reversal that many found shocking. Drăgescu remembered a one wounded soldier in 1943 expressing “maximum disbelief” when he realized she was the pilot and even resisted being loaded into the aircraft.³⁷

Romanians saw women in combat as unnatural and except for the female pilots of the White Squadron, the Propaganda Section depicted women as caring mothers or nurses. The only women shown in combat were Soviet. From the beginning of the war, Romanian propaganda used the fact that the Soviets were sending women into combat as proof of the moral bankruptcy of the Soviet regime and evidence the Red Army was near collapse. Rădulescu depicted Soviet female soldiers in his comic strip as fat, ugly creatures who did not belong on the front and easily captured by Private Neață.³⁸ The female pilots of the White Squadron pushed the boundaries of gender norms in Romanian society, but within limitations set by the military.

³⁵ Turturică, *Aviatoarele României*, 97; *Sentinela*, 6 Iulie 1941, 6.

³⁶ Turturică, *Aviatoarele României*, 99.

³⁷ *Armata*, Anul I, Nr. 7-8, 4 Octombrie 1942, 14-15; Focșa, *Escadrila albă*, 30.

³⁸ Rădulescu, “Pațaniile soldatului Neață,” *Sentinela*, 27 July 1941, 7.

Corporal Constanța Moisescu

During a visit to a mountain battalion in Crimea in May 1943 Ion Postolache, a spotted a strange looking soldier wearing the crisp uniform and when he came closer, “I saw how feminine tresses flowed from underneath the mountain beret almost down to the shoulders. The delicate soldier in front of me was a woman.”³⁹ Postolache was in truth not surprised to find a female soldier in Crimea because he had come specifically to interview her. His dramatic license was meant to squeeze every bit of shock from the revelation and hook his readers, who would have been dismayed to read of such an abnormality, the only woman serving in the ranks of the Romanian Army during the Second World War, Corporal Constanța Moisescu.

A female soldier in the Romanian Army was not unprecedented. Ecaterina Teodoroiu was a heroine of the First World War, in 1916 she volunteered as a nurse, but when the German Army overran most of Romania, including her hometown of Târgu Jiu where she organized a failed defense, she volunteered to fight as a soldier to avenger her slain brother. She overcame a reluctant military establishment with the backing of the king and queen, fought in several battles, after being wounded was made an honorary 2nd lieutenant, and ultimately was killed in battle in 1917. She was celebrated after the war as the supreme example of Romanian female sacrifice. In February 1943, an article in *Soldatul* entitled “Women in Combat” argued that women should support the war effort by taking their men’s place at the plow and providing succor as nurses. It compared Corporal Moisescu with 2nd Lieutenant Teodoroiu, “Her soul sought to defeat the weakness of body and bending the law of nature took up arms together with men.” Romanians, it argued, should not be surprised that the new war against the greater enemy of Bolshevism

³⁹ Ion Postolache, “O voluntara a cruciadei din rasarit: Caporal Moisescu Constanța,” *Gazeta Odesei*, 9 Mai 1943, 3.

finally “has its heroine.”⁴⁰ The use of the singular was no accident and the implied message was clear. Romania had had a heroine, Teodoroiu, in the First World War and now had a heroine, Moisescu, in the Second World War. In consequence, there was no need for any other Romanian women to get any ideas about serving in combat.

In her interview in May 1943 Corporal Moisescu related her story of how she became a soldier in the Mountain Corps fighting partisans in Crimea. She was from a small town in the Carpathian Mountains on the way to Brașov called Bușteni. In the summer of 1942, she sent a petition to Marshal Antonescu asking to be sent to the front to fight as a simple soldier, after which she was called for a personal audience with the *Conducător* in Predeal where, “I explained to him that I had no other reason except for love of country. Neither sentimental delusion, nor desire for fame [were motivations]. I wanted to follow the same life as our soldiers, to live with them the same heights, and to face death together with them.” After she convinced Antonescu of her pure intentions he approved her petition, the only one of 86, and he sent her to the infantry training center in Făgăraș. After basic training Private Moisescu asked to join the “green devils” (a Red Army nickname for Romania’s mountain troops). She trained with the Mountain Corps rear element during 1 August-15 November 1942 before going to Crimea. Since then, “Here I served just like a soldier: sentry duty, marches, shooting, fears of combat. I get no special treatment any different from my comrades. This winter I remained on the frontline for 23 days without being relieved.”⁴¹ She was promoted to corporal after her stalwart winter service.

⁴⁰ Ion Munteanu, “Femei in lupta,” *Soldatul*, 25 Februarie 1943, 1.

⁴¹ Ion Postolache, “O voluntara a cruciadei din rasarit: Caporal Moisescu Constanța,” *Gazeta Odesei*, 9 Mai 1943, 3.

Unfortunately, the record falls silent and Corporal Moisescu's fate is unknown. If she remained in Crimea until the Soviet broke through and retook the peninsula in May 1944, it is likely she escaped by ship or became a casualty during the retreat. This assumes that she was not killed in one of the many anti-partisan operations carried out in the year following her interview – sweeps resulting in burned villages and reprisals. One thing is sure, she was never celebrated like Teodoroiu, and if she survived the war she faded into obscurity in a country that did not want to remember why she had volunteered to fight against the Soviet Union.

Women and the Holocaust

The contribution of Romanian women was not without a darker side as their efforts were ultimately in the service of an army fighting for a reprehensible cause. In addition to donations, both the Red Cross and Blue Cross benefited from funds extorted from Jews. Maria Antonescu's Council of Patronage for Social Works received 400 million *lei* in 1942 alone.⁴² Nurses who worked alongside Jewish doctors in Romania treated them as pariahs, even as they relied on their medical expertise to save the lives of soldiers who may have participated in massacres of Jews. The women who served on the front were confronted with the criminal aspects of the war being fought by the Romanian Army. Pilot 2nd Lieutenant Drăgescu recalled visiting Odessa after it fell and saw Soviets executed as partisans by the “Germans,” but considering that the city was under Third Army occupation they were executed by the Romanians.⁴³ The extent to which Romanian nurses may have participated in atrocities east of the Dniester is unclear.

⁴² Much of it through Radu Lecca's Central Jewish Office, see, Deletent, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 123.

⁴³ It is also certainly possible that the “Russians” were in fact Jews, see, Focșa, *Escadrila albă*, 22.

Sex, Prostitution, and Rape on the Front

While Romanians imagined that the front was a masculine space, the territory east of the Dniester occupied by the Axis was filled with women left behind by the Red Army. This put the Romanian Army in position of power over Soviet women. Since Red Cross nurses were largely off limits to the rank and file, only officers could pursue them, NCOs or privates courted local girlfriends, purchased sex, and some used force to satisfy carnal desires. Sexual violence by troops against Soviet women is a subject that Romanian military historians avoid even more studiously than the murder of Jews or partisans in their sanitized accounts of the Eastern Front. In comparison, Holocaust historians emphasize the rape of Jewish women by Romanian soldiers. Therefore, sexual practices by Romanian soldiers on the front deserves some attention.

Third Army discouraged its soldiers from fraternization, but many officers and soldiers disregarded its wishes. Soldiers who stayed in a location for any length of time, particularly in occupation duties in Transnistria or Crimea, often found local girlfriends and some got married.⁴⁴ Those just passing through sought temporary companionship. The Romanian Army did not have a tradition of army brothels and, unlike the German Army, did not establish any to try to limit the spread of venereal disease.⁴⁵ At times gendarmes arrested prostitutes, but often on accident, like in May 1942 when police searching for communists or legionaries in Tiraspol stumbled upon 22 prostitutes plying their trade.⁴⁶ Romanian officers could frequent German army brothels, but the rank and file made due with illegal brothels. In November 1942, the SSI reported there were six

⁴⁴ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 568, f. 61; some argue the unequal relationship between occupier and occupied means that even consensual relationships have at least a tinge of coercion, see, Bucur, *Heroes and Victims*, 207.

⁴⁵ In fact, during the First World War it was not until after the arrival of the soldiers of the French Military Mission that such establishments were created, and even then, only for French officers' use, see, Ciupală, *Bătălia lor*, 66.

⁴⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1130, f. 401.

“houses of tolerance” in Simferopol and venereal disease was common.⁴⁷ Due to a shortage of medicine (and officer indifference) soldiers with venereal disease were often left untreated, so army records are peppered with reports of soldiers with cases of untreated syphilis.

Some soldiers decided they would not pay for sex and used force. The Romanian Army did not tolerate rape to the extent of the Red Army, but it was relatively commonplace, especially against Jewish women in eastern Romania in the opening phase of Operation Barbarossa. Since Jews were believed to have humiliated Romania by impoverishing it over decades and betraying it in 1940 soldiers raped Jewish women to assert dominance. They often gang raped women or girls in front of their families to humiliate them.⁴⁸ Michael Stivelman, a Jew from Secureni in northern Bukovina, emerged from hiding in early July soon after the Romanian Army arrived, and found Molia Roitman, a 16-year-old neighbor, who had been gang raped by soldiers while her parents were forced to watch, but he could do nothing and she bled to death.⁴⁹ There are stories of alcohol fueled rape orgies followed by the rape victims’ murder by gendarmes during the deportation of Jews from eastern Romania to Transnistria.⁵⁰

Romanian soldiers raped Soviet women once they crossed into the Soviet Union, but on a smaller scale. Officers punished rape, albeit sporadically, by flogging soldiers. Officers caught in the act were court martialed, such as in October 1941 when a lieutenant billeted in a Ukrainian home raped one of the daughters of the owner.⁵¹ In September 1942, Third Army reported that

⁴⁷ Soldiers usually paid for sex with food. A few of the prostitutes in Simferopol also had positions as cooks in army canteens and were soon successful black marketers, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 933, f. 91.

⁴⁸ Regina Mühlhäuser, “Between ‘Racial Awareness’ and Fantasies of Potency: Nazi Sexual politics in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union, 1942-1945,” in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 200-201.

⁴⁹ Stivelman, *The Death March*, 108.

⁵⁰ For a section on “Degradation of Jewish Women,” see, Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania*, 438-444.

⁵¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 287, f. 73.

soldiers passing through Rostov on the way to the Don front “stop women on the street and try to convince them to accompany them either with food or money, and even by force.”⁵² The report declared these actions were unworthy of soldiers, more embarrassed about indiscipline than true concern about protecting women. General Dumitrescu, as with all discipline problems, ordered rapists to be shot, but there is little evidence this occurred.

Minorities in the Ranks

The General Staff was deeply suspicious of minorities, but it needed the manpower. The most suspect minorities were labeled Category III: Hungarians, Russians/Lipovans, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Jews. These were the largest minority groups, who were associated with hostile states on the borders of *România Mare*, and who, if they defected on a mass scale, could damage the war effort. Interwar Romania had smaller ethnic groups associated with friendly states that were labeled Category II: Poles, Czechoslovaks, and Yugoslavs. Leading up to 1940, the ethnic German minority in Romania worried the Romanian Army, especially with the rise of Hitler, and who were initially in Category III, but after the Antonescu regime allied with Nazi Germany these ethnic Germans received privileged treatment. The least suspect were ethnic Romanian members of religious sects labeled Category I: Baptists, Pentecostals, Evangelists, Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and several heretical Orthodox sects. Men from all these groups were conscripted, some served on the front, but most in labor detachments in Romania.

Jews

The Minority Treaty forced on Romania at the Paris Peace Conference meant that the situation for Jews in the Romanian Army improved during 1921-1940. They could now become

⁵² Ibid., dosar 877, f. 7.

reserve officers or NCOs and several regiments with Jewish majorities had rabbis as chaplains. Sadly, this progress was only superficial and was rapidly undone after June 1940. On 8 August 1940, one of the last acts of the Carlist regime was to issue a decree clarifying the status of Jews that included restricting Jews who received citizenship after 1918 from becoming regular officers and alluded that Jews would be required to provide labor service rather than army service. The Antonescu regime codified this idea on 5 December 1940 in the Law on the Military Status of the Jews that excluded all Jews from military service, obligated the payment of “military taxes,” and required Jewish men to provide communal labor [*muncă de folos obtesc*] “according to the needs of the state.”⁵³ During 1941-1944, the General Staff organized Jews into segregated labor detachments working in tough conditions in construction projects west of the Dniester and used Jewish professionals or craftsmen to make up for skilled labor shortages in Romania.

The General Staff organized segregated labor detachments to work on military and state projects beginning in May 1941.⁵⁴ Previously, during the brief reign of the National Legionary State, Legionaries forced Jews at random to do degrading communal labor like as clearing snow, mud, or trash from streets to humiliate. Since the suppression of the Legionaries, the Antonescu regime rationalized Jewish labor, but the war made regulating Jewish labor a greater priority. On 14 July 1941, Decree Nr. 2030 clarified labor obligations for Jews. Jewish men 18-50 could be mobilized as individuals, small groups, or large detachments, whatever dictated by the needs of the General Staff or other state institutions. Officially, they would only serve for a limited fixed period of days each year corresponding to age: 60 days of service for men 18-21, 180 days for

⁵³ For both decree-laws, see, Bărbulescu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România*, 57-64.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 14.

men 21-24, 120 days for men 24-26, 90 days for men 26-41, and 60 days for men 41-50.⁵⁵ A few Jewish professionals were exempted from physical labor but were still required to lend their skills when called upon. Any exempted for being sick, infirm, or otherwise unfit had to pay the “military tax.” Labor service was either “interior,” served locally with the individual providing his own meals and returning home each night, or “exterior,” assigned to a labor detachment in the countryside with food and shelter provided by the army. Some improved their assignment or escaped communal labor completely by a well-placed bribe. In mid-1941, 84,042 of the roughly 300,000 Jews remaining in the Old Kingdom and southern Transylvania were men between 18 and 50: 47,345 were eligible for communal labor, 11,933 were intellectuals available for white collar work, 9,365 were exempted, and the status of 15,399 was unclear.⁵⁶

Communal labor was a national program that encompassed not just Jews. Other ethnic minorities and even Romanians made up the majority of soldiers who required to provide labor service for the General Staff. Ultimately, 49 segregated labor detachments with 24,197 Jews and 176 labor detachments with 165,930 Romanians and minorities were formed (see Table 6).

Table 6. Situation of Labor Detachments, 1943.

Category	Units	Effectives	Date Created	Location	Minorities
Agriculture	30	15,930	Apr.-Jul. '43*	Territorial Corps	Mixed
Forestry	58	43,502	Oct. '41	Forest Districts	Mixed
Factory	5	1,950	Apr.-Jul. '42	Transylvania	
Petroleum	4	810	Aug. '43	Prahova Valley	
Road	13	25,412	Apr. '42	Transn., Romania	Mixed
Railroad	28	57,337	Apr. '42	Transyl., Mold.	42,320 Minorities
Train Station	6	1,200	Apr. '42	Transnistria	

⁵⁵ Trașcă, “Chestiunea evreiască” în documente militare române, 42.

⁵⁶ Bărbulescu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România*, 28.

Table 6 Continued. Situation of Labor Detachments, 1943.

Category	Units	Effectives	Date Created	Location	Minorities
Special	5	1,500	May '43	Military Schools	700 Hungarians
Sărata	17	14,516	May/Sept. '43	Transn., Romania	Mixed
Fortification	10	3,722	Aug./Dec. '43	Dobrogea, Transyl.	
Total:	176	165,930			
Railroad	4	1,056	Apr. '42	Territorial Corps	Jews
Roads	8	6,000	Apr. '42	Bessarabia	Jews
Engineer	5	6,709	Apr. '43	Moldavia	Jews
Civilian	32	8,414	Sept. '42	Various Cities	Jews
Sărata	2	1,994	-----	FNB Line	Jews
Total:	49	24,197			
General Total:	225	190,127			

*These agricultural labor detachments were demobilized each winter until the following spring.

Source: ANIC, Fond PCM: CM, dosar 35/1944, f. 7.

These units did all kinds of labor: road construction, railway repair, woodcutting, mining, and factory work. Jews did not receive uniforms, although it was not uncommon for Christian labor detachments to lack uniforms as well, other than a yellow armband with the letters C.R. or C.T. (for Recruitment Center or Territorial Corps), county name, and sometimes the unit designation printed or simply handwritten on them. The primary differences between normal and segregated labor detachments were Jewish laborers were supposed to provide their own equipment, received little to no pay, and fewer rations. Jewish families sent money, food, and clothing to help their sons, brothers, and husbands survive their labor service. If they worked locally families brought these things, but visits were curtailed, plus Jews' ability to travel was restricted, so many were unable to reach exterior labor detachments. The mail system was unreliable and mistrusted by

Jews and Christians alike, so they found other ways to deliver goods. Jewish families used Christian friends, sympathetic officers, or paid couriers to smuggle packages to forced laborers. For example, in July 1942, 2nd Lieutenant Vasile Tănăsacle, a reservist, was caught transporting a suitcase with 30-35 kg of clothing, food, medicine, and letters from Botoșani, where he had been billeted with the Grünberg family, a middle-class Jewish couple, to their son assigned to the Podolia Camp near Hotin. At his court martial, Tănăsacle did not deny transporting the suitcase, but “being touched by the sufferings of a mother, however, he declares that he should not be accused of un-patriotism.”⁵⁷ Most couriers lacked such a tender motivation. The profits from a brisk smuggling trade augmented the pay of soldiers, railway personnel, and civil servants traveling around Romanian and Transnistria. Romanian officers and NCOs oversaw these labor detachments. Some were corrupt or abusive, beating Jews, stealing packages sent from home, extorting money, and selling supplies designated for the Jewish laborers. Most, however, were no worse than an average Romanian officer or NCO. Jews in these segregated labor detachments were not worked to death or murdered, although a few died in work-related accidents.

After June 1941, the exemption of Jews from combat caused some consternation among Romanians. The General Staff reported on 19 February 1942 that soldiers became demoralized when they had leave and saw “insolent” and “defiant” Jews safe from the horrors on the front.⁵⁸ In November 1941, the Antonescu regime signaled a change in the status of Jews in segregated labor detachments when it began calling labor by Jews forced labor [*muncă obligatorie*].⁵⁹ The General Staff ordered a review to weed out Jews who bribed or faked their way into exemption

⁵⁷ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 779, f. 24-25

⁵⁸ Trașcă, “*Chestiunea evreiască*” în documente militare române, 459.

⁵⁹ Bărbulescu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România*, 15.

from forced labor, but the most important change was a new policy of deportation to Transnistria as a punishment for Jews who did not report for forced labor or otherwise caused problems. The General Staff not only threatened to deport those judged guilty of infractions, but families too.

The threat of deportation to Transnistria terrified Jews in the Old Kingdom who were well-informed of the fate of the Jews of Bukovina and Bessarabia. Most Jews in Transnistria were crowded into ghettos where they survived by smuggling, black marketeering, and working in factories. The rest were held in camps in the countryside. There were two types of camps: concentration camps set up in old Soviet kolkhozes where Jews deported from Bessarabia and Bukovina in 1941 worked in agriculture or construction, and small labor camps created for Jews deported from the Old Kingdom after 1942 for infractions related to forced labor.⁶⁰ This threat suddenly disappeared on 14 October 1942 when Mihai Antonescu suspended all deportations to Transnistria, including of Jewish “delinquents” from forced labor. Only 554 (306 delinquents with 249 family members) of 12,086 “disobedient” Jews were deported to Transnistria.⁶¹ After the deportation halt order Jewish absenteeism grew and by February 1943 the army thought there were 17,000 delinquent Jews. The General Staff considered punishing delinquents as deserters: permanent forced labor, seizure of property, or execution, but it never followed through on the threat to execute delinquents.⁶² Jews in Transnistria, however, could be executed for any number of reasons and the conditions facing them in ghettos and camps remained difficult.

The Romanian Army needed craftsmen and professionals, especially doctors, and Jewish medical officers continued to serve in uniform for almost the entire war. In August 1940, under

⁶⁰ Dennis Deletant, “Ghetto Experience in Golta, Transnistria, 1942-1944,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18, nr. 1 (Spring 2004), 6.

⁶¹ Bărbulescu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România*, 303-304.

⁶² Ibid., 323-333.

Carol II, the General Staff ordered all Jewish officers and NCOs, except for those with medical expertise, and all Jewish soldiers, except for those already in labor detachments, be demobilized and sent home.⁶³ The mobilization rolls began to be purged of Jews in December 1940, but there were no replacements for Jewish professionals. So, on 27 January 1941 Antonescu approved the continued use of Jewish doctors, pharmacists, veterinarians, engineers, and architects who would be allowed to continue wear uniforms with special Star of David insignia and receive a normal salary.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, senior officers raced to replace these Jews with Christian professionals, but the process was haphazard. Some senior officers simply sent all Jews home immediately, while others tried to hold onto them until replacements arrived. The General Staff announced in March 1941 that all Jewish doctors had been sent home and Christian replacements were on their way, but many doctors failed to report. In consequence, under pressure from concerned commanders, the General Staff reaffirmed the continued use of Jewish doctors – as strictly necessary.⁶⁵

When they donned their uniforms, Jewish doctors looked like any other officer, but when people realized that they were Jews they were repulsed. Emil Dorian recorded that his superior avoided telling the local elite that the officer physical helping set up a hospital in June 1941 as a Jew, but the fact got out. “The high society of Găiești learned that it had harbored ‘a beast, a traitor, a commando, etc., etc.,’” and demanded he be removed. Dorian boarded a train back to Bucharest, where he saw other Jewish doctors returning home after being left because their unit would not take them east of the Prut.⁶⁶ Officers needed Jewish doctors to help treat wounded soldiers, but often troops would not tolerate being treated by a Jew and officers believed that

⁶³ Fond CMC, dosar 84, f. 119.

⁶⁴ Bărbulescu, *Munca obligatorie a evreilor din România*, 70-71.

⁶⁵ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 177, f. 17, 22, 678; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 377, f. 52.

⁶⁶ Dorian, *The Quality of Witness*, 165-166.

Jewish doctors would spread defeatism or rumors to demoralize the soldiers. The General Staff ordered that Jewish medical staff wear Star of David rather than rank insignia on their collars and not be called by their former rank but instead “doctor” or “assistant doctor,” so soldiers knew who was treating them. Soldiers were reminded to be on their guard against Jewish subversion, and to not show Jews in uniform the same respect as Romanian officers.

The General Staff refused to allow Jewish doctors or laborers accompany combat units to the front, but increasingly relied on them in the rear. In August 1942, the General Staff sent 93 Jewish doctors to Transnistria to carry out duties there, but their presence immediately triggered complaints. The Transnistria Gendarme Inspectorate claimed their presence upset civilians and soldiers. Soldiers saluted the uniformed Jews until they found out who they were and stopped. The report suggested the General Staff should strip them of uniforms and make them serve in civilian clothes with a Red Cross armband.⁶⁷ These doctors presented the strange sight of Jews moving around freely in Transnistria. The 3rd Security Division reported that Jewish doctors “enter[ed] unhindered and alone” into ghettos and camps where they observed conditions, shared information, and took messages back to Romania –seen as possibly subversive activity.⁶⁸ The General Staff did not strip Jews of their uniforms, probably to afford the doctors the protection that an officer’s uniform offered them in Transnistria where soldiers were habituated to beating or executing Jews out of hand. It would do the General Staff no good to have Jewish doctors injured or murdered while performing the duties required of them. The Sărata Training Center assigned Jewish doctors to each of the labor battalions during 1943.

⁶⁷ The officer writing the report may also have been outraged at the thought that he might be mistaken for a Jew and not properly saluted by soldiers, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1236, f. 999.

⁶⁸ Ibid., dosar 779, f. 28.

In addition to professionals, territorial corps and rear echelon garrisons also used Jewish craftsmen as forced labor to work as unit tailors, cobblers, carpenters, painters, mechanics, and electricians. In peacetime, each garrison had workshops with craftsmen normally selected from draftees who already had the skills, but with regiments sent to the front, and demand growing for craftsmen, Jewish forced laborers filled the gap. Soon every army workshop had a few Jewish craftsmen and even dozens by 1944. In Transnistria, with tens of thousands of Jews still alive even after the harsh winter and massacres, the General Staff ordered in May 1942 that teams of 20 Jewish craftsmen, under an NCO, could be employed to produce goods for the army, and thousands were soon laboring in army workshops.⁶⁹ Jewish craftsmen were so ubiquitous in garrisons that in late-July 1944 reports reached the General Staff that some officers and NCOs had created conditions to compel Jews to offer them “incentives.” General Șteflea ordered inquiries and reminded soldiers who had to deal with Jews to take “into account the spirit of corruption of this race – to avoid any kind of ties with the Jews.”⁷⁰

Ethnic Germans

The rise of Hitler and the growing influence of Nazi ideology among ethnic Germans in Transylvania made the General Staff look askance at them. During 1938-1940, many officers saw ethnic Germans as potential supporters of an invading German-Hungarian army. Feelings towards ethnic Germans, however, were far from uniform. A report from October 1939 shows that some officers loudly denounced the Saxon and Swabian soldiers as Nazis while declaring support for the Anglo-French alliance, but at the same time other officers acted “irreproachably”

⁶⁹ RG-25.003M, Reel 20, dosar 1127, c. 91-92.

⁷⁰ Some officers were caught inflating the cost of furniture bought from Jewish merchants with whom they were allegedly conspiring to defraud the army and pocket the profit, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1814, f. 392.

towards ethnic German subordinates.⁷¹ During 1940-1944, the General Staff tamped down any surviving anti-ethnic German sentiments and addressed complaints from ethnic German soldiers to please its new ally Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, many ethnic Germans preferred to serve in the German Army where material conditions (food, uniforms, and pay) and officers (well-trained and no flogging) were better, and soon hundreds began evading the draft by crossing the border into German-occupied Yugoslavia. Over time, the Nazis steadily consolidated their control over Romania's ethnic Germans and eventually enrolled tens of thousands in the *Waffen-SS*.

Romania's territorial losses in 1940 reduced its ethnic German population to 542,000 that were concentrated in southern Transylvania. The Romanian Army needed every man after these losses, however, it soon faced competition in recruiting ethnic Germans from the SS because as part of Romania's new alliance Nazi Germany had extracted a key concession, the creation of the German Ethnic Group in Romania on 20 November 1940. This organization granted local ethnic Germans greater autonomy and increased Nazi influence over them. The SS quickly organized the *1,000 Mann Aktion* to recruit a thousand volunteers for the SS *Das Reich* Division. The SS were particularly successful in attracting young and disaffected ethnic Germans, like Sigmund Landau who bristled at his status as a "tolerated foreigner" in his own home land with people shouting, "Speak Romanian!" at Germans, scuffles with Romanian student activists, and what he considered incompetent "Gypsy" rule from Bucharest.⁷² Soon hundreds volunteered for the SS, obtained a position in the German Ethnic Group, or found work with Wehrmacht units arriving in Romania with the German Military Mission to avoid serving in the Romanian Army.

⁷¹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 16, f. 10.

⁷² His memoir still bristles with anger at Romanians, see, Landau, *Goodbye, Transylvania*, vii, 5, 7.

Not all ethnic Germans were Nazi sympathizers and most reported when drafted, so an estimated 40,000 ethnic Germans served in the Romanian Army during the war.⁷³ The General Staff relaxed restrictions on ethnic Germans that they enforced for other minorities – they could read German newspapers, write letters home in German, and speak German – but they faced the same strict discipline as Romanian soldiers.⁷⁴ Some Saxons or Swabians decided to evade the draft while others deserted to the German Army later. In early 1941, Sigmund Landau illegally joined a Luftwaffe anti-aircraft unit in Ploiești. He left for the front and advanced with German Eleventh Army to Tighina, Kherson, and even Simferopol before being sent back to Romania in December 1941 after Antonescu protested the Wehrmacht aiding draft-dodgers like him.⁷⁵

In early 1942, the Antonescu regime began revoking the citizenship of ethnic Germans who remained in the German Army or deserted across the border. Landau, after a quick visit to his family, decided he would rather lose his citizenship than serve under the Romanians that he despised, and signed up with a group of 2,500 volunteers for the SS in January 1942. He served for the rest of the war in a *Waffen-SS* unit. Yet the possibility of never being able to return home convinced many ethnic Germans not to volunteer for the SS. Nonetheless, Antonescu's efforts had minimal effect on the drain of ethnic Germans. The SS used the German Ethnic Group to set up paramilitary youth group and an adult group, which enrolled 31,000 and 36,640 respectively, to prepare them to fight in the *Waffen-SS*. Ethnic Germans in the Romanian Army resented the situation, a June 1942 report from a garrison unit watching the Hungarian border recorded Saxon soldiers complaining, “We are militiamen with families and we serve with pleasure on the front,

⁷³ Scafaș, *Armata română*, 207.

⁷⁴ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 225, f. 108; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 246, f. 124; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 639, f. 165.

⁷⁵ Landau, *Goodbye, Transylvania*, 19-23.

but why do Saxon youths drive automobiles on the streets of Brașov and receive large salaries from the Saxon Ethnic Group? Eligible Saxon youths should come to the front and show their patriotism and love for Germany here!”⁷⁶ There were 5,000 ethnic German soldiers serving east of the Dniester in May 1942 (see Table 7), but the number probably doubled during Case Blue.

Table 7. Minorities in Third Army, May 1942.

Minority Group	Officers	NCOs/Soldiers
Ethnic Germans	679	4,080
Hungarians	8	386
Yugoslavs	35	99
Slovaks	14	58
Bulgarians	3	27
Russians	0	6
Ruthenians (Ukrainians)	0	2
Other	16	87

Source: AMR, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1118, f. 1.

Romanian troops nicknamed Saxons “the Germans’ Gypsies.” They were invaluable to officers on the front as translators and to soldiers as sources of the latest gossip from the German Army.⁷⁷ There were many ethnic German mid-ranking officers, mostly former Habsburg officers, leading on the front and General Hugo Schwab and General Carol Schmidt commanded divisions.

A steady trickle of ethnic German soldiers deserted while on the front to nearby German units, but the greatest loss of ethnic German manpower resulted from SS recruitment efforts in Transylvania. With German High Command increasingly desperate for manpower, it forced the

⁷⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1044, f. 355.

⁷⁷ Their dialect was sometimes hard for Germans to understand, see, Harward, “Purifying the Ranks,” 168-169.

Antonescu regime to sign an agreement on 13 April 1943 that allowed the SS to recruit heavily from Transylvania. A month later Antonescu was also compelled to end the policy of stripping ethnic Germans of their Romanian citizenship when they left to fight for the Wehrmacht. All he managed to obtain in return was a face-saving agreement that all ethnic German officers, NCOs, or specialists (artillerymen, mortarmen, telephone or telegraph operators, aircraft gunners and bombardiers, or sailors) already in the armed forces would be forbidden from volunteering for the Wehrmacht.⁷⁸ Officially, ethnic Germans were supposed to volunteer of their own free will, but Romanian reports indicate that Saxons came under pressure from the SS and their cronies in the German Ethnic Group. Soon after the announcement of the agreement, a few Saxon families approached the commander of the 2nd Mountain Division rear echelon to ask for their sons to be called up by the Romanian Army, so that they could avoid having to “volunteer” for the SS. The Brașov police reported that during the SS directed enrollment on 17-18 April “only a relatively small number of Saxons received the recruitment operations with enthusiasm. The rest [reacted] with indifference, and a good portion among them are anxious.”⁷⁹ Romanians in Brașov watched with obvious satisfaction as the recently privileged Saxons now faced the specter of the Eastern Front. Approximately 60,000 ethnic Germans had volunteered to join the SS by the end of 1943. Most served with the *Waffen-SS*, but hundreds ended up as concentration camp guards, including at Auschwitz. Another 15,000 served in the German Army or worked for the Todt Organization.

⁷⁸ Scafeș, *Armata română*, 207.

⁷⁹ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1393, f. 170, 177.

Hungarians

Hungarians were the largest ethnic minority in *România Mare*, numbering 1,425,507 or 7.9 percent of the population in 1930, and were the most mistrusted by the Romanian state after the Jewish minority because of Magyar irredentism supported from Budapest. The General Staff did not trust in the reliability of Hungarian draftees and increasingly relegated them to support or rear service positions. The Second Vienna Award greatly reduced the number of Hungarians, so the General Staff had the luxury of not sending them to the front. Hungarian soldiers' rates of draft evasion were low and most dutifully reported for service in the Romanian Army.

The General Staff was surprised in 1939 by the number of Hungarians that reported when full mobilization was declared because it expected high rates of draft evasion. Only a few dozen fled across the border, the majority obeyed orders and hoped war would be avoided. The Carlist regime knew it needed the support of minorities if it was going to successfully deter any invasion and made efforts to accommodate minorities in the ranks. Until June 1940, Hungarians, as well as all the other ethnic minorities, could write letters in their native tongues, Hungarian, Yiddish, German, Russian, and Ukrainian. They could read Hungarian or whatever respective minority language newspapers. A few Reform (Calvinist) priests in Transylvania, most of whom were Hungarians, favored neutrality and were openly anti-war and pro-Romanian.⁸⁰

Regardless of attempts by the General Staff to woo minorities in the ranks, Section II was convinced that ethnic Hungarian reserve officers were spying on behalf of the Hungarian Army and that anti-Romanian propaganda was being spread in letters, newspapers, and plays. All the

⁸⁰ Transylvania had long been a bastion of Calvinism and nearly all the members of the Reform Church were Hungarians, but those Hungarians closer to the border were more likely to be members of the Catholic Church, see, Paul A. Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christin Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 11; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 93, f. 41.

entertainment for Hungarian troops had to be pre-approved and SSI or Section II agents attended performances to make sure no unapproved messages were sneaked in.⁸¹ Nervous officers had little trust in the loyalty of Hungarian soldiers. The duty officer in charge of security at Fourth Army headquarters in Tecuci raised the threat of betrayal on 20 June 1940, citing a Hungarian sentry posted outside the headquarters, “If you take into account that the [headquarters] drivers are of the same [ethnic] origin, we can expect a surprise in a time of need.”⁸² The General Staff assigned newly mobilized Hungarian, Ukrainian, Russian, and Bulgarian minority troops to labor battalions to construct defenses in Transylvania or Bessarabia. However, those minority soldiers already serving in mobilized combat units remained with them.

The situation for Hungarian soldiers worsened after the territorial losses of 1940. After the loss of northern Transylvania only 363,206 Hungarians remained in southern Transylvania, but the General Staff still viewed them as a threat. It banned Hungarian language newspapers and ordered that letters had to be written in Romanian. Section II put Hungarian soldiers under surveillance. When the Romanian Army invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, hundreds of Hungarians advanced with Third and Fourth armies, but most were not used in frontline combat. Hungarian soldiers were usually assigned to menial jobs like carriage drivers or assistant cooks in support formations.⁸³ In this way, the Romanian Army benefited from Hungarian soldiers’ service who freed Romanian soldiers for frontline combat, but they were still not trusted.

The re-mobilization of 1942 triggered new concerns that Hungarian troops were being told by Magyar irredentists to desert once they had received uniforms and weapons to deprive

⁸¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 225, f. 17; dosar 39, 310-311.

⁸² Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 201, f. 319.

⁸³ Harward, “Purifying the Ranks,” 163.

the Romanian Army of men and equipment, both in short supply. In May 1942, there were 400 Hungarians east of the Dniester with Third Army (see Table 7), but hundreds more were riding trains eastwards with Echelon II units heading to the Don that fall. The General Staff attempted to keep ethnic Hungarian soldiers from interacting with the Hungarian Army while in the Soviet Union. In September 1942, it ordered officers to “take severe measures that all soldiers of ethnic Hungarian origin be closely supervised for the whole period of transport and not be allowed to make contact with Hungarian soldiers and railway personal, under any circumstances.”⁸⁴ A few dozen still managed to desert.⁸⁵ On 22 September, an angry Antonescu ordered that Hungarians soldiers would no longer be given leave because of desertions. In December 1942, the Artillery Officer School requested that the ban be lifted as a quarter of its staff were Hungarians. While admitting that a few had deserted while on leave, it argued that most had “proved to be good soldiers,” and added that ban was ineffective because Hungarian soldiers could still easily desert while traveling within Romania between the Artillery Officer School’s two halves, in Bucharest and Timișoara. Therefore, the ban uselessly alienated loyal Hungarian soldiers.⁸⁶ The General Staff subsequently recommended that the ban be lifted.

It was easier to evade the draft in southern Transylvania than to try to desert in the USSR under the watch of suspicious Romanian officers. When Hungarians received their draft notice, a few decided that they would rather risk crossing the border into Hungarian-occupied northern Transylvania to avoid conscription. Holly Case argues that the decision was primarily motivated by the desire to avoid conditions in the army that the Romanians had purposefully made poor for

⁸⁴ Fond MR: CM, dosar 243, f. 17; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1486, f. 6.

⁸⁵ There were more ethnic Romanians with the Hungarian army than ethnic Hungarians with the Romanian Army on the front and hundreds of them deserted, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1236, f. 903; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 992, f. 3.

⁸⁶ RG-25.003M, Fond Ministerul de Război: Cabinet, dosar 273, f. 69-70.

Hungarians to encourage them to flee across the border rather than report for service, an indirect form of forced population exchange, but the conditions in the Hungarian Army were not much better since Hungarian officers were as brutal as Romanian officers. Moreover, in June 1941, General Ioanițiu ordered that all minorities caught committing infractions must be treated with “much tact” in a “civilized” way and it was “absolutely forbidden that these [minorities] be beaten or badly treated” because more Romanians were outside Romania than minorities inside Romania, so “the consequences will all be in our disfavor.”⁸⁷ Clearly, the General Staff tried to make sure Hungarians were *not* treated worse than Romanians in the army. Hungarian soldiers were still consistently maltreated due to the prejudice of individual officers or NCOs, but not as official policy. Ironically, Hungarians who dodged the draft may have had a greater chance of seeing combat than those who remained because the Hungarian Second Army mobilized soldiers equally from all over Hungary, including occupied northern Transylvania, and participated in Case Blue. It was destroyed defending part of the Don northwest of Stalingrad.⁸⁸

Most Hungarians did not evade the draft. In addition to hundreds on the front or at army schools, roughly 20,000 served in labor detachments. The heavy losses on the front meant that the Romanian Army needed Hungarians, especially those with training or experience. In mid-September 1942, the Ministry of Defense ordered the creation of lists of remaining Hungarian NCOs who had been trained under the Austro-Hungarians or the Romanians, so they could be best employed on the front, at army schools, or overseeing labor detachments.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 306, f. 13.

⁸⁸ Roughly 20 percent of Hungarian Second Army’s soldiers were minorities – mostly Romanians from northern Transylvania or Ruthenians from Transcarpathia – and 10 percent were Jewish force laborers, see, Case, *Between States*, 84; Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 191-194; Beever, *Stalingrad*, 82-83, 181-182.

⁸⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1486, f. 7.

Slavic Minorities

The Ukrainian, Russian, and Bulgarian Slavic minorities were the other major groups that served in the Romanian Army. They were all considered suspect because Romanians assumed that they sympathized with the USSR and communism – although the General Staff recognized that many Ukrainians were nationalists with anti-Soviet sentiments, it found their aspirations for an independent Ukrainian state that would include Bukovina equally worrisome. These Slavic minorities were concentrated in eastern Romania: 595,000 Ukrainians dominated Bukovina and northern Bessarabia, 409,000 Russians were concentrated in the cities and towns of central and southern Bessarabia, also included in this number were Lipovans (Russian Old Believers) who lived in scattered villages across eastern Romania with most concentrated in the wetlands of the Danube Delta, and 366,000 Bulgarians predominated in southern Bessarabia and Dobrogea.⁹⁰ The territorial losses in 1940, operations in 1941, and new wartime borders greatly reduced the numbers of Slavic minorities in Romania who were conscripted into the army after 1941. Most were assigned to labor detachments and did not fight on the front.

The loss of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia in July 1940 removed most Ukrainians and nearly all Russians in a matter of days, but the Romanian-Bulgarian population exchange carried out during the turnover of southern Dobrogea dragged on until April 1941. In September 1940, the General Staff ordered all Bulgarian officers from northern Dobrogea (Tulcea and Constanța counties) and all Romanian officers from southern Dobrogea (Durostor and Caliacra counties) to turn in their uniforms and return home to be resettled. In October 1940, the Ministry of Defense issued an order clarifying that officers descended from Bulgarian families that settled in northern

⁹⁰ Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Interwar Romania*, 10.

Dobrogea before 1877 “will be considered Romanians, because they were raised in Romanian schools,” and would remain in the Romanian Army.⁹¹ After the exchange only a tiny Bulgarian minority was left in northern Dobrogea. Romania had few Slavic minorities for a year.

The reoccupation of eastern Romania in July 1941 returned most of the Slavic minorities who were again seen as probable Soviet agents. Lipovans especially were targeted in a manner similar to Jews west of the Prut: accused of insulting the Romanian Army in 1940, blamed for signaling Soviet aircraft in 1941, and even evacuated from the frontier. The absurdity of the idea that these religious non-conformists would support the Soviets just because they were ethnically Russian was lost on Romanian officers. The General Headquarters ordered the evacuation of the Lipovan population from the Danube Delta, citing their threat in case of Soviet attack, but some Lipovan men were interned in camps on the Danube as well – 165 Lipovans arrived from Tulcea in Călărași on 6 July, the same day as one of the two “death trains” from Iași.⁹² On 14 July, after advocating evacuating all Jewish men 16-57 from Moldavia and interning them at Târgu Jiu, XI Corps reported that the lakes in southern Bessarabia were crowded with Lipovan fishermen who might be Soviet agents left to signal aircraft or report troop movements. General Ghineraru, then commanding the 1st Fortification Brigade, proposed that they be restricted from fishing.⁹³ Third Army rapidly overran northern Bukovina and since Ukrainian nationalists had little motivation to flee with the Soviets most remained. There was some conflict between Romanian soldiers and Ukrainian militiamen. Mihai Antonescu advocated deporting Ukrainians along with Jews east of the Dniester, but these plans came to naught.⁹⁴ Instead, the Antonescu regime had gendarmes

⁹¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 157, f. 86; dosar 225, f. 247.

⁹² RG-25.003M, Reel 2, dosar 3751, c. 202; RG-25.004M, Reel 65, dosar 7232, c. 480.

⁹³ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 127

⁹⁴ Arad, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 74; Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 177-184, 318-322.

and *grăniceri* advance to the Dniester and set up pickets to block the return of non-Romanians who had fled east across the river, especially Jews, but also Slavic minorities. On 24 July, the General Headquarters ordered all foreigners, including 8,000 Poles and 6,000 Ukrainians the Soviets settled in Bessarabia during the occupation, to be deported east of the Dniester.⁹⁵

Most Ukrainians and Bulgarians avoided deportation, some deserted from the Red Army, but many Russians, *basarabeni* collaborators, and Jews – all with ample reason to fear the arrival of Romanian troops – joined in the Soviet exodus. Those who remained endeavored to provide their loyalty to Romania. In August 1941, a Bulgarian officer named Gheorghe Dancov, showed up at a Romanian unit claiming that while he had served as a captain in the Red Army in Ismail during the Soviet retreat he had done as little as possible before deserting.⁹⁶ The Government of Transnistria had control over the population caught between the Dniester and Bug: local Soviet civilians, deported Romanian Jews, and minorities from eastern Romania who had fled with the Red Army that were not allowed to return home. Soviet POWs from Transnistria were released from camps in Romania during 1941-1942 and allowed to return home. During 1942-1944, the Government of Transnistria, ostensibly a “civilian” government effectively ran the province for the General Staff and mobilized the population to labor in agriculture or manufacturing to for the war effort. Therefore, the General Staff did not recruit for labor detachments from Transnistria. Nearly all Ukrainians, Russians, and Bulgarians west of the Dniester who were drafted into the Romanian Army were assigned to labor battalions. In May 1942, there were just two Ukrainians, six Russians, and 30 Bulgarians with Third Army (see Table 7), compared to approximately

⁹⁵ RG-25.004M, Reel 25, dosar 20725, vol. 9, c. 680; Reel 16, dosar 22539, vol. 5, c. 243-253.

⁹⁶ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 793, f. 455.

30,000 in labor detachments west of the Prut (see Table 6). The General Staff wrote a study in September 1941 proposing to create segregated Ukrainian units, but it was not never approved, so Ukrainians, Russians, and Bulgarians continued to serve alongside Romanians.⁹⁷

These Slavic minorities deserted when they grew tired of conditions, abusive officers, or for nationalist reasons. Bulgarians had a refuge in Bulgaria across the new border in Dobrogea. Russians, however, lacked a similar safe harbor because Transnistria was a dangerous place to be without proper papers. Ukrainians could desert to Nazi-occupied Poland, a particularly attractive option to hundreds of ardent nationalists who were encouraged by the Germans to join the SS to fight the Soviets for the dream of an independent Ukraine. While hundreds of Slavic soldiers did desert, most remained with labor detachments because conditions were not too bad and probably seemed much better than fighting against the Red Army on the Eastern Front.

Christian Sects and Muslims

Religion in *România Mare* was synonymous to ethnicity (Orthodox/Uniate Romanians, Calvinist/Catholic Hungarians, Lutheran/Catholic Germans, Orthodox/Uniate Slavs), but there were a number of small, but growing, neo-Protestant and heretical Orthodox sects. There were only about 100,000 of these believers, who were concentrated in Transylvania and Bessarabia, with various ethnic backgrounds. The General Staff was suspicious of Christian religious sects because many did not recognize the legitimacy of the state and preached pacifism.⁹⁸ In contrast, the General Staff saw Romania's 150,000 Muslims, Turks concentrated in southern Dobrogea, as reliable because they were a historical religion willing to serve the state in uniform.

⁹⁷ RG-25.003M, Reel 272, Fond Ministerul de Război: Cabinet, dosar 272, c. 25.

⁹⁸ Viorel Achim, ed., *Politica regimului Antonescu față de cultele neoprotestante: Documente* (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Național pentru Studierea Holocaustului din România "Elie Wiesel; Bucharest: Polirom, 2013), 12.

The Romanian Army's mobilization of soldiers after 1938 meant that neo-Protestants, heretical Orthodox believers, and Muslims entered the ranks in greater numbers than ever before and triggered different responses from the General Staff. It was concerned that neo-Protestants would use the opportunity presented by mobilization to proselytize. In a 20 June 1940 order the Military Bishopric called "Adventist" proselytizing "unspeakably dangerous."⁹⁹ "Adventist" did not only refer to the religious group but was often used as a catch-all term for all neo-Protestant groups. The General Staff ordered Orthodox chaplains to address the "Adventist" threat and to "show them the error of their ways."¹⁰⁰ Baptists, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others in uniform were followed by Section II agents who also observed their worship services. In March 1940, while neo-Protestants were targeted, the General Staff approved Bishop Ciopron's request to allow four Muslim imams to become chaplains to minister to Muslim soldiers.¹⁰¹

The territorial losses of 1940 altered the situation of both neo-Protestants and Muslims, if in different ways. Along with losing southern Dobrogea, Romania lost most its Muslims, so few served in the ranks after 1940. The loss of eastern Romania and northern Transylvania reduced the number of neo-Protestants and heretical Orthodox believers, but an estimated 25,000 Baptists and 15,000 Adventists remained.¹⁰² On 9 September 1940, just three days after seizing power, Antonescu outlawed all neo-Protestant and heretical Orthodox groups: Adventists, Baptists, Evangelists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals, Incohentists, Stilists, and a few others. These religious minorities did not give up their beliefs and continued to practice their religion best they

⁹⁹ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1568, dosar 260, c. 79.

¹⁰⁰ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 225, f. 60; Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1568, dosar 260, c. 91.

¹⁰¹ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.4.1568, dosar 260, c. 77.

¹⁰² Gusti, *Enciclopedia României*, 441.

could, so Antonescu re-issued the band on 28 December 1942. Many religious minorities found ways to accommodate themselves with the Antonescu regime, especially neo-Protestants.

Neo-Protestant Romanians may have changed their religion, but they did not change their nationalist sympathies. George Crisan, a Baptist officer from Transylvania, defended Romanian claims to Bessarabia after the war, and admitted, “I, like any other Rumanian, was apprehensive of any foreign-language-speaking fellow.”¹⁰³ Additionally, many continued to believe in anti-Semitism that was deeply rooted in Romanian culture. The heretical Orthodox sects were less accommodating towards the Antonescu regime, especially Incohentists. This charismatic and millennialist Orthodox sect refused to recognize the authority of the state, bear arms, or report when drafted. Antonescu had 2,000 Incohentists deported to Transnistria in August 1942 at the same time as “unproductive” Gypsies.¹⁰⁴ Many neo-Protestants accepted the rhetoric of “holy war” war against communist atheism and believed in defending Christian civilization.

When neo-Protestants received a draft notice most reported for duty. Adventists reported to recruitment stations to avoid persecution by the state and tried to maintain their conscientious objector beliefs. Most Adventists donned uniforms without protest, but difficulties began when they were asked to hold a rifle or swear the oath to Nation, King, State, or *Conducător*. Officers were unsympathetic to claims of conscientious objection. The General Staff went out of its way to order that all soldiers without exception had to attend the mass oath taking, which was being broadcast by radio, on 5 April 1941 when the new contingent of draftees swore the army oath to Antonescu for the first time.¹⁰⁵ Adventist soldiers tried to avoid the ceremony or only pretended

¹⁰³ Crisan, *An Amazing Life*, 114, 122.

¹⁰⁴ Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 73.

¹⁰⁵ Fond MR: IGA, dosar 131, f. 7; dosar 133, f. 44; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 888, f. 2; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 789, f. 2.

to say the words if they could not. They tried to obtain assignments to non-combat positions like drivers, cooks, or orderlies, so that they could fulfill the military service required of them without compromising their faith. On 18 July 1941 Third Army warned that, “In the cases when they do not succeed in getting a position that shields them from having to shoot [a rifle], they desert.”¹⁰⁶

Those who continued to refuse to serve or were caught deserting faced court martial and a long prison sentence. Some Adventists ended up at the Sărata Training Center, released from prison for the chance to rehabilitate themselves on the front, Captain Păsat kept an Adventist in his command staff because he trusted him more than the rest of the soldiers in his company, who he considered a band of cut-throats and thieves, and assigned him to a special night shift. “We only keep this soldier around to watch and eavesdrop on discussions and, eventually, on plans [of rehabilitation soldiers] to rob the population [in or near Sărata].”¹⁰⁷ The harsh sentences acted to convince some to renounce their faith, at least officially. On 18 November 1943, from Cernăuți, Priest Pantelimon Birău crowed that 44 “religious sectarians,” all condemned to 1-25 years hard labor, had reconverted to Romanian Orthodoxy in exchange for pardons.¹⁰⁸ Adventist soldiers lucky enough to be assigned to a unit in Romania had to make a hard decision if it was ordered to the front. Private Corneliu Florescu, part of the groundcrew of 3rd Bomber Fleet, despite lengthy discussions with a captain and an Orthodox chaplain, signed a declaration on 2 June 1943 saying, “I am penetrated by my Adventist teachings, I do not accept any of the other religions that are legal in the Romanian State...This is my final decision; I remain Adventist, I do not accept the [Orthodox] cross, I do not bow [to Orthodoxy], and I do not accept giving the oath on the flag

¹⁰⁶ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 308, f. 398.

¹⁰⁷ Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitánului Dumitru Păsat*, 67.

¹⁰⁸ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului Militar, F.II.41579, dosar 301, f. 678-679.

because I do not accept these forms as valid.”¹⁰⁹ Adventists, and Incoherentists, continued to be a thorn in the side of the General Staff for the rest of the war.

Gypsies and Race

The situation of Gypsies in the Romania Army was the most complex and ambiguous of all the minorities. The Gypsy population in Romania was officially 208,700 in 1941 – although the true number was probably higher because the 1930 census let people chose their background and Gypsies many likely identified as Romanians because they were so assimilated or else feared stigmatization as Gypsies. Like most Romanians, 85 percent of Gypsies lived in the countryside. They were spread across *România Mare*, those in Transylvania spoke Hungarian or in Bessarabia spoke Russian, but most lived in Wallachia and spoke Romanian.¹¹⁰ They also spoke their own language, called Romani, and were bilingual. Gypsies were the most assimilated minority group, speaking Romanian and Romanian Orthodox believers, but suffered from widespread unofficial racial discrimination that was as pernicious as it was legally invisible.

There was never an official policy of Gypsy segregation in modern Romania, but there was an unofficial practice of racial discrimination in the nineteenth century rooted in medieval Gypsy slavery. Romanian peasants knew little about theories of eugenics or racial hygiene, but most nurtured racist beliefs rooted in nearly five centuries of Gypsy slavery. The first recorded Gypsy slaves were gifted to Orthodox monasteries by Romanian princes in 1385. Gypsy slavery quickly became widespread and endured until 1856. The reprehensible legacy of slavery meant that after emancipation Gypsies remained an impoverished and marginalized group.¹¹¹ By the

¹⁰⁹ Fond MR: IGA, dosar 134, f. 73.

¹¹⁰ Achim, *Documente privind deportarea tiganilor în Transnistria*, Vol. I, 163-164; some historians argue that the number was much higher, closer to one million, see, Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 290.

¹¹¹ David Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Griffen, 1996), 107-121.

interwar period, Gypsies had begun to enjoy some improvement in their social position with a growing number escaping large boyar estates by moving to the city to become workers and a few fortunate ones joined the small middle class. There was also a large group of nomadic Gypsies who sustained a free, if hardscrabble, life on the margins of Romanian society living in caravans.

Gypsies were denied entry into the officer corps and when drafted were often selected to be orderlies. They performed menial labor and other tasks for the officers, just as Gypsy house slaves had on boyar estates for centuries before emancipation and continued to under the new guise of domestic servants. Not all orderlies were Gypsies, however, because officers were as comfortable using Romanians, who had been serfs (in many ways very much like slaves) until 1864. Gypsies may also have been preferred because of their traditional role as musicians and officers often selected those with such abilities to entertain them in their free time. Regardless of the reason, Gypsies were overrepresentation in the ranks of orderlies.¹¹² This lent legitimacy to the widespread belief among Romanian soldiers that Gypsies were cowards.

Racist songs, poems, and jokes mocking Gypsies as cowardly, lazy, stupid, and dishonest filled the military press for the amusement of soldiers. This image was a kind of a mirror image to the one of Jews being cowardly, lazy, smart, and dishonest. It illustrates that while Romanians did not fear Gypsies as a dangerous threat, like “Jewish-Communists,” Gypsies were still widely despised, even hated, by much of Romanian society. Nevertheless, some Romanians not only tolerated Gypsies but lived comfortably with them, as attested by the racist wailings of the few

¹¹² There were at least 25,000 (enough to form two infantry divisions), married regular officers were provided two (one for use at the garrison and another for work at home), both unmarried regular and reserve officers were only eligible for one, but officers often exceeded these official limits, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 306, f. 20; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 951, f. 53; officers often used orderlies as free labor if they owned any property or a small country manor (some abusing their position to exceed official orderly limit), see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 645, f. 27.

Romanian eugenacists who bemoaned the high rates of intermarriage between Romanians and Gypsies, especially in Transylvania.¹¹³ Despite this racial discrimination, Gypsies patriotically answered the call to serve during the period of growing crisis after 1938. The Romanian Army could not easily mobilize men from the nomadic Gypsy population since they were often not officially listed in state records and lacked any fixed address, so were not registered with local recruitment offices. Therefore, when the Antonescu regime later decided to identify and deport nomadic Gypsies to Transnistria to labor camps, the General Staff made no protest.

When the army crossed the Prut in 1941, tens of thousands of Gypsy soldiers fought on the front lines. Even though they suffered discrimination, Gypsies still supported Romania as they believed in defending Orthodoxy, held anti-Semitic beliefs, and feared communism. But Romanians had trouble understanding this, as Major Scârneci noted on 5 December 1941.

[Private Tobi, Gypsy orderly for another officer,] is also fighting here in Crimea before fortress Sevastopol. But for what? For his poverty? I take a postcard and following his words – as he is illiterate – I write to his family at home and I regret to the bottom of my soul that I cannot do more for him...The Country does not think of him, nay there's talk...of colonizing them in Transnistria.¹¹⁴

He could not see Gypsies as Romanians sharing the same intrinsic motivation. Gypsies fought bravely on the front, many as NCOs, and won decorations they wore proudly on their chests like any other Romanian – at least until June 1942 when deportations of Gypsies began.¹¹⁵

News of the deportation of 11,474 nomadic Gypsies between 1 June and 2 October and 13,245 “criminal” Gypsies between 2 and 16 September 1942 shocked Gypsies in the army.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ M. Benjamin Thorne, “Assimilation, invisibility, and the eugenic turn in the ‘Gypsy Question’ in Romanian society, 1938-1942,” *Romani Studies* 21, No. 2 (Winter 2011), 182.

¹¹⁴ Scârneci, *Viață și moarte în linia întări*, 212.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 139.

¹¹⁶ Solonari, *Purifying the Nation*, 276, 278.

Antonescu ordered the deportations after a rushed census in May meant to target only nomadic and “criminal” Gypsies, but combination of racial prejudice, incompetence, and the zeal of the Gypsy-hating General Constantin “Piki” Vasiliu, commander of the Gendarmerie, meant that Gypsy soldiers who had been demobilized or on leave were also swept up by gendarmes in the first wave of deportations. The General Staff had no objection to the deportation of nomadic or “criminal” Gypsies, but soon reports began arriving that drafted or draftable sedentary Gypsies or their families had been deported. On 4 August 1942, the 3rd Security Division in Transnistria reported that “all [Gypsies] were evacuated casually, without being sorted, but sent in a big batch [*la grămadă*]. [The Gypsy soldiers among them] are claiming the rights won through law and military service.”¹¹⁷ In the end, after the intervention of the General Staff, more than half of the sedentary Gypsies that were initially slated to be deported were exempted from the second wave of deportations.¹¹⁸ Vasiliu, however, pushed to exceed these official limits. When news reached Gypsy soldiers on the front that their families had been deported, they protested. The Mountain Corps reported in October that Gypsy soldiers whose families had been swept up by gendarmes were very angry, “especially those that had behaved well on the front.”¹¹⁹

Antonescu halted the deportations on 16 September 1942, but not before 25,000 Gypsies were abused, robbed, and sent to labor “colonies.” On 3 October 1942, the General Staff issued Order Nr. 101290 that explained the recent events, clarified that any nomadic Gypsies still on the mobilization rolls should be erased and deported to Transnistria, claimed no family members of Gypsy soldiers had been mistakenly deported, and sedentary Gypsies should remain with units.

¹¹⁷ Achim, *Documente privind deportarea tiganilor în Transnistria*, Vol. I, 245-246; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 779, f. 28

¹¹⁸ Originally 31,438 “criminal” Gypsies was reduced to 12,497, see, Solonari, *Purifying the Ranks*, 277.

¹¹⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 992, f. 86; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 951, f. 170.

Contradicting itself, the General Staff argued if any Gypsy soldiers' family members had been deported it was because they asked to be deported to accompany other family members. Officers were to make lists of soldiers who said family had been mistakenly deported.¹²⁰ A week later, the Ministry of Defense reported to the General Staff that it had intervened with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, headed by General Dumitru Popescu, to end its plans for further deportations, citing the late season and previous mistakes during selection. It instructed the General Staff "to correct these mistakes" by issuing travel papers to Gypsy soldiers to track down their families. The Transnistria Gendarmerie Inspectorate had been instructed to assist Gypsy soldiers to settle in Transnistria or repatriate their family to Romania.¹²¹ General Vasiliu opposed these efforts.

Gypsy soldiers petitioned to save their families. Some did not find out that their families had been deported for months or even a year later. Private Gheorghe Zăilă had been mobilized since 2 July 1941, but finally got leave to visit his home in a village in Wallachia two years later, only to find that his wife, three children, mother, and sister had been deported to Balta County. Since his unit had been pulled off the front after Stalingrad to refit in Transnistria he managed to find them, but only his sister and a single child were still alive. The major commanding Zăilă's pioneer battalion petitioned the Balta gendarmes to let them return with the unit, as it was being transferred to Romania, since his family had been deported illegally.¹²² The Ministry of Internal Affairs had responsibly over all the deported Gypsies and it showed little sympathy when Gypsy soldiers petitioned for their families' release, such as in the case of Corporal Gheorghe Bălceanu. Since he was on the front, his family in Craiova had been spared deportation, but his wife Giga

¹²⁰ RG-25.003M, Reel 148, dosar 2659, c. 9.

¹²¹ Ibid., dosar 148, f. 10.

¹²² USHMM, RG-31.004M, Selected Records from the Odesa State Oblast Archive, 1941-1944, Reel 13, Ed. hr. No. 5, Fond 2264, Opis 1, c. 245.

had “asked on her own” to be deported because her parents and siblings had been rounded up by the gendarmes. The gendarmes denied wrongdoing because she had “chosen” to go.¹²³ On 12 March 1943, the General Staff sided with the Gendarmerie, admitting that while there were some Gypsy soldiers’ wives in camps in Transnistria, it was because they had hidden their identity to accompany family being deported or (allegedly) in hopes of being granted land. It claimed that Gypsy family members could not be repatriated until May 1943 due to the threat of typhus. The General Staff also ordered that all Gypsy soldiers who appeared in Transnistria should be told that their families would be repatriated as soon as possible and warned that they must report back to duty or they would be erased from mobilization rolls and join their families in Transnistria.¹²⁴ The Gendarmerie continued to give Gypsy soldiers the runaround and delayed repatriation until the Red Army approached. When the General Staff was informed in January 1944 that some officers were letting Gypsy soldiers travel to Transnistria to fetch their families before the Red Army arrived, it ordered this to stop. It reiterated that Gypsy soldiers had to go through official channels with the General Inspectorate of Gendarmes.¹²⁵

The military justice system was biased against Gypsies and many of the soldiers sent for rehabilitation to the Sărata Training Center were Gypsies. Courts martial convicted Gypsies in higher rates because they profiled all Gypsies as petty criminals, so when military and civilian jails were emptied of men to be rehabilitation there were many Gypsies among them. General Poenaru reported in June 1942 that a few soldiers at Sărata had deserted or committed crimes, “The majority of these are Gypsies or have a revolting physical appearance [*conformatie*] that

¹²³ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 992, f. 20.

¹²⁴ The General Staff dismissed these wives, claiming that most were really just long-term girlfriends living in sin [*concubine*] with the soldiers, implying they were not worth repatriation, see, Fond CMC, dosar 810, f. 243.

¹²⁵ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1481, f. 317.

initially inspires pity...[these] pickpockets and career deserters are the worst soldiers.”¹²⁶ Just as released inmates arrived at Sărata Training Camp, the deportation of nomadic Gypsies reached its peak and word about them soon reached the camp. The Sărata commandant read Order Nr. 101290 to them on 8 October and added that nomadic Gypsies at Sărata with prison sentences still to be rehabilitated would remain at the center to be sent to the front. The same was true for any Gypsies whose family had been deported as “dangerous to public order.”¹²⁷

Gypsies whose families had been deported were “agitated” by the fact that they would not be released and sent to join them in Transnistria. They argued that they could not understand why they had to fight the Red Army to protect their families from communism if their families had been deported, discussed deserting once they were sent to the front, and some immediately deserted. Colonel Iancu Ghenescu, te second in command at Sărata Training Center, confronted a group of Gypsies and asked if they wanted to go back to prison. They responded, “we’d rather die.” Ghenescu quipped in his report, “the yearning of the Gypsy for liberty is well known.”¹²⁸ Gypsies whose families had been deported likely made up a significant number of the 7 percent of rehabilitation soldiers who deserted from the Sărata battalions on the way to the front during fall 1942.¹²⁹ Morale among these Gypsy rehabilitation soldiers must have been very low.

Gypsy soldiers continued to fight on the front until the end of the war. They had been told that as sedentary Gypsies their families would not be deported and the end of deportations in September 1942 let all Gypsy soldiers breathe a sigh of relief. The General Staff needed Gypsy

¹²⁶ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 72, f. 32.

¹²⁷ Ibid., dosar 110, f. 362.

¹²⁸ Ibid., dosar 72, f. 170, 176.

¹²⁹ 97% of those released from prison reported to the Sarata Training Center, 87% remained after two months of training, and 80% arrived on the front, see, Ibid., dosar 40, f. 247-248.

manpower and made sure no further deportations occurred. Racial discrimination continued, but Gypsy soldiers trusted that their military service would protect their families. Nonetheless, they must have remained nervous well into 1943 that the Antonescu regime might begin deporting sedentary Gypsies. Those whose families were deported as nomadic or “criminal” received no relief and the fate of Gypsy soldiers betrayed by the Romanian Army is particularly tragic.

Conclusion

Approximately 5,200 female volunteers served with the Red Cross on the front, 40,000 ethnic Germans and comparable number of Gypsies served in regular units, and 75,000 minority soldiers served in labor battalions in Romania and Transnistria. The experiences of women and minorities provides valuable additional perspectives that contribute to illustrating a fuller picture of the remarkable commitment of Romanian society during its “holy war.” The volunteerism of boyar and middle-class women shows that the Romanian boyar and middle-class elite supported the Antonescu regime and the war against “Judeo-Bolshevism.” The General Staff required high standards from nurses sent to the front and was able to find enough to meet its needs. For all the exaggerated fears of the General Staff, most minority soldiers reported for duty and fulfilled the service demanded of them. Those allowed to serve on the front typically fought bravely despite abuse, tensions, and discrimination facing minorities in the ranks. The Romanian Army could not have fought on the front as well as it did without the efforts of women and minorities.

The situation faced by approximately 25,000 Jews from west of the Prut required to serve in segregated labor battalions was not very different from the rest of the labor battalions formed from a mixture of Romanian and minority draftees. The conditions while working in Romania in segregated labor battalions were not good, but they certainly could have been much worse. The soldiers of the Romanian Army and gendarmes of the Government of Transnistria treated Jews in

the ghettos and camps of Transnistria much worse, but the continuation of the war and the need for Jewish labor improve conditions during 1942-1943. The General Staff benefited from skilled Jewish professionals and craftsmen working in workshops at various garrisons across Romania, but it also wasted professionally trained Jews assigned to manual labor in the countrside. Anti-Semitism hindered military efficiency because it wasted manpower. Few officers opposed the policy, however, and most remained wary of having to employ Jews to support the Romanian Army in any way during the war.

CHAPTER X

1942-1944: STALINGRAD, RETREAT, AND “SECOND STALINGRAD”

The Red Army had broken through at the front, so Lieutenant Geratimusz Morar and his mountain troops were racing to try to reach safety in April 1944. They had fought in the Kuban bridgehead for most of 1943, evacuated to Crimea in the fall, and now had to escape the Soviet net once more. As they crossed the Yaila Mountains to reach Sevastopol one of his trucks ran out of fuel in a village, so he ordered the mayor have the villagers provide carts with horses or oxen to replace it. When they prevaricated, claiming harnesses were worn out, Morar ordered his men to set up a light machinegun, and threatened the mayor that if all he had asked for was not ready in a half hour then “nothing will remain, y’all be shot.” Animals, carts, and harnesses quickly appeared and Morar’s unit reached the coast to escape by sea to Constanța.¹ Romanian soldiers were still capable of violence against civilians during the long retreat from the east but began to think twice before committing crimes as the tide of war had turned against the Axis.

This chapter examines the period between November 1942 and August 1944 to show that despite defeats, periods of demoralization, and overwhelming Soviet strength Romanian soldiers continued to fight, if no longer to destroy “Judeo-Bolshevism,” then certainly to defend Romania from Soviet invasion. Soldiers also fought out of loyalty to comrades in their primary group and simply because they saw no other choice. The rumors of terrible conditions for Romanian POWs in camps in the USSR strengthened resolve to avoid capture. Fear became a powerful motivator, and not just fear of Soviet captivity but fear of Romanian officers who remained committed to

¹ When he told this story, it was meant as a humorous anecdote of the front, see, Geratimusz Morar, Sibiu, 2012.

the cause and were given greater leeway to punish soldiers in times of crisis. During 1943-1944, the General Staff focused on shoring up morale by propaganda and remuneration, especially that of troops in the Mountain and Cavalry corps on the front for more than two years. Rehabilitation soldiers became more common as manpower dwindled. Despite growing demoralization in the ranks and at home as it became clear Nazi Germany was losing the war, there was no widespread refusal to continue fighting by soldiers on the front or mass draft avoidance in Romania.

Fear of the Red Army undermined atrocity motivation. Romanian officers and soldiers murdered few Jews after Stalingrad. Although the “Final Solution” left few Jews in German-occupied territory, nonetheless, Jews survived in Transnistria and Romania. The heady days of 1941, when they believed the Soviet Union was about to be vanquished, were gone and sobering news on the front stayed the hand of not only the *Conducător* but officers and soldiers too. The anti-Semitism of officers and soldiers remained, but they no longer felt safe to violently manifest it because they feared Soviet justice and assumed Jewish lives had high value to the Soviets and Anglo-Americans – both allegedly controlled by a global Jewish conspiracy. Romanian soldiers, who generally treated Slavic minorities less brutally than German troops, murdered fewer Soviet civilians. Those believed to be partisans, however, were still shot out of hand.

The fate of Third and Fourth armies outside Stalingrad is well known, but the continued contribution of the Romanian Army afterwards in the battles for the Kuban, Crimea, and eastern Romania are largely ignored. Beginning during the battle and continuing for decades after, the Germans used the Romanians as a scapegoat for the defeat because they had allowed the Soviets to encircle German Sixth Army in Stalingrad. Until relatively recently most historians accepted German accusations that they had been let down by unmotivated Romanian soldiers who simply surrendered or fled. Since the publication of Mark Axworthy’s book, most historians have begun

to revise their description of Stalingrad to show Third and Fourth armies stood and fought as best they could but were quickly overwhelmed. Most attention, however, focuses on the drama inside Stalingrad and the Romanian contribution to the German relief attempt remains forgotten.² The Romanian Army fought for another year and a half after the fall of Stalingrad.

Romanian troops fought tenaciously in the defense during the long retreat from the Volga to the Dniester. In November 1942–February 1943 many Romanian units fought almost literally to the last bullet at Stalingrad with Army Group B, during November 1942–September 1943 the Cavalry Corps fought tooth and nail in the Caucasus alongside those German units left behind by Army Group A, and in March 1944 the few Romanian forces available helped halt the Red Army in eastern Romania. After defending Crimea since October 1943, only in April 1944 did soldiers rush to abandon the peninsula without much of a fight, no differently than German troops. When Romanian soldiers had a chance to dig in to neutralize Soviet advantages they were stalwart, but if caught in the open they suffered grievously and if encircled lacked the means to escape. When the General Staff mobilized the last of its manpower in spring 1944, Romanian youths reported to defend their homes without much incident. When the Romanian Army finally collapsed on 20 August 1944 it was due to Soviet superiority in men, firepower, material, and mobility.

Soviet Winter Counteroffensive: November 1942 to January 1943

Stavka carefully prepared its strategic counteroffensive in late 1942. Operation Uranus envisioned a double envelopment of German Sixth Army at Stalingrad by attacking its exposed flanks on the Don bend and Kalmuk steppe held by weakened Romanian forces. Stavka massed

² In the most authoritative accounts, at best they are mentioned in passing as part of the failed counterattack, see, Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 292; or they are simply not included, see, Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 300.

three Soviet armies on both flanks with the main blow to hit Third Army on the Don. Red Army tankers were well aware of their superiority. A captured Soviet officer reported that during their training Red Army soldiers were shown how captured Romanian anti-tank guns could not pierce the armor of Soviet tanks and told, “see what [kind of weak] resistance is in front of you? You can go forward with all vigor and without fear.”³ In addition, the Red Army had concentrated a massive number of artillery pieces and aircraft. Stavka tried to keep its offensive secret, using various methods to mask the Red Army buildup, but it was hardly a surprise as every German or Romanian officer saw the danger. Yet there was nothing they could do to stop it.⁴

The German High Command had no strategic reserve and was dangerously overextended. German Sixth Army was weak from street fighting and immobile due to vehicle, fuel, and horse shortages. Third Army had to commit most its infantry reserve in previous weeks leaving its line thin and brittle, moreover, its small mobile reserve was not under its control if the Soviets broke through. Army Group B placed XXXXVIII Panzer Corps behind Third Army. It consisted of the 1st Armored Division, which now had some German tanks to replace lost French ones, ^{and} the 22nd Panzer Division, which was understrength, undergunned, and overall in shabby shape. On the Kalmuk steppe, the situation was far worse for VI and VII corps. Fourth Panzer Army, which retained control of both Romanian corps, had just the Korne Detachment as a tiny mobile reserve – the panzer army no longer had panzers. Soviet local attacks had disorganized units and caused heavy losses, but Third Army and VI and VII corps still had plenty of fight left, even though the cold, supply crisis, and exposed positions had begun to sap soldiers’ morale.

³ From the 15th Infantry Division official history of the battle, see, Fond Armata 3-a, 1152, f. 11.

⁴ For a more detailed examination of the Axis predicament see, Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 293.

On 19 November, 3,500 guns, rocket artillery, and heavy mortars on the Don opened fire at 5:30. Third Army was outnumbered two to one in infantry and many times that in firepower and tanks. The barrage lasted an hour, pulverizing positions, cutting telephones, and disorienting troops, then shifted farther back to interdict supply and allow Soviet infantry and tanks to attack. Soviet Fifth Tank Army launched the main assault from the Serafimovich bridgehead against II Corps near Bolshoi, the center of Third Army, while Soviet Twenty-First Army began a smaller attack from the Kletskaya bridgehead against IV Corps that aimed for Gromky, farther on the right. A thick fog limiting visibility aided the Soviets. Romanian infantry managed to fight off the first wave of attacks in many places, but wherever the Soviets had massed armor more tanks arrived that barreled over concussed troops and pieced the front.⁵

Soviet tanks ran roughshod over defenders lacking anti-tank guns and quickly penetrated into the rear. A lieutenant commanding an artillery battery near Gromky later reported he began prearranged harassing fire, but to little effect, and by 9:30 am Soviet tanks appeared, most turned towards Gromky. A few, with infantry leaping off, stayed to clear the Romanian guns. A nearby anti-aircraft battery knocked out several tanks as his battery continued to fire in support of troops on the front, but he ran out of shells when his ammunition dump was hit by Soviet artillery fire and tanks shot up supply wagons. The artillerymen fought off several attacks before retreating at noon with tanks close on their heels.⁶ After overrunning the front, Soviet tanks spread fear and chaos in the rear attacking poorly armed support troops. Soviet infantry took many Romanians prisoner.⁷ By the end of the day II Corps had been decimated with a 19 km wide gash torn in the

⁵ Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 240-241; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 92.

⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1094, f. 43, 60.

⁷ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 194-195.

center of Third Army. IV Corps was cut in two, ripping open a gap between 13th Infantry and 1st Cavalry divisions, into which 15th Infantry Division, the only reserve unit, counterattacked, but it failed to stop up the hole. Between the two Soviet breakthroughs, V Corps and the remains of IV Corps were pinned down by strong Soviet frontal assaults as Red Army soldiers flooded into the holes carved on either flank. The Soviets threatened to encircle the center of Third Army.

The only hope to stem the tide was the pitiful collection of armor that was the 22nd Panzer and 1st Armored divisions. XXXXVIII Panzer Corps reacted to confused reports from the front in the long Prussian tradition and took the initiative to order a counterattack by 10:35 am, against the Soviet breakthrough at Gromky, but Army Group B, better informed, countermanded this and redirected the panzers to Bolshoi against the main breakthrough. The 1st Armored Division was separated from 22nd Panzer Division in the confusion, so it trailed the panzers – both low on fuel. By nightfall they were directly in the path of the onrushing Soviet Fifth Tank Army, but still too far apart to support each other and were in danger of being encircled and destroyed individually. They had to adopt a “hedgehog” defense to survive. The German liaison unit with 1st Armored Division was overrun during the night, its radio destroyed, and communication with XXXXVIII Panzer Corps interrupted. The two divisions fought separately until 26 November.⁸ German or Romanian tankers, too busy saving themselves, could not ride to the rescue of Third Army.

As a new day dawned, the Soviets began another offensive on the Kalmuk steppe against VI and VII corps at 10 am on 20 November with a 45-minute barrage. Soviet IV Mechanized Corps overwhelmed the thin Romanian line, advancing to Plodovitoe, before it turned northwest towards Kalach on the Don bend. Soviet IV Cavalry Corps then followed and turned southwest

⁸ Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 244-245; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 151-152.

to strengthen the encirclement.⁹ Crișan Mușeteanu, a medical officer, arrived in Kotelnikovo at Fourth Army headquarters and watched staff officers with pallid faces rush around after news of Soviet cavalry advancing on the town arrived.¹⁰ Germans in Stalingrad watched the 20th Infantry Division to their right be overrun by Soviet tanks and infantry. A German counterattack rescued the Romanians, but most of the 20th Infantry Division was caught in the Stalingrad pocket.¹¹ The fact Stavka could organize not just one, but two, major attacks stunned German High Command and General Headquarters, however, the fact VI and VII corps collapsed was not surprising.

The Soviets reported that many Romanians threw down their weapons and surrendered, but this was more due to ammunition shortages and an incredibly tiny number of anti-tank guns, not lack of motivation.¹² Granted, when troops saw shot after shot from their few anti-tank guns ricochet off Soviet tanks it was demoralizing, but survivors attest that crews did not abandon the guns and fired until out of shells or literally crushed under tank tracks. Soviet infantry was more mobile, often riding tanks, and able to rapidly encircle overrun Romanian units. Fourth Army's ammunition stocks were quickly depleted, and General Constantinescu-Claps was angry to find out that the Germans did not have more, despite his repeated requests in previous days. Third Army had previously ordered artillerymen to turn over their reserve rifle ammunition for use by the infantry, so when the Soviets broke into the rear many had only five rounds.¹³ Therefore, in many places Romanian soldiers fought until they were overrun or ran out of ammunition.

⁹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 101; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 214.

¹⁰ Crișan V Mușeteanu, *Strigătul! Ediție definitivă* (Bucharest: Editura "Jurnalul literar," 2003), 20-21.

¹¹ Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 248-249; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 103.

¹² Beevor, *Stalingrad*, 249-250.

¹³ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1273, f. 1; Dumitru Burciu, Iasi, 2010.

The same morning, having penetrated deep into Third Army's rear and brushing aside all counterattacks the day before, Soviet units advanced south or east to clear the Don bend and link up with the second attack from the east. Through the hole where II Corps had been, Soviet Fifth Tank Army began a mad rush from Bolshoi to Kalach and Soviet Twenty-First Army turned east to roll up the German line after breaking through IV Corps to seize Gromky, sweeping up the 1st Cavalry Division as Axis troops fled in panic to Stalingrad. In between V Corp and the remnants of IV Corps doggedly held on. The only Third Army formation relatively unscathed was I Corps to the west. Romanian support units in the rear had little combat value and stampeded to escape. Sergeant Lungu's gendarmes in his military police unit joined the rout, "As far as the eye could see, the plain was dotted with soldiers, lost [ones], stray [ones], and officers among them, [all] of course without weapons. [I ran] like a rabbit through the snow, not knowing in what direction, but I saw behind me, on a hill, a Russian tank following me."¹⁴ Soviet VIII Cavalry Corps soon reached the Chir River, encountering few Romanian or German combat troops in the thinly held rear, and captured supply depots, hospitals, and other Axis rear installations.¹⁵

The ad-hoc force that coalesced around V Corps was named the Lascăr Group and placed under XXXXVIII Panzer Corps, which promised that panzers were on their way and ordered the Romanians to stand and fight. The Lascăr Group was comprised of the 5th, 6th, and 15th Infantry Divisions, respectively led by generals Mazarini, Lascăr, and Sion, plus the remnants of 13th and 14th Infantry divisions, which formed a horseshoe shape facing north that was threatened on both flanks. These forces stood fast not only because they had been ordered to, but because they were

¹⁴ Lungu, *Dela Stalingrad la Gherla*, 24.

¹⁵ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 296.

too busy fighting off Soviet attacks and lacked mobility to break out. The three generals held a war council that lasted into the wee morning hours of 20/21 November. A letter arrived from the Soviets at 5th Infantry Division's headquarters telling them that they had been abandoned by the Germans and requesting surrender, which Mazarini considered, but Lascăr and Sion argued that so long as there was ammunition they had to keep fighting.¹⁶ Despite promises, by the end of the day 22nd Panzer Division had been forced south, and 1st Armored Division, which was defending 5th Infantry Division's flank, soon followed. The Soviets began encircling the Lascăr Group.¹⁷

While the Lascăr Group held out on the Don, Fourth Army had the unenviable mission of trying to reform the broken VI Corps and the understrength VII Corps on the Kalmuk steppe. Its job was made harder because Fourth Army did not have operational control. General Șteflea, in Rostov, ordered General Constantinescu-Claps to counterattack, promised supplies, and told him Army Group B had ordered key towns to be fortified. Fourth Panzer Army's liaison with Fourth Army told Constantinescu-Claps that VI and VII corps could not retreat and to fight to the last. Constantinescu-Claps asked Șteflea on 21 November who had final say – him or the Germans. He complained the stand fast orders were unrealistic and argued that the survivors of VI Corps, plus VII Corps, should be pulled back to shield Kotelnikovo where his headquarters and supplies were located.¹⁸ General Headquarters, however, backed Army Group B's stand fast orders.

The fate of the Lascăr Group was sealed on 22 November as Soviet forces approached a weakly defended Kalach on the Don bend from both west and east. The day began with promise when a Romanian aircraft landed in the pocket at Golovski where wagons with wounded, anti-

¹⁶ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1152, f. 12-13.

¹⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 95.

¹⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1273, f. 22-23, 71, 87.

aircraft units, and stragglers had gathered at 6th Infantry Division's headquarters. Later, German aircraft dropped food, ammunition, and leaflets promising panzers were coming. After that five Romanian transports landed with supplies and evacuated 60 wounded officers.¹⁹ The 5th Infantry Division's situation on the western flank of the pocket, however, steadily worsened all day and at 4 pm the generals met again. General Ioan Sion argued with General Mazarini who was ready to accept a second Soviet surrender request. Mazarini had been Third Army's chief of staff in 1940 to General Iacobici. He was made Deputy Chief of the General Staff under General Ioanițiu, but after his death he worked again under Iacobici when he took over as Chief of the General Staff. Mazarini and Iacobici were close and held similar concerns about mobilizing Echelon II units in January 1942, so when Iacobici resigned Mazarini was demoted. He shared the same motivation as his soldiers. In 1941, he argued it was "a national imperative" that Jews in labor battalions in Romania be isolated from civilians and he did not protest reprisals against Jews in Odessa. Now, however, the warnings in the General Staff reports he had helped pen earlier that year that argued Echelon II units were unfit for combat against the Red Army were coming true. Mazarini saw no hope and quickly became demoralized.²⁰ General Lascăr broke the deadlock, recognizing that 5th Infantry Division's situation was desperate, but arguing that honor would not allow ignominious surrender, so they would plan a breakout for that night and hope XXXXVIII Panzer Corps would approve.²¹ Soviet attacks disrupted these plans. Captain Păsat, commanding the survivors in his company of rehabilitation soldiers that were still fighting with 5th Infantry Division, remembered the terrible massacre in the ever-shrinking pocket, "Flamethrowers, handled by tankers, like on a

¹⁹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 97.

²⁰ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 177; dosar 870, f. 645-647; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 74-75.

²¹ Codeword "Lăscar" for remaining to fight and "Mihai" for a breakout, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 894, f. 15-16.

maneuver, never missed. When the flame finally reached a fleeing soldier, you saw how he fell down and struggled with the flames, until the tank crushed him with its heavy tracks...looking like a frog, a dog, or a cat that had been run over by a heavy car.”²² The Soviets took Golovski at 9 pm, capturing most of 6th Infantry Division’s headquarters, including Lascăr and Mazarini who were sheltering from deadly Soviet fire in a basement. The Soviets ordered Lascăr to use a megaphone to try to convince the rest of his troops to surrender. General Traian Stănescu, chief of staff of 6th Infantry Division, led those who avoided capture northward and took command of the Lascăr Group’s remaining forces that were short on ammunition and food.²³

Now on his own, General Sion ordered 15th Infantry Division, which had repulsed weaker Soviet attacks against the southeast perimeter of the Lascăr Group, to break out a few hours later. His forces broke contact and struck southwest, led by an advance guard of anti-tank and artillery guns that soon stretched out over 12 km, and followed by a disorganized mob of stragglers from Golovski that lengthened the column further. After a harrowing night march on 22/23 November in freezing weather, with dangerous crossings across rivers as ice broke under heavy equipment, and a Soviet bombardment under illumination that drove most of the stragglers to the south, Sion and the advance guard successfully linked up with 22nd Panzer Division at Bolshaia Donshchinka with about 3,600 soldiers, 1,045 horses, 18 vehicles, four mortars, and two guns.²⁴ His men were reinforced with a battery of German anti-tank guns and ordered to defend the village. Any plans the 22nd Panzer Division may still have had earlier on 22 November to relieve the Lascăr Group

²² Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitaniului Dumitru Păsat*, 142.

²³ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 202-203; Păsat, *Memoriile Căpitaniului Dumitru Păsat*, 147-149.

²⁴ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 894, f. 17-18; dosar 1152, f. 17.

were frustrated by continued Red Army attacks. The 1st Armored Division was also driven back and forced to retreat westwards towards the relative safety of the Chir during that day.²⁵

On 23 November, Soviet XXVI Tank Corps took Kalach, crossed the Don bend and then linked up with Soviet IV Mechanized Corps, arriving from the east, at the Karpovka River. To the north Romanian and German troops competed to escape to Stalingrad across the few bridges across the Don still in Axis hands. Sergeant Lungu, who had reformed his unit and now escorted half an infantry company, engaged in a shootout with Germans guarding a bridge, while in other places cavalrymen tried to ford the river, many drowning in the attempt.²⁶ General Dumitrescu issued an order that day, marked secret, that authorized his corps commanders to take “the most severe measures to suppress the rout and panic behind the front,” such as summary execution and setting up “dams” to intercept and reorganize panicked soldiers, and he threatened to punish his corps commanders for further disorder in the rear.²⁷ On the Kalmuk steppe, Fourth Panzer Army ordered the Korne Detachment, which now included the bulk of 8th Cavalry Division, to abandon VII Corps and rush north to plug the hole in VI Corps’ line, but it was too little too late.

The last organized resistance by Third Army forces east of the Chir in the Don bend was eliminated during 24-25 November. General Sion’s group was attacked in the early morning of 24 November, after the Germans had pulled out their anti-tank guns without telling him. He and his staff tried to stiffen the defense by their personal presence on the line, but his troops had little ammunition left and began panicking. At 11 am, Sion finally ordered a retreat towards the 22nd Panzer Division, but he was killed by shrapnel and most of his men became casualties.²⁸ Only

²⁵ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 204; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 98-99.

²⁶ Lungu, *Dela Stalingrad la Gherla*, 24-25.

²⁷ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 992, f. 431-432.

²⁸ Ibid., dosar 1152, f. 17-18.

an estimated 800 soldiers managed to reach the 22nd Panzer Division and escape with it when it broke out to the west on 24/25 November. The 1st Armored Division retreated west of the Chir that night as well. Third Army rushed its tanks north and finally they linked back up with the panzers to defend a bridgehead at Chernishevskaya.²⁹ The last of the Lascăr Group, mostly the 6th Infantry Division still in its original positions on the Don, fought on through 24 November, but lack of ammunition compelled General Stănescu to order a surrender by the end of the day. Romanian aircraft reported they could see bloody stains on the snow and the bodies of men and horses gathered on the hills around Golovski where they had huddled during a final stand. By 26 November all resistance ended, and an estimated 27,000 Romanian soldiers went into captivity.³⁰

Although the resistance of the Lascăr Group was in vain, it shows Romanian soldiers did not lack the will to fight, but rather necessary modern equipment. General Headquarters, which in the past had often dealt harshly with generals after retreats, now reassured Third Army that it recognized the calamity was not a result of command incompetence or poor discipline. On 24 November, General Șteflea wrote General Dumitrescu that the extent of the defeat should not be exaggerated, blamed Soviet material superiority for the catastrophe, and argued it was not a time to look for scapegoats. This after the Red Army had shattered Third and Fourth armies in a week and bagged close to 300,000 Axis soldiers in Stalingrad. He emphasized the need to root out any defeatism. “It must not be forgotten that German power is so great that it cannot be defeated. So forward with unshaken faith in final victory.” Dumitrescu noted, “Very wise and correct words. This is also my Christian faith. Will be communicated to the troops.”³¹ Antonescu soon issued

²⁹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 99-100.

³⁰ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 205; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 97-98.

³¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 838, f. 96-97.

his own declaration, “Every [man] ought not forget that he carries in his person the responsibility of the future of the Romanian Nation and that the Country can disappear forever if the Army does not fight.”³² Romanian officers trusted in the motivation of soldiers to keep fighting and in a German military miracle to restore the situation – with good reason due to prior experience.

Indeed, the Romanians supported the German relief offensive, Operation Winter Storm. German High Command rushed Marshal von Manstein to command surviving Axis forces, now called Army Group Don, hoping his presence would reenergize Axis forces and he could repeat a triumph like in Crimea earlier that year, but by this point his operational genius was no match for Soviet material. General Constinescu-Claps marshaled Fourth Army’s 39,000 survivors, only a third were combat soldiers, and finally set up a line defending Kotelnikovo. Now von Manstein cobbled together the Pannwtiz Detachment, a battalion of panzers and vehicles with Romanian artillery support, to cover the arrival of reinforcements. LVII Panzer Corps, consisting of 6th and 23rd Panzer divisions, brought from refitting in France and fighting in the Caucasus respectively, began assembling around Kotelnikovo. Third Army helped hold a line from the Don along the Kriushka and the Chir with its remaining 83,000 soldiers, only 36,000 combat troops, forming broken units into ad-hoc battle groups.³³ On 12 December, von Manstein launched his attack to relieve Stalingrad. The 6th Panzer Division spearheaded the offensive with assistance from the remains of 18th Infantry Division, the 23rd Panzer Division with just 30 panzers guarded its right, and VI Corps, now only the size of a brigade, guarded its left flank – as per his normal practice von Manstein placed the Don bend on VI Corps’ left to shield its flank. They broke through and

³² Ibid., dosar 1364, f. 16.

³³ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 101, 109.

reached the Aksai in a day. The Popescu Cavalry Group, the Pannwitz Detachment fused with the 8th Cavalry Division, joined in the attack, protecting the 23rd Panzer Division on its right. As Romanian cavalrymen passed the infantry they shouted encouragement, “Break the front!” The breakthrough was an illusion, however, some Romanian infantry only had 120 rifle rounds and ten grenades, there were too few panzers, Soviet resistance stiffened, and the advance slowed to a crawl.³⁴ After the arrival of the 17th Panzer Division, von Manstein restarted the attack on 18 December, but a Soviet offensive on the Don had already ended any hope of success.

Operation Little Saturn began on December 16 and slammed into the Italian Eighth Army on the Don just northwest of Third Army. Italian Eighth Army swiftly collapsed because it was materially outclassed, demoralized by earlier local attacks, and many Italian soldiers panicked or quickly surrendered.³⁵ The Italian retreat exposed Third Army, so I Corps, consisting of 7th, 11th and 9th Infantry Divisions, ignored German orders to stand fast and retreated southwards. A new attack by Soviet Third Guards Army across the Kirushka, encircled most of I Corps and German 62nd Infantry Division on 19 December and destroyed them over a few days. Part of 7th Infantry Division escaped with Italian help marching 200 km in 14 days. The remnants of II Corps, plus the depleted 22nd Panzer and 1st Armored divisions, held the Chir for a few days, but abandoned their positions by 22 December.³⁶ This forced von Manstein to transfer the 6th Panzer Division the next day to meet the threat and call off his offensive 56 km from the Stalingrad pocket.

³⁴ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 301; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 109-110; Museteau, *Strigatul*, 51.

³⁵ Robert M. Citino, *The Wehrmacht Retreats: Fighting a Lost War, 1943* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2012), 59; many Romanian veterans still poke fun at the Italians, who “were beyond hope,” and when it first snowed allegedly exclaimed, “[Look] Romanian Comrade, it’s our death,” see, Iancu, Constanța, 2011.

³⁶ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 107-108; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 208.

As the last survivors of Third Army broke out, the Soviets attacked the bulge created by Operation Winter Storm. Sergeant Ezechil, whose cavalry platoon spent Christmas in minus 45-degree Celsius weather in the burnt ruins of a village retaken from the Soviets, remembered the counterattack on 26 December. Soviet tanks broke through the line, crushing guns and soldiers who instinctually grouped together for protection, “leaving behind a red mass of blood and flesh steaming on the snow.” Ezechil escaped, but many others were captured. Red Army troops shot many on the spot and stripped others naked, leaving them to freeze to death.³⁷ Soviet troops had been shooting surrendering Romanian soldiers in large numbers since the beginning of Operation Uranus rather than burden themselves with prisoners, especially as they were pressured to advance quickly, short on rations, and full of vengeance. General Constantinescu-Claps’ chief of staff Lt. Colonel Dragomir secretly ordered units to fall back at night after reporting they had come under heavy attack. The subterfuge leaked, so German orders to stand fast remained. Retreat or stand fast, it made little difference as moonlight allowed the Soviets to keep attacking. The 1st Infantry Division’s headquarters was overrun and Kotelnikovo fell on 29 December.³⁸ Third and Fourth armies were pulled off the front on 27 December 1942 and 3 January 1943 respectively.

Inside the Stalingrad pocket, an estimated 12,600 Romanian soldiers continued to resist. The remains of 20th Infantry Division helped defend the southern perimeter, halting attacks on 3 and 10 December 1942, and scattered survivors of the 1st Cavalry Division plugged holes on the western perimeter. Sergeant Lungu remembers soldiers crammed into bunkers who burned tires

³⁷ Ezekial, *La Portile Infernului*, 52-59.

³⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1273, f. 270-271, 282-287; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 110-111.

for heat and, as food supplies dwindled, they fought with German soldiers for slaughtered horse meat. The Luftwaffe tried to supply the Stalingrad, but the situation deteriorated quickly since it could not transport near enough supplies. German officers issued less food to Romanians troops. They began starving and rationed horse meat to avoid hungry troops going over to the Soviets.³⁹

General Tătăranu, commander of 20th Infantry Division, surprised the General Staff when he flew out of the pocket on 13 January 1943. He claimed General von Paulus had sent him to report on the situation inside Stalingrad and to pass along a request for Romanian aircraft to help supply the trapped forces. Tătăranu met with Antonescu, Pantazi, and Șteflea in Bucharest on 17 January and he reported positively on German-Romanian relations inside the pocket. Antonescu accused him of abandoning his men and besmirching the honor of the army and declared that he knew full well there were no aircraft available for von Paulus.⁴⁰ In 1941, Tătăranu had been the other Deputy Chief of the General Staff under General Ioanițiu, during which time he negotiated the Tighina Agreement, authorized executing “franc-tireurs” east of the Dniester, and pushed for the ghettoization of Jews in Transnistria along the lines as previously in Moldavia.⁴¹ He acted as the chief of staff for General Iacobici when he took command of Fourth Army at Odessa and did not protest the murder of Jews after it fell. He too was demoted in February 1942 after Iacobici resigned. In 1943, Antonescu ordered Tătăranu to return to Stalingrad for rehabilitation or face court martial. On the flight back, however, already ill, he became sicker still, and returned to be hospitalized – Hitler claimed in April 1943 he had ordered von Paulus to send Tătăranu out of

³⁹ Lungu, *Dela Stalingrad la Gherla*, 26-27; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 228-230.

⁴⁰ He did not fly out to protest German control of Romanian units, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 111.

⁴¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 481, f. 120-126; dosar 450, f. 29; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 781, f. 161.

Stalingrad.⁴² The 20th Infantry Division collapsed on 26 January. On 2 February, German Sixth Army finally surrendered, so 91,000 Germans and 3,000 Romanians marched into captivity.

Stalingrad was a catastrophe for the Romanian Army. Beginning in October, Third and Fourth armies lost an estimated 140,000 soldiers, most (110,000 men) after 19 November, and together only mustered 73,000 soldiers on 7 January 1943.⁴³ The material losses were equally disastrous, since most heavy weapons and equipment were lost and could not be replaced. For weeks thousands of survivors dodged Soviet patrols to reach friendly lines. General Dumitrescu had stragglers suspected of panicked flight flogged and sent back to their units while any officers suspected of cowardice were court martialed. Deserters caught far from the front were punished more severely.⁴⁴ The German High Command wanted to keep the survivors near Rostov, but the General Staff argued that most were rear support soldiers, demoralized, and lacked equipment to provide even just rear security. Therefore, the bulk of the survivors marched in terrible weather to Transnistria to refit, but all combat troops were left behind to guard the Azov Sea coast.⁴⁵

Soviet Winter Counteroffensive in the Caucasus: December 1942 to February 1943

The defeat at Stalingrad left Army Group A dangerously exposed in the Caucasus. Hitler had agreed to transfer panzer divisions and now to evacuate Army Group A but decided to hold a “springboard” for a future counteroffensive.⁴⁶ German Seventeen Army was given a handful of German divisions plus six Romanian divisions to hold onto the Taman Peninsula. It pulled back forces from Grozny to Krasnodar, including the 2nd Mountain Division, while the 6th, 9th Cavalry,

⁴² Possibly Parkinson's, see, Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 233; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 231.

⁴³ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 114.

⁴⁴ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 843, f. 152.

⁴⁵ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1482, f. 46, 4-14.

⁴⁶ Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 62.

and 19th Infantry divisions of the Cavalry Corps defended the Black Sea coast. When the Wetzel Group, with the 10th Infantry, 3rd Mountain, and two German divisions, arrived it absorbed the Cavalry Corps. German Seventeenth Army mixed German battalions into Romanian divisions as “corset stays” to strengthen them – the tactic was first used in the First World War to prop up the Austro-Hungarian Army. This mixed German-Romanian force held off Red Army attacks from Novorossiysk on the Black Sea coast east along the mountains to south of Krasnodar.⁴⁷

The General Staff grew concerned about Romanian soldiers’ motivation in the Caucasus. The 19th Infantry Division reported news of Stalingrad had shaken its troops: rumors swirled that King Carol II was in the USSR, Germans abused Romanians, and Antonescu had been removed. In New Year’s messages, King Mihai I praised soldiers for “righteous battle for the liberation of invaded provinces” and Antonescu said after a year of “unimaginable sacrifice” troops were still unified in “the destiny of our righteousness.”⁴⁸ General Racoviță was replaced on 2 January by General Gheorghe Cealîk, the former commander of 4th Infantry Division had been relieved on 1 August 1942 and had a new chance to prove himself. On 10-11 January, armed with a pile of charts and graphs showing Romania’s contribution to the war effort, Antonescu met with Hitler. He used the crisis to obtain concessions to keep his men fighting. He demanded Hungary be required to send more soldiers to the front, obtained promises for deliveries of German arms, and secured payments to stabilize Romania’s economy.⁴⁹ Antonescu had promised a military welfare state would care for soldiers’ families, but inflation undercut these efforts; German payments of gold or Swiss francs for oil and foodstuffs let him to increase financial aid to soldiers’ families.

⁴⁷ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 123, 125; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, ix.

⁴⁸ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 880, f. 381.

⁴⁹ Arimia, *Antonescu-Hitler Vol. II*, 9-19, 21-23, 27-32; for details, see, Aly, *Hitler’s Beneficiaries*, 237-243.

At the same time, General Pantazi ordered each company, battery, or squadron to make a “corner of shame” with a list of deserters who had been executed in the unit, a mirror to the usual “corner of honor” with a list of those killed in battle, to try to motivate by the threat of eternal shame.⁵⁰

The situation farther north deteriorated when the Hungarian Second Army on the Don fell apart under a Soviet offensive on 13 January and then German Second Army was smashed on the Donets on 29 January.⁵¹ The Soviet thrust to the Dnieper became overextended. On 21 February Marshal von Manstein launched a counterblow, retook Kharkov, and stopped the Soviets. By the end of March, the line stabilized almost where it had been before Case Blue, except that German Seventeenth Army held an arc east of the Taman peninsula dubbed the Kuban bridgehead. The 10th Infantry Division helped defeat a major Soviet landing at Novorossiysk on 4 February trying to outflank the line, but Soviet artillery drove back Romanian troops threatening a tiny surviving beachhead – later German-Romanian attacks never could liquidate it. The Germans blamed poor Romanian morale, not Soviet firepower, pointing also to an isolated case of a battalion in the 19th Infantry Division temporarily refusing to return to the line on 23 February, to justify breaking up the 3rd Mountain, 6th Cavalry, and 19th Infantry divisions to plug their best units into the German line. The intact 2nd Mountain Division took the northern end of the line on the Azov Sea and the Cavalry Corps, 9th Cavalry Division reinforced with parts from other divisions, guarded the rear.

Third Army Operations: February 1943 to February 1944

The Romanian Army, not counting troops occupying Transnistria or defending oil fields around Ploiești, on the front was reduced to 110,000 soldiers. Around two-thirds defended the

⁵⁰ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 928, f. 1-2; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 880, f. 418.

⁵¹ Citino, *The Wehrmacht Retreats*, 61, 68-74.

Kuban bridgehead until October 1943 while the rest occupied Crimea. On 10 March 1943, after shepherding survivors of Stalingrad to Transnistria, Third Army again had administrative control of all units east of the Dniester, but German armies had operational control.⁵² Stalingrad seemed to prove their worst fears about the Romanians, and German commanders sent alarming reports on Romanian troops' morale to German High Command. The General Staff was concerned too, employing both carrot and stick to reinforce soldiers' intrinsic motivation to keep fighting.

Stalingrad unquestionably had a sobering effect on morale, but even demoralized soldiers will fight to avoid capture, due to blind obedience, out of hatred of the enemy, and from fear of punishment by officers. All on top of intrinsic motivation. After two years Romanian troops had begun to understand the German racial worldview and their own place in it, the SSI reported that a few soldiers worried that German victory would mean "we will be the Germans' slaves [for] all time."⁵³ Yet better a slave to the Nazis than a victim of the Soviets. Fear of "Judeo-Bolshevism" was reinforced by knowledge of crimes in the USSR that convinced soldiers Soviet victory must be avoided at all costs. The public in Romania agreed. Wilhelm Filderman, a Jewish leader in Bucharest, recorded after Stalingrad that acquaintances "tell me they are afraid that one day the Jews will seek revenge."⁵⁴ General Pantazi inspected the Kuban bridgehead in February 1943. He reported that morale was not as bad as the Germans said, but gave each division commander authority to punish, rehabilitate, or execute soldiers because they were isolated from Third Army courts martial.⁵⁵ The General Staff ordered lists of soldiers who had been awarded medals that

⁵² Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 126-127.

⁵³ Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin văzută de români*, 117.

⁵⁴ Filderman, *Memoris and Diaries*, Vol. 2, 383.

⁵⁵ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 125-126; Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, 1047, f. 204.

were supposed to receive land in eastern Romania after the war to be updated by units, expecting the news to motivate peasant soldiers hungry for land to keep fighting bravely.⁵⁶

Inter-Axis relations took a sharp downward turn during Stalingrad. General von Weichs blamed Third Army for the disaster. He claimed demoralized Romanian soldiers did not fight, castigated all generals except Dumitrescu and Lascăr for not following his orders, and argued all officers were pro-British. Following criticism, von Weichs rounded up and disarmed Romanian troops and ordered a court martial of the leadership of 14th Infantry Division for an unauthorized withdrawal.⁵⁷ Firing back, Antonescu demanded Ferdinand Heim and Karl-Adolf Hollidt, the commanders of XXXXVIII Panzer and German XVII corps respectively, be fired for abandoning Third Army, pointed out German soldiers had fled too, and complained of German abuse. Hitler appeased Antonescu by making von Weichs apologize and firing Heim. Marshal von Manstein halted further punishments but promised he would respect the Romanian Army's honor.⁵⁸ He demanded Lt. Colonel Dragomir be fired for secretly ordering Fourth Army to retreat. General Constantinescu-Claps took responsibility, so Antonescu relieved him in February 1943. German soldiers' contempt for Romanian soldiers was not so easily papered over. As they competed for scarce resources that winter, tensions broke out into conflict: Germans kicked Romanian troops off trains, out of shelters, and threatened them with pistols. They screamed that Romanians were cowards and to blame for the defeat at Stalingrad.⁵⁹ The scale of these incidents should not be exaggerated and tapered off as weather and supply situation improved, but tensions permanently increased. The Romanians needed the Germans, so they swallowed their pride and kept fighting.

⁵⁶ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1365, f. 7.

⁵⁷ Dutu, *Armata Romana in Razboi*, 235; DiNardo, *Germany and the Axis Powers*, 151.

⁵⁸ DiNardo, *German and the Axis Powers*, 156; Dutu, *Armata Romana in Razboi*, 236-237.

⁵⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 1351, f. 55-58; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 933, f. 498.

Spring Reorganization

Third Army spent the spring rounding up stragglers and deserters. The General Staff set up a “dam” of gendarmes on the western bank of the Bug and ordered Fourth Army to establish another on the eastern bank to intercept soldiers. The General Staff ordered all officers, NCOs, and soldiers caught “without justification” in the rear would not be allowed to return to Romania. Instead, they would “be intensively retrained with iron discipline” in at Training Center No. 3 in Tiraspol in Transnistria.⁶⁰ Romanian units in the Caucasus and Crimea were undermanned, and the General Staff relied on rehabilitation soldiers for replacements and counted on their intrinsic motivation to fight. During March, gendarmes gathered 2,172 deserters who survived the winter living in villages around Rostov and sent them for a stint at the Tiraspol Training Center. Those guilty of more serious crimes, such as impersonating military police or becoming bandits, were imprisoned or executed. Antonescu reaffirmed in April that deserters should be sent to the front for rehabilitation after two months of retraining at the Sărata or Tiraspol training centers – four months for those guilty of a second desertion. Henceforth, all “recidivists” would have “D” for “detained” tattooed on the back of both hands and were supposed to be executed if they deserted again, but this was not enforced.⁶¹ Training Center No. 3 reported later that men were deserting from Tiraspol anyway because they decided that the front was worse than being caught deserting again and knew they would not be executed. An officer complained that while the Germans just

⁶⁰ Ibid., dosar 1351, f. 104; dosar 2148, f. 85; Third Army Section II estimated that another 2,000-3,000 deserters might have avoided the “dams” by staying east of the Bug and passing as Soviet Moldovans to deceive the German occupation authorities, see, Ibid., dosar, 2759, f. 187; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1483, f. 101.

⁶¹ Fond Armata 3-a., dosar 2148, f. 383-385; Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 40, f. 50; dosar 856, f. 37.

shot deserters the Romanian Army used “weak retaliatory measures.”⁶² Most deserters accepted the offer for redemption, so rehabilitation soldiers became increasingly common on the front.

As Third Army combed Ukraine for wandering troops, the Mountain Corps reported that the morale of soldiers rotating off the front from the Kuban bridgehead was low. A group of 200 troops from the 6th and 9th Cavalry divisions passing through Feodosia in Crimea in early March 1943 looked totally neglected, averted their eyes to avoid saluting officers, acted disorderly, and were photographed by German troops who mockingly exclaimed “and these fight for our Greater Reich.”⁶³ In April, an anxious General Avramescu reported that men coming from the Caucasus did not look or act like soldiers: officers lacked braid, proper caps, and belts; soldiers dress was poor, wore pieces of Soviet uniforms, and saluting fell by the wayside. Some Romanian soldiers sold their food or equipment to civilians, many were often drunk, and looted wherever they went. Probably unfairly, he blamed reserve officers for not taking enough interest in their men. When asked to explain their actions soldiers simply responded, “I come from the front,” as a catch-all excuse.⁶⁴ Some of his concerns are legitimate, but senior officers often obsessed over uniforms impossible to keep pristine on the front and riotous behavior is expected of troops fresh from the front. In the Kuban bridgehead soldiers complained about not receiving leave, mail not being delivered, incompetent or abusive officers, worn out equipment, insufficient food, and incidents with Germans. Letters from home informing troops of abuses by village civil servants, shortages of all kinds, and insufficient financial aid did not help soldiers’ morale.⁶⁵

⁶² Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2217, f. 43, 15-16, 17, 50, 28, 57; dosar 2148, f. 382, 386.

⁶³ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 933, f. 347.

⁶⁴ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 1047, f. 97.

⁶⁵ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1481, f. 23-27.

Officers and chaplains did their best to keep up morale on the front. Priest Ion Popescu held conferences with 20th Mountain Battalion in Feodosia for the start of Lent. He promised the troops if they “will not swear, steal, desert, or self-mutilate...will avoid sin and will pray to God, [they] will keep a more genuine and more beautiful fast than that of food.” Priest N.T. Cernea weekly visited troops of 10th Motorized *Roșiori* Regiment in the trenches outside Novorossiysk. He passed out little crosses, gathered soldiers to talk about “the purpose of our battle,” and held special meetings with newly arrived soldiers to encourage them to fight “against the enemy of faith and our Romanian Nation.⁶⁶ The General Staff issued an instructional pamphlet to officers on how to educate those traveling home on leave: they should tell families about great victories, sacrifice, bravery, and Soviet losses. Soldiers should be reminded of the crimes of Bolshevism. It concluded, “Either we vanquish [the enemy] in the East, or we disappear as [a] State from the map of the world!”⁶⁷ Priest Grigorie Enăchescu with the 1st Mountain Battalion in Crimea took these instructions to heart. He held conference on 23 March and spoke for an hour, concluding, “Communism is Jewish [*jidovesc*] and facilitates the coming of the kike dream.”⁶⁸

The General Staff, preparing to rebuild Echelon II units, needed to transfer the survivors of Stalingrad from Transnistria from Romania, but worried what effect these demoralized troops might have on civilian morale. Therefore, the Antonescu regime had county prefects organize “national-patriotic demonstrations” in every village, town, and city to reinforce commitment for the war.⁶⁹ The survivors were amalgamated with rear echelon garrison troops and new draftees to rebuild Echelon II units. In June, concerned after reports of poor morale in units rebuilding in

⁶⁶ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului, F.II.41578, dosar c. 300, 258-259; F.II.41579, dosar 300, c. 39.

⁶⁷ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1481, f. 1-13.

⁶⁸ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului, F.II.41579, dosar 300, c. 59-61.

⁶⁹ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1481, f. 139.

Romania, General Pantazi complained that despite previous orders some officers were not giving proper attention to “patriotic education.” He also blamed the “Jewish element” in Moldavia for spreading defeatist rumors and ordered that soldiers should not interact with Jews.⁷⁰

The Kuban Bridgehead and Kursk

The Kuban bridgehead steadily shrunk under Soviet pressure in March as combat turned into trench warfare that favored the Axis troops. The Germans had sufficient time to construct a series of defenses 75 km west of the old Krasnodar line, dubbed the Blue Line, consisting of six successive positions separated by 10-15 km with a perimeter of only 80 km. The German tactic of dispersing Romanian infantry, mountain, or cavalry (increasingly footbound due to horse and vehicle losses) regiments among German divisions in the middle of the line, while 2nd Mountain Division and the Cavalry Corps held the flanks on the coast, was a success. Whatever crisis in morale among Romanian troops in winter appears to have passed with the coming of spring. The German trenches provided the Romanian soldiers the cover they needed and reduced the effect of Soviet firepower. The Blue Line was occupied on 6 April 1943 and repelled Soviet offensives in April, May/June, and July/August; before retreat in September and final evacuation on the night of 8/9 October. Axis losses in the Kuban bridgehead were relatively low, only 51,795 Germans and 9,668 Romanians, inflicting roughly an equal number of losses on the enemy.⁷¹

Stavka concluded that the Kuban bridgehead was an operational dead end and treated it as such, sending just enough troops and material to keep up the pressure, but funneling most of its resources to Ukraine. Hitler refused to evacuate the Kuban bridgehead and asked Antonescu

⁷⁰ Ibid., dosar 1481, f. 92.

⁷¹ Bărboi, *Armata Română în vîltoarea războiului*, 161-163; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 251.

for help. The General Staff sent 1st and 4th Mountain divisions, well-rested after nearly a year of light duties in Crimea, to trade places with 2nd and 3rd Mountain divisions, worn down after Case Blue, the winter retreat, and trench warfare. The divisions slowly traded places between March and July, so Romanian troops temporarily made up almost 40 percent of the forces in the Kuban bridgehead. Major Scârneci's 3rd Mountain Battalion landed in Taman port on 16 June, and six days later, on the second anniversary of the invasion of the USSR, he wrote with frustration,

[Antonescu] we long ago fulfilled your command [to cross the Prut], we've even gone the extra mile. We crossed many waters, slower [ones], faster [ones], and deeper [ones]: the Dniester, the Bug, the Dnieper, the greater and lesser Inhul. We even crossed over seas...[to the] Kuban, where we will shed blood and where again we will bury our dead, the budding hope of the nation. Don't you believe that we have long ago fulfilled the command? Don't you consider it is enough? Don't wait for us to have our say, because then it will be too late. It seems that the Germans, our associates, no longer have too good a hand of cards.⁷²

Yet like most Romanians he saw no other option than to keep fighting. The German defeat in the battle of Kursk proved Scârneci was correct that the German Army had few cards left to play. Operation Citadel, a long-delayed offensive launched on 5 July against a Soviet bulge in the line left by Marshal von Manstein's earlier success at Kharkov, aimed to encircle and destroy Soviet troops to reassure allies like Romania that the Wehrmacht was still capable of winning a victory. Instead it was "a complete and utter misfire."⁷³ The northern attack was halted in its tracks, the southern attack made some progress but had no chance of success, moreover, the Allied landing in Sicily on 10 July convinced Hitler to call off the floundering offensive just three days later. Operation Citadel did not achieve any of its objectives, operational or political, and a Red Army counteroffensive soon drove the Germans out of Russia and into eastern Ukraine.

⁷² Scârneci, *Viața și Moarte în linia întâi*, 408; in July officers in 19th Infantry Division complained they should be rotated home and 50 ethnic German troops had deserted in June, see, Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 915, f. 150-153.

⁷³ Citinio, *The Wehrmacht Retreats*, 110-111, 134, 200-204.

As the battle of Kursk played out, the General Staff reinforced the Kuban bridgehead. In June, I Air Corps deployed to Mariupol, its Romanian pilots flying German-made aircraft across the Azov Sea to provide air support to the “rabbits,” as infantry were nicknamed, in the trenches. Corporal Cârlan, in the rear with his radio in the Kuban bridgehead, watched waves of German and Romanian Stukas pass overhead to pound Soviet troops.⁷⁴ The Germans delivered broken-down Czech-made tanks to the Mountain Corps in Crimea, and in July a battalion of refurbished tanks were sent to the Kuban bridgehead. Among replacements were 600 men from the Sărata Training Center. The 994th Independent Infantry Battalion with the 19th Infantry Division had lost almost half its men since arriving on the front in December 1942, but it received praise and Iron Crosses from the Germans for its solid performance.⁷⁵ Some commanders did not want to accept rehabilitation soldiers, blaming them for demoralizing other soldiers and dishonoring their sacrifice.⁷⁶ General Dumitrescu brow beat subordinates who questioned the policy because the manpower crisis was so dire he needed them. Some troops sent for rehabilitation were now over 45. Security in the rear was so lax that deserters from the Blue Line could cross back to Crimea. Gendarmes did not question wandering soldiers they stopped who said they were trying to get to the Kuban bridgehead and just hustled them back across the straits to their units.⁷⁷ While a few soldiers chose to connive a way out of the Kuban bridgehead to hide out in Crimean cities, and a tiny number chose to head for the hills to join the partisans, the overwhelming majority remained committed to the war. Life in the trenches took on a routine. Chaplains ministered to wounded, blessed troops, weapons, or shelters, and continued to baptize and marry civilians. After arriving

⁷⁴ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 69-71, 80-81, 99.

⁷⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2152, f. 246.

⁷⁶ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1363, f. 288-289, 291.

⁷⁷ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2152, f. 68, 255, 377; dosar 2759, f. 357.

with 1st Mountain Division, Priest Nicolae Petrache helped build shelters for wounded, designed a cemetery, and oversaw the renovation of a church that officers and soldiers wanted restored.⁷⁸

There was time for fun, such as saving up alcohol to get drunk or attending a German-Romanian soccer match. The situation was so good that when Hitler finally approved the evacuation of the Kuban bridgehead Romanian gendarmes reported that soldiers did “not understand the decision to retreat from the Kuban, where they had impenetrable positions.”⁷⁹

The Soviets pieced the front in eastern Ukraine, Kharkov fell on 22 August, forcing the German Army to retreat and abandon the Kuban bridgehead. The worn out Romanian pilots of I Air Corps were transferred west. General Erwin Jaenecke prepared a phased withdrawal of the 15 divisions with German Seventeenth Army that fell back on Taman port to evacuate to Crimea. The retreat began on 16 September. Stavka tried to disrupt these plans. A Red Army offensive started on 10 September, capturing Novorossiysk six days later, and landed a force in the rear on 22 September attempting to cut off the Axis retreat and capture the whole force, but 19th Infantry Division helped fight off the landing. Romanian soldiers fought well as Axis troops leapfrogged from line to line. The evacuation went like clockwork, aided by the extreme narrowness of the Kerch Strait and aircraft from the newly arrived German I Air Corps, and approximately 177,000 Germans, 50,000 Romanians, and 25,000 Russian HiWis – with most of their heavy equipment – slipped away for only 5,000 German and 600 Romanian casualties by 9 October 1943.

⁷⁸ Fond Inspectoratul Clerului, F.II.41579, dosar 300, c. 311-312, 491.

⁷⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2158, f. 171.

“Encircled” Crimea

After the defeat at Kursk, the Germans hoped to hold a line along the Dnieper river bend and then south from Zaporozhye to Melitopol to the Azov Sea to protect Crimea from being cut off and “encircled.”⁸⁰ The only reserves in the area were the ad-hoc 24th Infantry Division built from the surviving combat troops of the 7th and 11th Infantry divisions left behind by Third Army in March 1943 – including the 993rd and 995th Independent Infantry battalions, the former having fought bravely on the Don and the latter fresh from Sărata – tasked with coastal defense. The 4th Mountain Division, recently evacuated from the Kuban bridgehead, was hurried north and both undermanned divisions contributed to the German defense of Melitopol.⁸¹ An estimated 75,000 Romanian troops remained in Crimea or about a third of the defenders. Neither the Germans nor the Romanians expected to remain in Crimea very long and its defenses were in shambles.

By all reports the Cavalry Corps and other divisions recently arrived in Crimea were in bad shape, but some were worse off than others. The 10th, 19th Infantry, 3rd Mountain, and 6th Cavalry divisions were still capable of being used on the frontline in a defensive role, but 1st, 2nd Mountain, and 9th Cavalry divisions were fit only for anti-partisan warfare or coastal defense.⁸² Lt. Colonel Victor Isăceanu arrived from Romania in September to find 13th *Călărași* Regiment, newly arrived with 9th Cavalry Division, “in [a] state of moral ruin,” so he set to work getting his new soldiers “back in hand.” He soon restored discipline, however, he could do nothing to fix material shortages. His men “were marching without shoes, almost barefoot, in summer blouses, full of lice! The officers, who had lost their baggage in the battles in Kuban, were in the same

⁸⁰ Citino, *The Wehrmacht Retreats*, 233-234.

⁸¹ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 141, f. 10-13; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 115, 129.

⁸² Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 129.

state.”⁸³ This unit was one of the worst off, so it was assigned to guard the coast against a Soviet landing. The Axis commanders temporarily lost control of their men during the evacuation and resulted in a spike of Romanian stragglers and deserters who wandered the rear, either in search of their unit or trying to escape the threat of a “second Stalingrad,” especially since it was far from certain that the German Seventeenth Army would defend the peninsula.

General Jaenecke spent most of October planning to abandon, not defend, Crimea.⁸⁴ He was not an inspiring leader and did not bring order to the confused mishmash of competing Axis commands in the region, so the isthmus at Perekop was left open assuming German Seventeenth Army would soon evacuate. On 6 October, in this confused situation, the General Staff replaced General Avramescu with General Hugo Schwab, a Saxon from Transylvania, as commander of the Mountain Corps, the two trading places as commander of III Corps in Transnistria. This was done primarily to stick a disliked minority with the unenviable task of fighting a doomed battle. Avramescu was respected by his soldier and the change was unpopular with much of the rank and file, especially mountain soldiers from Transylvania, many of whom were prejudiced against Saxons. Major Scârneci despaired that the Mountain Corps, the pride of the Romanian Army, was now commanded by an “arrogant, lazy, and, above all, stupid Saxon.”⁸⁵ Schwab had led the 9th Infantry Division during the liberation of eastern Romania, then it occupied Transnistria for a year before the Echelon II unit was sent to the Don where it was destroyed. In March 1943, he took over III Corps and set to work rebuilding broken units. He began to do the same in Crimea, sorting out and reorganizing the mixed-up survivors evacuated from the Kuban bridgehead.

⁸³ Fond Manuscrite, MSS 676, f. 11-12.

⁸⁴ Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow*, 243.

⁸⁵ Scârneci, *Viața și Moarte în linia întâi*, 476.

The Soviets advanced along the Azov Sea to threaten Crimea, so Romanian soldiers who had just escaped from one trap, now found themselves about to be caught in another, and morale suffered. Corporal Cârlan noted, “When we left from the Kuban front no one asked themselves: where are we going? Everyone was thinking about escape, but now everyone asked themselves: where?”⁸⁶ The SSI had anxiously pointed out examples of demoralization in Crimea earlier that spring: a group of soldiers had refused to embark for the Caucasus until rations were improved, many complained of being called Gypsies by the Germans, and one was heard saying, “instead of allies the Germans have become our masters, as if we were occupied by them, like are other countries.”⁸⁷ Officers kept them in line and after their bellyaching soldiers resignedly followed the rest of their comrades who prepared for another battle. General Pantazi trusted in soldiers’ motivation enough to order on 12 October that corps commanders should excuse anyone caught as stragglers or deserters for the first time and set up an infantry regiment to “reeducate” them for two months and then send them back to their units – this was a new spin on the rehabilitation policy as it did not officially stigmatize them or reassign them to a different unit.⁸⁸ Only soldiers guilty of “serious” desertion or crimes should be sent to court martial.

In the confusion of the evacuation of the Kuban bridgehead many soldiers went AWOL, wandered looting goods, or carried on black market activities on the side in Crimea, but only a small number of soldiers chose the option of “serious” desertion. On 25 October, 40 mountain troops boarded a train, pretending to be heading home on leave, and were not checked by guards. At Tighina they got off the trains, split up, and continued by foot to avoid gendarme posts on the

⁸⁶ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 109.

⁸⁷ Moraru, *Armata lui Stalin văzută de români*, 113-115.

⁸⁸ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2782, f. 76.

frontier, but at least one group was caught. Third Army ordered increased gendarme patrols in Kherson, a city on the direct route from Crimea to Romania, to halt disorder in the streets caused by drunken soldiers or deserters.⁸⁹ Romanians, like the Germans, listened to news and music on Soviet radio and, between programs, it screeched at them to give up. “Romanian soldiers! Your fate in Crimea is sealed, do not believe the Germans. They lie to you...Desert while you have the chance. Surrender!” Major Scârneci, like most Romanian soldiers, scoffed at the message, “I wonder to whom? The Tatars in Crimea?”⁹⁰ Atrocity propaganda, reports of poor conditions in POW camps, and brutal treatment of captured Romanians by Soviet troops all made surrender unappealing. A handful turned traitor and joined the Soviet partisans in the Yaila Mountains.

When General Jaenecke finally threw together a belated defense, General Schwab was on hand to provide reorganized units that could be plugged into gaps at key locations. After a week of fighting, the Soviets broke through the German line at Melitopol, on 28 October. Both the 4th Mountain and 24th Infantry divisions were mauled, two-thirds of their soldiers became casualties, although many went missing during the retreat they chose to escape rather than be captured and 1,530 were soon gathered up. The survivors were amalgamated into the 4/24th Infantry Division on 5 December and trusted only with rear security until May 1944 when it was renamed the 4th Mountain Division and put back on the front.⁹¹ On 29 October, advance Soviet units approached a nearly undefended Perekop, the Germans raced to set up a defense and eventually remembered to have Schwab send troops.⁹² While a mixed bag of German and Slovak units blocked Perekop, the ad-hoc Balan Group, three mountain battalions, an artillery battalion, a company of anti-tank

⁸⁹ Ibid., dosar 2217, f. 124; dosar 2225, f. 68; dosar 2780, f. 149.

⁹⁰ Ana Pauker, a Romanian Jew read many of the broadcasts, see, Scârneci, *Viața și Moarte în linia întâi*, 472.

⁹¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2158, f. 270; dosar 2780, f. 67, 86; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1414, f. 527-528.

⁹² For details on the initial Soviet attack, see, Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow*, 246-48.

guns, and a company of tanks, was sent to the Sivash Sea coast. The same day, Schwab ordered discipline be maintained by swift corporal punishment and authorized company commanders to use “capital measures” for “grave disorders that could endanger combat potential...[but]...after being carefully thought through and only in the exact moment of the infraction.”⁹³ These orders are no different than a dozen others that had been issued by various Romanian commanders since June 1941. Anytime a commander felt he had to make sure subordinates took things seriously he threatened summary execution, but it is doubtful officers shot their men when manpower shortages were so severe. Schwab’s order should be read more as a signal of the start of a crisis.

The Soviets launched a combined land and sea attack on November 1 to seize Crimea off the march, but the German slapdash defense had plugged up Perekop. The Soviets turned to the exposed coast of the Sivash Sea and began crossing in force, but the Balan Group was on hand to stymie the Red Army until German reinforcements arrived. At the same time, the Soviets landed 2,500 troops across the Kerch strait near Eltigen. On 3 November, the Red Army made a larger disorganized landing near Kerch port farther north, so the 6th Cavalry Division took over bottling up the Eltigen bridgehead to let German soldiers face the new threat. Axis forces had contained the Soviets to a 13 km deep bridgehead on the Sivash Sea by 6 November, and four days later the Germans just managed to contain the Soviet attack at Kerch. The immediate crisis had passed.⁹⁴ Seven undermanned Romanian divisions, three weak German divisions, and a myriad of German support units, over 200,000 men, settled into a stalemate. The 6th Cavalry, 3rd Mountain, and a German division guarded the most vulnerable coastline along the Kerch peninsula, two German

⁹³ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1414, f. 506.

⁹⁴ Dutu, *Armata Romana in Razboi*, 253-254; Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow*, 250.

divisions blocked Perekop, the 19th Infantry Division manned the Sivash Sea and Arabat spit, the 9th Cavalry Division guarded the western coast, the 1st and 2nd Mountain divisions patrolled the southern mountains and seaside, and the 10th Infantry Division was kept in reserve. This fails to convey the true complexity of the defensive arrangements as Romanian divisions had German “corset stays” and German divisions plugged Romanian units into their overstretched fronts.

General Schwab reported on 24 November that in 20 days of combat his forces had lost at least a quarter of their already reduced combat strength. The fall of Melitopol and occupation of all the territory to the Dnieper by the Soviets exacerbated his personnel shortage because soldiers on leave and replacements could not arrive by land, so he asked they be flown in. He also wrote that morale was low and a few more soldiers had deserted to the partisans, so several days later he asked that financial aid to the families of soldiers fighting in the Crimea be increased, to even double that of soldiers elsewhere, to improve morale.⁹⁵ On 28 November, Hitler sent a letter to Antonescu informing him that Crimea would be defended “by all means.” He promised that the German Seventeenth Army would be supplied by sea, reinforcements would be sent, and a land corridor would soon be restored.⁹⁶ In fact, German Seventeenth Army was well-supplied by sea in the following months as German-Romanian troops continued to hold off the Red Army.

With the larger bridgehead near Kerch port contained, General Jaenecke decided to use Romanian troops supported by German assault guns, artillery, and Stukas to destroy the smaller bridgehead at Eltigen. Early on 4 December, the 6th Cavalry Division attacked from the north,

⁹⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2158, f. 303-305; two soldiers stole a truck and joined a bandit group north of Simferopol, see, Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 1256, f. 272; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1405, f. 56; a private captured by partisans reported who later escaped said they treated Romanians well in an attempt to win them over, a few became trusted partisans, but the rest were effectively prisoners and shot if they tried to escape, see, dosar 1407, f. 107-110

⁹⁶ Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow*, 260.

but met strong resistance aided by Soviet guns from across the strait. The 3rd Mountain Division began attacking from the south. The northern line started to cave in the following day and the 6th Cavalry committed all its forces on 6 December. During the night 1,500 Soviets broke out to the north. The Romanian forces overran the bridgehead in the morning, taking 2,300 POWs, and the Soviets that had broken out were quickly found huddled on the coast beneath Mount Mithridates. The 3rd Mountain Division surrounded the group, German artillery and aircraft bombarded them, and on 11 December they surrendered.⁹⁷ This was the last Axis success before the two sides dug in for the rest of the winter. Between 1 October and 31 December, the battles at Melitopol and in Crimea cost the Romanian forces 6,500 casualties, leaving over 63,000 in the peninsula.⁹⁸

While generals Jaenecke and Schwab worried about Romanian morale, the 19th Infantry division, reinforced by the 10th Infantry Division and German “corset stays,” held the Sivash Sea through the winter against repeated local attacks. When Lt. Colonel Iscăceanu’s dismounted 13th *Călărași* Regiment was transferred to the 10th Infantry Division’s sector his cavalrymen showed less stomach for the fight. In the first Soviet attack against his unit one squadron panicked under heavy artillery bombardment and fled without firing a shot, so it was withdrawn and transferred to the German sector at Perekop. Jaenecke sandwiched Romanian units between German units because manpower was so dear that he could not simply pull the few poor performing Romanian units off the front. The Soviets set up megaphones in front of the 13th *Călărași* Regiment, which broadcast Romanian songs intermixed with appeals encouraging them to desert. Iscăceanu heard the voice of Major Nicolae Cambrea, the two had been acquainted before his capture on the Don,

⁹⁷ Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Crowd*, 258-259.

⁹⁸ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 131.

claiming that the Soviets treated Romanian POWs well.⁹⁹ These efforts were a failure as none of Iscăceanu's soldiers deserted to the enemy. The 13th *Călărași* Regiment was an exceptional case because it was a severely demoralized unit that had lost most its heavy weapons and horses in the Caucasus, but it illustrates how the Axis dealt with such demoralized Romanian units.

German Seventeenth Army knew its position in Crimea would crumble under the weight of a major Soviet offensive and wanted to evacuate, but Hitler would not countenance it and sent two more weak divisions. This was not irrational. German High Command estimated the weak German-Romanian force was tying down three Soviet armies, plus air and naval assets, and kept the peninsula from becoming a base for Soviet air attacks against the Romanian oil industry.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, Crimea was relatively easy to supply by sea. Although the General Staff had begun planning for the defense of eastern Romania in September 1943, as the Kuban bridgehead was being evacuated, it was convinced by these arguments.¹⁰¹ This decision, however, left 75,000 experience Romanian soldiers, not to mention heavy weapons and equipment that were in short supply at home, stuck in Crimea and reduced to 63,000 men by January. General Șteflea needed to rebuild Echelon II units, but he had to send men to replace casualties, which included many rehabilitation soldiers, eventually raising the force to 65,000 soldiers by April.¹⁰² This left even fewer men for the defense of Romania if the Soviets broke through across the Dnieper.

General Schwab busied himself with schemes to improve the morale of his mix of proud Mountain and Cavalry corps veterans and rehabilitation replacements. On 9 December, he asked Third Army to begin granting leave to his troops again and suggested that those who had been on

⁹⁹ Fond Manuscrite, MSS 676, f. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 254; Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow*, 261, 265.

¹⁰¹ Ardeleanu, *Istoria statului major general*, 335-337.

¹⁰² Scafeș, *Armata română*, 63-64.

the front for 24 months or more should be sent home once a replacement arrived.¹⁰³ This was a well-intentioned idea, but it backfired and may have hurt morale. There were few replacements, and veterans with 24 months were soon frustrated they were not sent home immediately, some even threatened their officers.¹⁰⁴ The General Staff blamed poor morale in the ranks on officers neglecting propaganda and ordered that each unit's second-in-command to focus on such efforts. The General Staff sent several teams of three "propaganda missionaries" and three musicians led by an officer to raise spirits in Crimea from January to March 1944.¹⁰⁵ Desertions continued at a minimal level and morale was generally poor, but most soldiers kept fighting.

Anti-Partisan Operations in Crimea and Ukraine

In addition to defending Perekop, the Sivash Sea, and Kerch the Axis had to deal with the partisan movement in Crimea. The SSI reported that civilians were anticipating the arrival of the Soviets and emancipation from "German slavery." During the winter, partisans began attacking lone trucks and even whole convoys in mountainous forested areas, first by groups of 10-20 but later as large as 500-600. Between 1 November and 10 December 1943 there were 105 attacks near Simferopol alone. The SSI recorded a predictable response. "The reprisals carried out by the German authorities[,] and in part by the Romanian [authorities, only] accentuated even more the appetite for revenge of the locals, who are only waiting for the right moment."¹⁰⁶

General Jaenecke ordered General Schwab to clear the Yaila mountains of at least 7,000-8,000 partisans.¹⁰⁷ He carried out a successful corps-sized sweep in the forested massif south of

¹⁰³ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2158, f. 404.

¹⁰⁴ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 136; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2767, f. 144.

¹⁰⁵ Teachers who were veterans of the front, see, Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 1259, f. 15; dosar 1256, f. 389.

¹⁰⁶ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1405, f. 74; many villages were burned, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2281, f. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Duțu, *Aramta Română în Război*, 254.

Suja during 29 December 1943-9 January 1944 resulting in 1,934 dead, 121 wounded, and 2,763 partisans taken prisoner at a cost of 44 dead and 197 wounded Romanians. The paltry number of weapons taken and the large number of women and children among the prisoners suggests that while the sweep destroyed their logistical base most armed partisan men escaped.¹⁰⁸ Schwab followed this big operation by smaller sweeps since more of his units were sent to the front on the Sivash Sea. 1st Mountain Division only carried out one operation on 16-18 January, resulting in 13 partisans killed and 429 prisoners captured, and 14 camps destroyed for three killed and 13 wounded; 2nd Mountain Division carried out three sweeps on 16-19, 18-24, and 29-30 January, resulting in 159 partisans killed and 96 prisoners captured, and hundreds of burned huts for 23 killed and 76 wounded. The limited results of these subsequent operations were because targeted zones were too large, terrain was very difficult, and Romanian units were easily observed.¹⁰⁹

Third Army too was tasked with fighting partisans. By December, General Dumitrescu's forces included III Corps – 4th/24th, 15th, and 8th Infantry Divisions – and a number of German or Slovak security units, to secure the rear between the Bug and Dnieper.¹¹⁰ Reports indicated that the partisan movement was growing in Transnistria too, before August 1943 it only consisted of a few diehard communists and NKVD agents, now groups of 30, 50, and even 100 were forming in the north and south of the province, and began carrying out isolated attacks.¹¹¹ Dumitrescu issued special orders in January 1944 on combating partisans in Transnistria: flyers were posted to warn the population of “grave sanctions” if they supported partisans; possible threats, such as

¹⁰⁸ Jut 712 rifles, 17 machine pistols, 11 machineguns, 8 mortars were captured. Schwab's evaluation was very critical, “timid, slow, and frontal [*nemanevriera*],” attacks with soldiers not using terrain and poor infantry-artillery coordination (or par for the course for Romanian units), see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1812, f. 17, 29-31.

¹⁰⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2282, f. 104-112.

¹¹⁰ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 156.

¹¹¹ Many freed Soviet POWs were allegedly joining the partisans, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1481, f. 272-273.

former Red Army officers or NCOs released earlier from POW camps, were detained and sent to Budești in Romania; hostages were taken; and strict order maintained by raids, expedited judicial processes, and public executions. The partisan movement previously had almost been nonexistent in Transnistria, so any increase in activity was worrying and dealt with harshly.

Jews and the Army

While Stalingrad definitively ended any plans to deport Jews in Romania west of the Prut to death camps in Poland, the Antonescu regime's treatment of Romanian and Soviet Jews in Transnistria continued to be harsh. The Government of Transnistria used Jews living in ghettos as labor in factories. Jews in camps in the countryside were forced to work on farms guarded by gendarmes, Ukrainian police, or ethnic Germans who frequently shot Jews out of hand for minor infractions. In response to German requests for labor, Governor Alexianu sent thousands of Jews across the Bug to work in *Reichskommissariat Ukraine*, most never to return. There were some signs of changing attitudes, however, such as in January 1943 when the Central Jewish Office in Bucharest permitted an Aid Committee with the goal of improving conditions for Jews to inspect all the ghettos and camps in Transnistria.¹¹² Romanian and Soviet Jews continued to be beaten and abused by Romanian gendarmes or local police, but fewer and fewer were murdered as their labor was valuable for the war effort and officers no longer tolerated such criminality.

Despite an estimated 100,000 Romanian and Soviet Jews surviving in ghettos and camps in Transnistria, none of General Dumitrescu's anti-partisan orders in December 1943 mentioned the threat of "Jewish-Communists." As the Soviets approached in early 1944, Romanian soldiers in Transnistria began to treat Jews much better. In the final weeks of Romanian occupation, a

¹¹² Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 221-222, for details of the findings of the Aid Committee, see, 218-220.

Jewish survivor recalled, “No one was abusive, not the officers, not the soldiers, not the military prosecutors, not the pharmacists, not the agricultural engineers. The ‘*Jidani*’ [kikes] had now become ‘the Jewish gentlemen.’”¹¹³ Pressured by a few members of his government, particularly diplomats, and the monarchy, Antonescu relaxed some anti-Semitic policies and began to blame the Germans for the previous violence in eastern Romania. After a year of petitioning by Jewish leaders, the *Conducător* agreed to repatriate 34,600 of the 54,000 surviving Romanian Jews from Transnistria, but between 20 December 1943 and 11 January 1944 only 18,500 Jews – most were originally from near Dorohoi in southern Bukovina that had not been occupied by the Soviets in 1940 – were repatriated before he halted transports on 27 January. Antonescu believed that the repatriation of Soviet Moldovans in Transnistria took priority over deported Jews.¹¹⁴

Antonescu also worried what effect the sudden return of tens of thousands of Jews would have on popular opinion. After they had been deported, Romanians had seized their property or otherwise benefited, so few were happy to see Jews return. On 20 June 1942, a group of 29 Jews from Vatra Dornei, a town in southern Bukovina, were released from the Moghilev ghetto due to their skills in forestry and returned to the town to cut timber for the war effort. They asked that their homes be restituted. Vatra Dornei was thrown into an uproar and locals petitioned that the Jews be sent back; eventually they had to be put under guard to protect them from a mob.¹¹⁵ The Antonescu regime, which was already reluctant to repatriate Jews it still saw as communists or traitors, feared Jews returning might trigger popular protests against the government.

¹¹³ Translated quote found in Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 223.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 249-250, 254-256.

¹¹⁵ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1243, f. 217-218.

Trench Warfare in Crimea

Throughout the winter of 1943-1944, the Soviets kept up the pressure on Crimea and the Dnieper as Stavka prepared another series of offensives for the spring. The Red Army began a local attack on 10 January 1944 to eliminate the German bridgehead east of Dnieper at Nikopol. Its destruction on 8 February prompted German Seventeenth Army and the General Staff to beg Hitler to allow Crimea to be evacuated before it was too late, but German High Command stood firm and ignored their pleas.¹¹⁶ Axis forces had no choice other than to dig in deeper, however, the sodden clay soil and shortage of materials made constructing defenses on the Sivash Sea near impossible. The 10th and 19th Infantry divisions entrenched best they could and repelled repeated local Soviet attacks as winter turned to spring. On the Kerch peninsula, the 3rd Mountain and 6th Cavalry divisions helped keep the Red Army bottled up and guarded the coast. Romanian troops made the most of the sudden glut of supplies that the Germans dumped into Crimea on Hitler's orders by engaging in black market activities to make money that they sent home to their family or squandered satisfying various vices. Some Romanian troops got quite good at manufacturing fake papers to avoid inquisitive gendarmes and obtain rations from German canteens.¹¹⁷

As Axis troop dug in, they did so with one eye on retreat in expectation of an inevitable Soviet breakthrough. German Seventeenth Army had operational control of all Axis forces in Crimea, but Romanian units were divided between the Mountain Corps under General Schwab, occupied with anti-partisan operations in the mountains, and the Cavalry Corps under General Cealîk, holding back the Soviet bridgehead on the Sivash Sea; they shared coastal defense duties.

¹¹⁶ The chorus included von Kleist, Jaenecke, Șteflea, and Antonescu, see, Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 254.

¹¹⁷ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1407, f. 3.

In early February, Cealîk reported that while soldiers' morale was poor, officers were committed and overall the Cavalry Corps' units were sound, except for the 3rd *Roșiori* – most its men were rehabilitation soldiers – and 13th *Călărași* regiments.¹¹⁸ Lt. Colonel Iscăceanu's 13th *Călărași* Regiment was so demoralized that even squeezing it between German units did not help, so they were set to work digging trenches and shelters for a fall back line at Perekop.¹¹⁹ Schwab carried out another series of anti-partisan sweeps in late-February, but they failed to kill or capture very many. He asked General Jaenecke if some of his mountain units on the Sivash Sea or at Kerch could be transferred so he could organize larger sweeps to make sure mountain roads were kept clear in case the Axis forces needed to retreat. None could be spared, however, due to continued Soviet attacks, and all Jaenecke could offer were a few aircraft in support.¹²⁰

Third Army continued to carry out security operations between the Bug and Dnieper. General Dumitrescu, always a stern disciplinarian, complained of some of the same problematic outer signs of indiscipline reported earlier in Crimea – poor appearance, lackadaisical saluting, drunkenness, fights, folk songs with new “subversive” lyrics – but there were few desertions.¹²¹ When soldiers from the front entered Transnistria, they encountered a large population of Jews now unknown east of the Bug, and old habits resurfaced. On 26 February, two drunk soldiers entered the Balta ghetto and began shooting wildly, wounding a Jew and killing a Ukrainian. Both were arrested immediately.¹²² Such disorder was no longer tolerated because Third Army

¹¹⁸ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 1256, f. 59-66, 80.

¹¹⁹ The soldiers emerging caked in the sticky clay soil, see, Fond Manuscrite, MSS 676, f. 39-40.

¹²⁰ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1833, f. 1-4, 7, 15; only a few Luftwaffe aircraft remained after December 1943 and by the spring the Soviets had near overwhelming superiority, see Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow*, 267.

¹²¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2780, f. 214-215, allegedly the soldiers did not realize the nature of the lyrics, see, f. 237.

¹²² Ibid., dosar 3032, f. 71.

worried about indiscipline and surviving Jews were needed to work. Romanian soldiers' anti-Semitism simmered under the surface but was now kept in check for pragmatic reasons.

Defending the Iași Front: March to August 1944

When the Antonescu regime mobilized its last manpower reserves for a last-ditch defense of Romania, most youths reported out of a mixture of patriotism, social pressure, and coercion by the Rural Gendarmerie. On 8 February, the General Staff instructed that across Romania men in the 1946 contingent, 19-year-olds, were to report for frontline service, furthermore, in Moldavia, Bukovina, and Bessarabia all youths in the 1947-1950 contingents, 18- to 15-year-olds, would be called up too "in order to know the number of young men eligible for military service."¹²³ They knew that the fate of their nation hung in the balance and feared Soviet occupation, so when draft notices went out a week later the General Staff did not face protests or mass draft avoidance. By August 1944, the Romania Army would mobilize 1,077,000 soldiers. It took the General Staff a year, but it had rebuilt many Echelon II units, although they were short on firepower, especially anti-tank weapons, and their mobility was practically nil.¹²⁴ The new draftees were formed into training battalions and rushed piecemeal into battle once they had a modicum of training.

Soviet attacks had battered the Germans all winter and now a new spring offensive broke through on the Dnieper in Ukraine on 8 March. That same day Hitler ordered that "strongholds" in cities or towns be created with the mission to be encircled to slow down the Soviets, but these were mere speed bumps in the path of the Red Army.¹²⁵ Fourth Army, commanded by General

¹²³ 58% for infantry, 9% for cavalry, 9% for artillery, 7% for engineers, 7% *grăniceri*, 7% for sailors, 7% for airmen, 1.5% for gendarmes, and .5% for firefighters, see, Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 1211, f. 255-256.

¹²⁴ 674,000 were in the rear, only nine in operational divisions and the rest in 21 training divisions, Scafeș, *Armata română*, 73; for details on efforts to reequip the army, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 145-154.

¹²⁵ For details on the winter battles and spring breakthrough, see, Robert M. Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand: The German Campaigns of 1944-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 27-36, 54-56.

Racovița after 23 January 1944 and consisting of the Cantemir Mixed Tank Group and IV Corps, was reactivated on 15 March to defend Romania's northeastern frontier, but the Soviets overran northern Bessarabia, northern Transnistria, and all Bukovina before Fourth Army's meager force could set up a defense. The Soviets crossed the Dniester at Moghilev on 18 March. Antonescu and General Șteflea sent letters to Hitler the next day begging for help. Antonescu complained he had not been kept up to date on the front, warning of serious material losses if Bessarabia fell, and Șteflea admitted Fourth Army lacked the weapons to halt the Soviets.¹²⁶ The Soviets retook Bălți, crossed the Prut on 26 March, and soon occupied Botoșani and Rădăuți. Farther north, the Red Army crossed the Dniester on 28 March and Cernăuți fell on a day later without a fight.

German Sixth Army, reconstituted after Stalingrad, held onto southern Bessarabia and Transnistria with its line bulging east to the Bug protecting Odessa, the primary port supplying German Seventeenth Army.¹²⁷ Third Army's mish-mash of security forces preceded the front and inevitably left stragglers behind, but most avoided capture and were thrown back on the line without punishment. General Dumitrescu made sure on 21 March to clarify it was "only an act of generosity and of parental understanding and in no way a sign of tolerance [for desertion]."¹²⁸ He needed anyone willing to fight as Third Army began organizing a defense on the Dniester. In Crimea, General Schwab, anticipating that the Red Army would soon attack there too, risked an enemy landing by stripping units from coastal defense and ordered 1st Mountain Division to clear mountain roads with the help of Tatar police. The three sweeps during 9-13 March failed to net many partisans but kept the roads clear and would pay off during the evacuation of Crimea.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Arimia, *Antonescu-Hitler Vol. II*, 139-143.

¹²⁷ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2246, f. 78; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 254, 269.

¹²⁸ He no longer had patience for the official rehabilitation process, see, *Ibid.*, dosar 2968, f. 247.

¹²⁹ 275 partisans, plus destroyed camps, for 17 Axis losses, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1833, f. 200-209.

The Soviet breakthrough precipitated a flood of refugees into Romania. German High Command evacuated all men of military age in Crimea or east of the Bug to deny manpower to the Red Army. Soviet civilians who had collaborated or otherwise feared the return of Soviet power bribed Romanian gendarmes to cross the Bug. *Sonderkommando R* resettled the ethnic Germans from Transnistria to the Reich. Antonescu, under pressure from the diplomatic corps, the monarchy, and Jewish leaders in Romania reversed his earlier decision against repatriating Romanian Jews from Transnistria on 14 March. Another 10,700 were evacuated.¹³⁰ On 1 April, German Sixth Army took control of unoccupied Transnistria as Governor Alexianu evacuated his personnel and stripped the province of resources. The SSI reported that German soldiers treated locals brutally, healthy people were again hiding in the catacombs under Odessa, and Romanian troops from Bessarabia were overheard discussing deserting.¹³¹ Soviet occupation of northern Bessarabia again presented *basarabeni* with the dilemma of choosing home or nation.

At the beginning of April, a barrage of attacks threatened Romania from all sides. After barreling forward to the Dniester, the Red Army seemed to still have plenty of steam, and Stavka planned to knock Romania out of the war.¹³² On 4 and 5 April, the U.S. Army Air Force began a sustained bombing campaign against Romania with raids on Bucharest and Ploiești that shocked the home front.¹³³ On 7 April, the Soviets began an offensive against the Axis forces in Crimea. The Romanian Army was a hollow shell after irreplaceable losses of men and equipment outside

¹³⁰ It's likely that a few more Jews found ways to escape on their own, see, Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 257.

¹³¹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 3032, f. 277.

¹³² Soviet historians claimed for decades that Stavka was not planning to knock out Romania that spring, but it again pushed the Red Army too hard and it became overstretched, see, David M. Glantz, *Red Storm over the Balkans: The Failed Soviet Invasion of Romania, Spring 1944* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2007), xii-xiii.

¹³³ The bombers caught Bucharest unready and hit the North Train Station filled with refugees killing nearly 3,000 and wounding over 2,000. For a personal experience, see, Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 161-163.

Stalingrad and most its remaining experienced units were in Crimea, but without its support the Wehrmacht could not hope to hold its southern flank. If the Romanian Army had surrendered it would have been a disaster to the Nazi war effort, losing valuable fighting troops, the vital oil fields around Ploiești, and access to the rest of the Balkans. The Antonescu regime refused to give up, Romanian officers at all levels supported the decision by using lash or decorations to motivate, and soldiers fought on to defend their homes out of patriotism, fear, and fatalism.

Despite these odds the German-Romanian soldiers managed to halt the Red Army due to Soviet overreach, geography, and pure determination by desperate Axis soldiers. The Red Army had a habit of becoming overextended after multiple offensives until its logistics broke down and its soldiers were exhausted. Axis forces, on the other hand were falling back on a virtually intact logistical network in Romania, which was run by militarized railroads called the “Second Army” in state propaganda, allowing rapid reinforcement and resupply. For the first time in nearly three years the Axis had a secure rear because no partisan or resistance movement existed in Romania. The terrain of eastern Romania, hills in Moldavia and Bessarabia with the Carpathian Mountains to the west, favored the defense and funneled the Soviets toward the Focșani gap to the south.¹³⁴ Lastly, Romanian soldiers were willing to sacrifice their lives to defend Romania.

As the Red Army overran northeastern Romania, Army Group A, renamed Army Group South Ukraine on 5 April, shifted German units to Fourth Army to act as “corset stays” and then plugged arriving Romanian units into holes in the German line. These was the same tactics used in the Kuban bridgehead and Crimea. German “corset stays” only worked, however, because the

¹³⁴ Glantzi, *Red Storm over the Balkans*, 10-11; for a discussion of “the Soviet Way of War,” see, Citino, *Death of the Wehrmacht*, 289-290; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 156-157.

Romanian soldiers' motivation to keep fighting – if Fourth Army had decided to not fight or flee a few German units in its ranks could not have stopped it. German High Command had little to fear because rather than trying to abandon the war the General Staff willingly put the defense of Romania into the hands of the German Army. As Romania embraced Nazi Germany, Hungary was wavering, so Hitler ordered its occupation on 19 March, much to Antonescu's delight, who used his 23-24 March meeting with the Führer to rail against Hungarians and try to convince him to return northern Transylvania.¹³⁵ The *Conducător* returned only with promises of support.

It was up to German-Romanian forces in eastern Romania to stop the Red Army until any reinforcements or equipment arrived from Berlin. The Soviets advanced across the Prut and then the Siret into northern Moldavia as Fourth Army fell back in disorder. The roads were crowded with refugees, some units reported that soldiers were throwing down their weapons, and General Racovița claimed that 80 percent of *basarabeni* were deserting. Memories of 1940 made officers paranoid about *basarabeni*, and a significant portion chose home over nation, particularly if they were from Soviet-occupied Bessarabia and worried about their families, however, most remained loyal. Investigations proved initial reports were overblown, and troops were not unmotivated, as indicated by the fact that weapon losses were only slightly above normal and at most 10 percent of *basarbeni* deserted.¹³⁶ Moreover, most of deserters turned out to be stragglers, so Racovița set up new gendarme units to round up troops and reassigned them to the nearest unit. On 13 April, Antonescu took a harsher stance when he issued Order No. 10.523 that authorized commanders

¹³⁵ For details on Hitler's decision, see, Cornelius, *Hungary in World War II*, 269-276; Arimia, *Antonescu-Hitler Vol. II*, 143-146.

¹³⁶ By 7 April 1944, Fourth Army had suffered 2,807 casualties and counted 2,938 lost weapons. Additionally, in the whole of April, only 487 *basarabeni* had become stragglers or deserted out of a total of 4,672 under General Racovița's command, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1533, f. 17-18, 26-27; dosar 1596, f. 185, 187, 196-197.

to summarily execute officers, NCOs, and soldiers for desertion, cowardice (including panicked flight, provoking others to panic, remaining behind, throwing away one's weapon), looting, self-mutilation, insubordination, or striking a superior.¹³⁷ Understanding this was a classic example of a kneejerk reaction to a crisis common to Romanian generals few commanders shot anyone.

Terrain, logistics, and sacrifice by poorly armed and trained Romanians, not executions, finally arrested Fourth Army's retreat. The Red Army continued south between the Carpathians and Prut, soon threatening Iași. To the southeast, the Soviets pushed German Sixth Army back across the Bug, Odessa fell on 10 April, Tiraspol soon after, and they established a bridgehead across the Dniester at Tighina on 12 April. These were, however, final efforts by the exhausted Soviets, and in less than a week a German-Romanian line had solidified. It ran south along the Carpathian foothills in northern Moldavia, then jutted out east across central Moldavia north of Iași, continued across the Prut into central Bessarabia north of Chișinău to the Dniester, then turned south along the river, and ended at the Black Sea. Romania was safe, for now.

Fall of Crimea

As the front in eastern Romania stabilized, the Axis collapse in Crimea was total. On 7 April, the Soviets opened their attack with a bombardment to pin down the Germans at Perekop, because the main attack was directed against the Romanians defending the Sivash Sea that began the next day against the well dug in 10th Infantry Division. The 10th Infantry Division withstood the attacks, but the 19th Infantry Division on its right was cracking, so the Red Army shifted its attack and broke through the next day.¹³⁸ Corporal Cârlan endured an intense bombardment and

¹³⁷ Ibid., dosar 1533, f. 31-32.

¹³⁸ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 133; Forczyk, *Where the Iron Crosses Grow*, 272-275.

his unit was soon overrun. He records that Soviet soldiers shouted in Romanian, “Where are you running to, huh, motherfuckers, ‘cause we will put our hands on you before Sevastopol.” When a comrade urged Cârlan to flee he refused because if he left his radio “[the officers] will shoot me.”¹³⁹ Axis forces began a pell-mell race to Sevastopol. The units at Kerch began pulling back on 10 April, German troops and part of 3rd Mountain Division crowded onto ships at Feodosia on 13 April to evacuate to Sevastopol. The 9th Cavalry Division abandoned its defenses on the west coast and fell back without serious loss. On 12-14 April, the Mountain Corps set up a line on the old Soviet positions north of Severnaya Bay and fought off Soviet tank attacks. The perimeter extended south over the next few days as troops arrived from Kerch by sea or by roads through the mountains or along the coast.¹⁴⁰ The partisans in the Yaila Mountains did not impede the Axis retreat, in part due to the previous Romanian sweeps, but also because they were afraid to attack heavily armed Axis units. By 16 April, Axis defenses had coalesced around Sevastopol, and 81,700 German and 46,700 Romanian soldiers eventually reached its perimeter.¹⁴¹

Hitler ordered German Seventeenth Army to hold out at all costs. General Jaenecke argued for wholesale evacuation but was only allowed evacuate rear support troops from Crimea during 12-27 April. He immediately began to surreptitiously save combat troops too. Romanian soldiers formed into groups of twenty in the Chersonese peninsula, those few evacuated by air could take just 10-15 kg of possessions, while those evacuated by sea could take more. Corporal Cârlan had managed to reach the Sevastopol perimeter with his radio and while his group looked for an embarkation point they were ready to shoot any Germans that tried to stop them. As they

¹³⁹ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 155, 161.

¹⁴⁰ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 134.

¹⁴¹ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 256.

waited for their ship, they sheltered from Soviet aircraft in the same catacombs that Soviet troops had hidden in two years before.¹⁴² The seaside soldiers endured a quick but dangerous voyage as Soviet aircraft and submarines actively patrolled. By the end of April, 28,000 Germans, 21,000 Romanians, and 23,000 Slovaks, HiWis, POWs, and civilians had been evacuated.¹⁴³ Soldiers joyfully celebrated the Romanian coast come into view, but on 30 April, as Corporal Cârlan left Constanța with train of soldiers, along the tracks crowds had gathered “like at a military parade.” Peasants came from nearby villages at the news of a train with soldiers from Crimea was passing through, so families could ask for news about their husbands, fathers, or sons.¹⁴⁴

Hitler discovered General Jaenecke’s subterfuge and fired him on 1 May, replacing him with General Karl Allmendinger, but the change in command did not change the situation. That day the 2nd Mountain Division came under attack on the northern perimeter outside Sevastopol. On 5 May the Soviets launched a larger diversionary attack, again on the northern perimeter, the 1st and 2nd Mountain divisions helped hold them off, but the main Soviet assault targeted German V Corps on the southern perimeter and began two days later. It soon had to retreat, which forced German-Romanian forces north of Severnaya Bay to retreat in the night to avoid being cut off.¹⁴⁵ Hitler finally approved full evacuation on 8 May and during the next five days ships and aircraft rescued another 29,000 Germans, 15,000 Romanians, and 4,000 HiWis. The Soviets managed to sink several transports during the crossing, drowning 7,000 German and 4,000 Romanian troops, or about 10 percent of those evacuated. Roughly 3,000 Romanian soldiers escaped by air for a

¹⁴² Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amitirile!*, 184.

¹⁴³ Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 1234, f. 151; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 261.

¹⁴⁴ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amitirile!*, 186-190.

¹⁴⁵ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 135.

total of 39,000 rescued, but 53,500 German and 22,000 Romanian soldiers were captured.¹⁴⁶

The Red Army, for once, suffered far fewer casualties during the battle, roughly a third of Axis losses. The exhausted Romanian troops arrived without heavy equipment, while the Germans saved 1,092 tons of material the Romanians only got room for 291 tons, and the Cavalry Corps' horses were all left behind. These soldiers were desperately needed to defend Romania.

Defending the Iași Front

With the Soviets halted, General Ferdinand Schörner, commander of Army Group South Ukraine, organized his forces on what Romanians dubbed the Iași front. He organized two sub-army groups, ostensibly under the control of the titular general as a sop to Romanian pride, Sub-Army Group Wöhler consisted of German Eighth Army and Fourth Army, and Sub-Army Group Dumitrescu had German Sixth Army and Third Army. Third Army fielded three corps, one was German, and Fourth Army had five corps, one was German. German Eighth Army just had three corps, one was Romanian, but German Sixth Army had five corps, all German. All four armies were actually more intertwined at lower levels from the confused fighting that spring, plus the need to buttress Romanian units that had few anti-tank guns or tanks, limited artillery, and raw recruits more poorly trained than those in 1941.¹⁴⁷ Romanian reinforcements would arrive in the following months, but not before one more major Soviet offensive in May.

Fear became the overriding motivation of soldiers, fear of Soviet occupation and fear, to a lesser extent, of draconian discipline enforced by officers. Fourth Army reported on 21 April that Red Army soldiers were terrorizing Romanians in Soviet-occupied territory, including mass

¹⁴⁶ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 262, 257; his numbers are slightly off as he double counts the 3,000 soldiers evacuated by air, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 136; Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand*, 305-307.

¹⁴⁷ Strangely, after dismissing the manpower crisis, Axworthy makes the dumbfounding claim that the Romanian Army was better equipped in 1944 than it had been in 1941, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 145-154.

rape of girls and women in front of parents or husbands. General Racoviță encouraged civilians from an area 6 km behind the front to evacuate west.¹⁴⁸ Such rumors, and stories of Soviet tanks crushing crosses in Romanian cemeteries in the USSR were believed – in many cases were true – and motivated men to lay down their lives in defense of hearth and home. Third Army stragglers had caught up, by 1 April only 270 of its 3,800 rehabilitation soldiers were still listed as missing, and General Dumitrescu's 63,700 soldiers stopped Soviet attacks on the Dniester. On 25 April, veterans of 10th *Vânători* Regiment, dug in deep, waited out a three-hour bombardment, emerged quickly, and stopped an attack dead in its tracks.¹⁴⁹ During a visit to the front, Antonescu saw some soldiers stealing from civilians, so Fourth Army reminded its commanders on 21 April that Order No. 10.523 required “the smallest transgressions” be punished by firing squad. This time a spat of executions followed, including two company commanders, because officers needed to impress on soldiers that Romanian territory could not be treated like occupied Soviet territory. Nevertheless, contrary to the *Conducător*'s express orders most were not executed, 6th Infantry Division with Fourth Army rehabilitated all soldiers who participated in a counterattack in April that had been labeled deserters after the retreat in March, and even Antonescu merely confiscated the colors of the 18th and 90th Mountain groups for a panicked retreat north of Iași at the end of the month, which he would return only if they redeemed themselves through combat.¹⁵⁰ During April desperate Romanian counterattacks and German panzers held the Soviets on the Iași front.

On 2 May, Stavka launched the first Iași-Chișinău offensive, hoping to pierce the front at Târgu Frumos and then advance south through the Focșani gap into the Wallachian plain. Soviet

¹⁴⁸ They were to take particular care to evacuate any girls 10 or older, see, Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1596, f. 211.

¹⁴⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2968, f. 6-7; dosar 2877, f. 17.

¹⁵⁰ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1533, f. 69, 105, 111; Fond Armata 3-a; dosar 2898, f. 38.

forces attacked V and I corps, breaking through badly equipped Romanian units, but LVII Panzer Corps came to Fourth Army's rescue and filled the holes. The General Staff threw in the 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th Mountain "commands" and the 110th Infantry Brigade as well. Each of these was made up of three battalions of raw recruits or support troops taken from the garrisons of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th Mountain, and 10th Infantry divisions. These improvised combat units were later reinforced with survivors from their parent divisions that were being evacuated from Crimea.¹⁵¹ The Soviet offensive ground to a halt after six days, stopping short of Târgu Frumos just outside of the village of Ruginoasa, soldiers quickly nicknamed it "the battle of *Rușinoasă* [shameful]" because they had not been able to withstand Soviet pressure and needed panzers to save them.¹⁵² On 8 May, German Sixth Army attacked the Soviet bridgehead at Taşlîc, a narrow strip jutting 30 km from the Dniester towards Chișinău, and destroyed it in a week.¹⁵³ For the rest of May, fighting on the Iași front devolved into a series of local attacks by both sides.

In the meantime, the Allies began coordinating an air campaign against Romania. While Anglo-American bomber fleets still targeted oil production at Ploiești, supported by the Red Air Force, they prioritize destroying railyards in major cities to disrupt Axis operations. From April to August, 157 locomotives, 619 passenger cars, 3,010 freight cars, 1,525 tanker cars, and 10 vehicles were destroyed. This hampered the movement of troops and supplies to the front and oil deliveries to Germany were reduced to a trickle, however, Allied bombing caused collateral

¹⁵¹ Glantz, *Red Storm over the Balkans*, 268-274; 19th Infantry Division's battalions stayed near its garrison on the Yugoslav border to fight any of Tito's partisans who sought sanctuary from German anti-partisan sweeps across the frontier in Romania, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 159; Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 3015, f. 9-10.

¹⁵² Ionescu-Qunitus, Ploiești, 2012.

¹⁵³ Temporarily removing the threat of double encirclement, see, Glantz, *Red Storm over the Balkans*, 291-304, 375.

civilian casualties of 7,600 dead, 7,600 injured, and 46,523 wrecked homes.¹⁵⁴ On 19 May, the General Staff announced that officers, NCOs, or soldiers, whether on the front or in the rear, who had family affected by the bombing would receive 15-20 days of leave.¹⁵⁵ Romanian reaction to the bombing was mixed, it demoralized some and angered others.

While situation on the Iași front improved during May, battles inflicted heavy casualties on the Romanian Army. After panzers helped them stop the Soviets, Fourth Army soldiers dug in and repelled attacks. Desperate for men but unwilling as yet to throw teenage draftees with a few weeks training into the fray, the General Staff emptied the Chișinău prison of all stragglers and deserters on 10 May and sent them to the front. General Dumitrescu liberally employed the lash to maintain discipline in May, having 491 flogged, 265 for being AWOL or deserting and 84 for “incorrectness,” compared to just 75 in April.¹⁵⁶ German Sixth Army destroyed several other small Soviet bridgeheads across the Dniester in the middle of the month. This convinced Stavka to postpone any more major attacks until later that summer to allow the Soviet forces on the Iași front time to rest, receive replacements, and be resupplied.¹⁵⁷ At the end of May, with Fourth Army’s sector near Târgu Frumos stabilized, General Schörner felt confident enough to order German Eighth Army to counterattack in the Târgu Frumos-Iași sector as well.

General Wöhler only had the means for a limited offensive. Its goals were to secure the exposed highway between Iași and Târgu Frumos, seize key heights north of Iași, and disrupt a

¹⁵⁴ Luke Truxal, "Bombing the Romanian Rail Network," *Air Power History* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2018), 15-22; Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 290; the USAAF carried out 42 daylight raids and the RAF at least 23 nighttime raids between 4 April and 19 August 1944, see, Bernád, *Rumanian Aces of World War 2*, 53.

¹⁵⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2898, f. 47.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., dosar 2968, f. 289; dosar 3031, f. 61, 73; Third Army had 1,165 soldiers AWOL or deserters: 1054 Romanians, 11 *basarabeni*, 32 *bukovineni*, 25 Hungarians, 16 Ukrainians, 5 Germans, and 22 others, see, f. 62.

¹⁵⁷ Glantz, *Red Storm over the Balkans*, 317-318.

Soviet attack Army Group South Ukraine believed was brewing – it had actually been called off. At 4 am on 30 May 360 guns opened fire. The 24th and 23rd Panzer divisions led the attack, with German (and Romanian) air support, and in two days fighting took a bite out of the Soviet line to the Jijia River. The German 79th Infantry and 14th Panzer divisions took over, so the 24th Panzer Division could shift west for the next part of the offensive. The second attack by the 24th Panzer and *Grossdeutschland* Panzer Grenadier divisions, supported by the 18th Mountain (formerly 18th Infantry) and 3rd Infantry divisions on either flank, on 2 June against now alert Soviet troops met with heavy resistance and halted after four days. Soviet counterattacks carried on for days more, aided when American aircraft bombed Iași on 7 June disrupting Axis communications. The two attacks succeeded in creating a small bulge in the Soviet defenses, captured 1,500 POWs, and destroyed numerous tanks, guns, and aircraft. They failed, however, to take the hills north of Iași used to direct Soviet artillery fire.¹⁵⁸ The front now settled into a period of relative calm.

With the front stable, Army Group South Ukraine focused on securing the rear. Refugees in southern Moldavia and Bessarabia included Romanians, Jews, minorities from Bessarabia and Transnistria, and HiWis. The General Staff evacuated an area 5 km behind the frontline and all men who were swept up were assigned to labor battalions. On May 16, it issued special orders in regard to Jews from Moldavia who had evacuated south and west after March, all Jews who had evacuated from Soviet-occupied territory had to register with local authorities in a city, never in the countryside, and could not leave, but Jews from territory not occupied by the Soviets had to return.¹⁵⁹ In early June, Army Group South Ukraine complained there were still refugees in the 5

¹⁵⁸ Glantz, *Red Storm over the Balkans*, 339-365; Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1666, f. 89, 96-99, 258-259, 100.

¹⁵⁹ Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1814, f. 141.

km zone in its rear, and that locals were returning home to southern Bessarabia since the front had stabilized. General Wöhler argued refugees were a threat, claiming some betrayed Third Army movements to the Red Army, and requested *basarabeni* be stopped from returning.¹⁶⁰ The Rural Gendarmerie had precipitously evacuated southern Bessarabia in March, making it hard to stop *basarabeni* from returning home and giving them the option to ignore mobilization orders that spring, but most youths answered the call to defend their homes.¹⁶¹

The General Staff knew that it was only a matter of time before the Red Army attacked again and prepared for a final battle. The Romanian Army faced almost every kind of shortage: weapons, ammunition, and equipment, officers and NCOs, training and experience, but it fielded a large number of soldiers determined to defend their country to the last. Reinforcements finally arrived during the summer, swelling Fourth and Third armies' ranks to 432,000, although most were new recruits with three months training. Morale in the ranks was shaky. In some respects, soldiers' situation had improved because so close to home soldiers were not short of food, mail arrived on time, and leave was regular, but the Red Army's obvious superiority meant that they knew their fate was sealed. In consequence, the General Staff organized a propaganda blitz to bolster morale. Officers held meetings, especially for new recruits, where materials the General Staff provided were read to the ranks to remind them of what they were fighting for: a defensive war after Soviet occupation in 1940, the restoration of *România Mare*, Christian civilization, and protecting families from Soviet tyranny. Propaganda missionaries and chaplains preached faith in final victory.¹⁶² How much these efforts convinced Romanian soldiers that the Axis could still

¹⁶⁰ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 3026, f. 8-11, 13, 18, 19.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., dosar 2968, f. 138.

¹⁶² But there were shortages in all printed materials, see, Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1814, f. 496, 509, 313-314.

win the war is debatable, but they reinforce soldiers' motivation to keep fighting. Colonel Mitica Panaite, an instructor at an artillery school in Focșani, noted on 6 July, "We are few remaining, few indeed who still believe in a good ending! My optimism has not waned, but you probably need to be a German to still be able to believe [in final victory]."¹⁶³ If few believed in a good ending, most were not ready to surrender their country into the hands of the Soviets.

The Iași front was remained quiet from June to August. In certain places a live and let live attitude developed in the trenches, 2nd Lieutenant Gheorghe Netejoru recalled that neither side fired at men getting water in his sector, but the Soviets keep up the pressure with patrols, artillery or air bombardments, and local attacks, which caused on average 3,600 casualties each month.¹⁶⁴ During this same time the number of stragglers, soldiers gone AWOL, and deserters remained manageable. Since 1941 divisions had averaged a hundred soldiers missing for various reasons per month, after battles the number often increased. In the fourteen weeks between 22 March and 5 July, the 14th Infantry Division reported 744.¹⁶⁵ Generals Dumitrescu and Racoviță still worried *basarabeni* in the ranks might again desert in large numbers as they had in 1940, so officers kept a close watch on them and tried to split them up and mix them in among men from the Old Kingdom who they considered to be more reliable. There is evidence that *basarabeni*, especially those from territory already occupied by the Soviets, were less motivated to fight since they wanted to return home to be with their families.¹⁶⁶ General Pantazi inspected Fourth Army

¹⁶³ Fond Manuscrite, MSS 625, f. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Netejoru, *Si eu am luptat în est*, 71; 3,849 in June, 4,344 in July, and 2,591 in August, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 159.

¹⁶⁵ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 2968, f. 535-536, 548, 553, 573, 575.

¹⁶⁶ Third Army reported that the 18th Security Battalion, comprised of 564 *basarabeni* and 2 from the Old Kingdom, only had 8 deserters, 5 "returned from desertion," and 67 absent without leave during March and April 1944, plus 134 lost in Crimea, see, Ibid., dosar 2968, f. 162; German XXIX Corps reported that during 1-10 June 1944 that there were no deserters from the 9th Infantry Division, three (two *basarabeni*) from the 21st Infantry Division, and 14 *basarabeni* from 4th Mountain Division, in response to Soviet promises that they would be allowed to go home, see,

four times, and Third Army once, during the summer. After the war he was adamant that, “The troops were in excellent physical and moral condition; [however] it is true that the moral condition was due in large part to the presence of German armored divisions.”¹⁶⁷

The news from other fronts was not encouraging. Romanian officers and soldiers closely followed Operation Overlord in Normandy after 6 June and Operation Bagration against Army Group Center in Byelorussia after 22 June; they knew if Nazi Germany collapsed that Romania was doomed. The announcement Hitler had survived the 20 July 1944 bomb plot was greeted with relief by Romanian troops because they assumed that it meant that the German Army would not abandon them to the Red Army. V Corps reported that as France and Poland were liberated by the Allies its soldiers “are worried about the way in which the war will end and they do not hesitate to show, their desire to conclude a peace as quickly as possible. Their morale, can be considered good still.” Since soldiers did not want peace at any price. “Our battle is regarded confidently, figuring that, without the barrier of the Army, the Country would be the prey of bolshevism.¹⁶⁸ The decision by German High Command in mid-July to strip Army Group South Ukraine of its panzers had a disquieting effect on the Romanian Army. In June there had been nine panzer or panzer grenadier divisions in Romania, but by August there were only two panzer (one in desperate need of refitting), one panzer grenadier, and the 1st Armored divisions.¹⁶⁹ The departure of the panzers did not go unnoticed by Romanian soldiers or civilians. General Korne, promoted to lead the rebuilt 1st Armored Division, noted on 2 August that the trains loaded with

dosar 3028, f. 175; on 10 August 1944, the 4th Mountain Division reported it had 118 deserters, 32 from Soviet occupied Bessarabia, 3 from Romanian occupied Bessarabia, 12 from occupied Bukovina, 10 from Soviet occupied Moldavia, and 61 from the rest of the country, see, dosar 2968, f. 548.

¹⁶⁷ Pantazi, *Cu mareșalul până la moarte*, 233, 285.

¹⁶⁸ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1635, f. 35.

¹⁶⁹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 160.

panzers passing through Transylvania were watched mournfully by peasants late into the night. He ordered his soldiers to be told that the transfer of panzers was in Romania's interest – so the German Army could win battles elsewhere to help the Romanian Army.¹⁷⁰

The Antonescu regime was still willing to make great sacrifices in lives and even territory to hold back the Red Army. On 5 August, during their last meeting, Antonescu tried to convince Hitler to transfer panzers back to the Iași front or to abandon southern Bessarabia and almost all of Moldavia to a line along the Carpathians, the FNB fortifications, and the Danube. He argued that this shorter line on strong natural defenses could be held by Romanian infantry and free up more German units to be transferred to Poland, but Hitler believed this was only a ruse to allow Antonescu to abandon the Axis once the German forces left Romania.¹⁷¹ While the meeting was acrimonious at times, it ended with Antonescu promising to fight to the end, the Iași front would be held. The German High Command did not believe Stavka had any forces left after Operation Bagration for another offensive against Army Group South Ukraine, but it was mistaken.

On 19 August, after amassing overwhelming forces, two Soviet army groups began local attacks all along the front and then the next day launched two concentric attacks, later called the second Iași-Chișinău offensive. The Second Ukrainian Front would strike the main blow in the Târgu Frumos-Iași sector held by Fourth Army bracketed on each side by German Eighth Army, German XVII Corps on its left flank along the Carpathian foothills and Mieth Group on its right flank north of Iași, driving south with the goal of breaking through the weak Romanian-German line, overrunning the rest of Moldavia, and pouring through the Focșani gap into the Wallachian

¹⁷⁰ Fond Armata 4-a, dosar 1635, f. 114.

¹⁷¹ Although he finally agreed to use the FNB line as a fallback, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 161.

plain. This would also cut off German Sixth Army's retreat from southern Bessarabia. German Sixth Army, commanded by General Maximilian Fretter-Pico, held the Chișinău sector between the Prut and Dniester and most of the Dniester river bank, but it too was only "a horde of nearly immobile infantry."¹⁷² Third Army held the lower Dniester and guarded the coast from a Soviet landing. The Third Ukrainian Front targeted the seam between the two armies from a bridgehead it held across the Dniester at Tiraspol and planned to drive west to the Prut as quickly as possible to cut off and encircle German Sixth Army, Third Army's fate was an afterthought.¹⁷³

Two massive barrages, both about an hour and a half in duration, pulverized the German-Romanian defenses in the Târgu Frumos-Iași sector and on the Dniester. The Soviets had 1,200 tanks in Moldavia, plus 600 tanks squeezed into the Dniester bridgehead, which they committed almost immediately forcing the Axis defenses to crumble. Romanian units that stood and fought were crushed, some panicked and fled on foot or by cart since few trucks were left, and the rest retreated opening holes in the front. The same was true of German units, some of which broke under Soviet pressure, and the Red Army split open the line on the Dniester the first day. That evening Antonescu visited Fourth Army headquarters where General Avramescu, temporarily in charge as General Racovița was away on leave, and Lt. Colonel Dragomir favored an immediate retreat south to the FNB line to block the Focșani gap. Antonescu, General Șteflea, and General Wöhler decided to try to reform a line on the Bahlui River just behind Fourth Army, which was more realistic because foot-bound and poorly-trained Romanian soldiers would never be able to carry out the fighting retreat envisioned by Avramescu. German-Romanian counterattacks in the

¹⁷² Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand*, 311.

¹⁷³ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 292.

Târgu Frumos-Iași sector on 21 August failed to contain Soviet breakthroughs. The following day Antonescu ordered Șteflea to organize a phased withdrawal of Fourth Army to the FNB line. The *Conducător* met with General Johannes Friessner, recently transferred to head Army Group South Ukraine, and convinced him off the wisdom of his unilateral action. Soviet troops crossed the lower Dniester in force early on 22 August and Cetatea Albă fell by the evening. General Dumitrescu responded by ordering Third Army to begin a headlong retreat west to the nearest crossing over the Danube at Ismail to try to set up a new defensive line on the river.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

The collapse of the Iași front, after the withdrawal of most panzer forces, was inevitable because the disaster outside Stalingrad had eviscerated the Romanian Army, and its contribution to the defense of the Kuban bridgehead and Crimea further hollowed it out. While morale in the ranks understandably began to suffer during the retreats and evacuations of 1943, the underlying motivation of Romanian soldiers remained sound. They understood Romania was imperiled by the advance of the Red Army and despite reverses on the front most proved resilient in combat. Furthermore, after each major retreat most stragglers returned, and the policy of rehabilitation continued to function reasonably well until the war ended. Officers used atrocity propaganda, flogging, awards, and the threat of execution to reinforce soldiers' motivation.

When the Red Army reached Romania, the Antonescu regime managed to throw enough soldiers into the fight to help stop it as it mobilized more men for a final battle. While few still believed in final victory, Romania's "holy war" to destroy communism had morphed into a war of national defense and soldiers feared an awful retribution for crimes in the USSR. The General

¹⁷⁴ For a very detailed, day by day, blow by blow account, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 167-174.

Staff mobilized 1,077,000 soldiers by August 1944 – an incredible number, near its 1940 peak, before *România Mare* was carved up – because Romanian society still supported the war. On 22 August, the eve of a royal coup against Antonescu, there was every indication that the Romanian Army would continue to fight to the bitter end. The collapse of the Iași front would trigger the fall of the *Conducător*, not through a popular revolt, but a palace coup organized by Mihai I and a coterie of a few disaffected Carlist officers that decapitated the militarist faction of the officer corps. Subsequent events would demonstrate that the officer corps made one last attempt to save Romania from prolonged Soviet occupation through feat of arms. This required soldiers to keep fighting for another nine months on the Eastern Front.

CHAPTER XI

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

Leaving General Șteflea to direct Fourth Army's retreat to the FNB line, Antonescu flew back to Bucharest late on 22 August and planned to leave the next day to a headquarters being set up in the "Transylvanian plateau" as a national redoubt. He met with National Peasant leader Ion Mihalache and then Liberal leader Gheorghe Brătianu, both from the conservative wings of their outlawed parties and on good terms with Antonescu, who both pressured him to meet with King Mihai I and discuss a possible armistice. He seemed amenable, but in the morning Vice President Mihai Antonescu and the *Conducător*'s wife had to cajole him to meet with youthful monarch. Finally, they convinced him to set up a meeting for 3 pm that day. They had no idea that they were playing into the hands of a small group of plotters who would have been frustrated if Antonescu had kept his plans to go to Transylvania where he would have been unreachable.

Mihai Antonescu arrived punctually, met by Mihai I and General Sănătescu, Chief of the Military Household, but the *Conducător* showed up late. He did not want to brief the king on the situation at the front because the news was bad and weakened his position with Mihai I who was still technically head of state and had been flirting with politicians who favored a negotiated end to the war. He reported that the Soviets had broken through both in Moldavia and in Bessarabia and was soon blaming everyone but himself for the collapse. Mihai I interrupted, asking if it was not time to consider an armistice, but Antonescu rejected this outright. He would only accept an armistice if the Germans agreed, received a guarantee from the Anglo-Americans that Romania would not be occupied by the Soviets, and the fate of eastern Romania should be decided after the war. Mihai Antonescu mediated and suggested waiting a few days for a response from

Anglo-American agents in Ankara in neutral Turkey to see if they accepted these terms. Mihai I and Sănătescu pushed the *Conducător* to step aside, he refused, arguing the Axis had to try to hold the FNB line, even if it meant throwing battalions of teenage draftees without little training or heavy equipment into the path of the Soviet juggernaut, and if Wallachia was overrun then the Romanian Army would “withdraw to the mountains and will try to hold them there.” “If that’s how things are, then there’s nothing more for us to do,” the king replied and then stood up. This declaration contained a prearranged phrase that was the signal for a captain and three NCOs from the Military Household who were waiting in the next room to enter. They arrested both Marshal Antonescu and Mihai Antonescu, escorting them to be locked in a room nearby, but not before Antonescu shouted “tomorrow you will all be executed” and spit in the captains’ face.¹

The conspirators quickly moved to decapitate the Antonescu regime. They summoned generals Pantazi, Vasiliu, and Tobescu, respectively Minister of Defense, Minister of Internal Affairs, the Chief of the Gendarmerie, in the name of Antonescu and arrested them. The Prefect of Bucharest followed. Eugen Cristescu, chief of the SSI, suspicious of the summons, refused to come, and alerted the Germans. General Iosif Teodorescu, head of the Military Command of the Capital, was convinced by his chief of staff, who was one of the main conspirators, to lock down Bucharest. The German Military Mission had its communications cut. At 10:30 pm a speech by the king was broadcast over the radio that told the nation that “only way to save the country from total catastrophe” was to abandon the Axis, declared a new “government of national unity,” and announced an armistice – repeatedly emphasizing Great Britain and the United States along with

¹ For an account of the coup based on King Mihai I’s recollections, see, Porter, *King Michael of Romania*, 98-110.

the Soviet Union to soften the shock of making peace with “Judeo-Bolshevism.”² Moscow was surprised by the coup, an armistice had not been negotiated, and the Red Army continued to treat the Romanian Army as a foe. The officer corps was taken unaware too. Already collapsing, the Romanian Army now disintegrated as commanders decided whether to keep fighting, surrender, or try to escape.³ Nonetheless, senior officers accepted the authority of the king who was still the official head of the Romanian Army. General Dumitrescu told General Friessner, after he asked if Third Army would abandon the Germans after three years of comradeship, “I cannot take another attitude than that which H.M. the King and the new government took.”⁴

The German-Romanian military divorce was remarkably cordial at first. While General Friessner initially wanted to order all Romanian troops disarmed, he was dissuaded by his chief of staff, and for good reason. Contrary to later German accusations, Romanian soldiers did not attack the Germans or let the Soviets through.⁵ If Army Group South Ukraine had attempted to disarm them, however, the amicable bubble would have popped. At Focșani, Colonel Panaite watched columns of German and Romanian soldiers stream by for days after 23 August, German officers separated and organized German troops into ad-hoc companies. Panaite was content to let heavily armed and anxious Germans, “who are afraid of their own shadow,” pass unmolested, even after news arrived that the Luftwaffe had bombed Bucharest.⁶ On 25 August, the Ministry of Internal Affairs ordered prefects to maintain order, refugees to be fed, and Romanian soldiers

² Ibid., 112, 115.

³ General Racoviță claimed he was involved in the planning of the coup to explain his absence from Fourth Army, but it appears he had just taken the traditional August leave, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 177, 180.

⁴ For his full report on 23 August 1944 to the Ministry of Defense, see, Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 3065, f. 284-287.

⁵ Heniz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1996), 367.

⁶ Between 24-26 August destroyed or damaged 100 buildings, killed seven, and wounded 22. The new government tried to whip up public anger against these “terror attacks.” Today, Romanians like to say that two days of German bombing did more damage than five months of the Anglo-American bombing. The Allies damaged or destroyed 9,500 buildings, killed 5,224, and wounded 5,482 in the capital, see, Armă, *București sub bombardamente*, 202, 179.

to disarm and intern German soldiers. Panaite began disarming Germans, but let them continue without their weapons, at least until the first Soviet patrols arrived on 29 August.⁷ Third Army tried to escape across the Danube, fighting as late as 25 August, but the Soviets landed marines by sea to force it to surrender. A large part of Fourth Army was cut off and went into captivity. On 24 August, General Schwab, technically commander of VII Corps but now just one of many confused men, tried to escape by car. He and his driver were halted by a group of Soviet soldiers and he shot himself rather than be captured.⁸ An estimated 154,000 soldiers had been captured by 12 September when a Soviet-Romanian armistice was finally signed. The Germans lost over 200,000 men in subsequent weeks. The conspirators organized a defense of Bucharest, secured the oil fields around Ploiești, and cleared other key points. Resistance from scattered Luftwaffe or other German rear echelon units was limited and Romanian rear echelon troops captured tens of thousands.⁹ The first Soviet units, including the Tudor Vladimirescu Division recruited from Romanian POWs in camps in the USSR, paraded through Bucharest on 30 August.

Historians have assigned the royal coup an importance that obscures Romanian soldiers' intrinsic motivation in the previous three years. In the traditional narrative, 23 August 1944 and the following nine months of combat by the Romanian Army until 9 May 1945 are pointed to as proof that Romania was only ever a reluctant ally of the Axis, the officer corps was always pro-Allied, and troops were excited to fight Hungary but apathetic about fighting east of the Dniester against the USSR. Therefore, the alliance with Nazi Germany and Romanian participation in the

⁷ Fond Manuscrite, MSS 625, f. 24-31; Fond Corpul de Munte, dosar 1814, f. 418.

⁸ Romanian military historians have tried to turn this into an act of honorable suicide, however, it seems likely that Schwab feared what fate would be under the Soviets as an ethnic German, German soldiers were separated from Romanian soldiers and treated more poorly, or for war crimes in Crimea, see, Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 347.

⁹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 174-175, 185-186, 188-193; Citino, *The Wehrmacht's Last Stand*, 311-312.

Holocaust was Antonescu's war and not Romania's "holy war." That narrative glosses over the fact that most of Romanian society had supported Operation Barbarossa in 1941, still supported the defense of Romania from the Soviets, and that the coup was orchestrated by a clique around the king with connections to the small liberal opposition. Indeed, there is every sign that officers and soldiers would have kept fighting the Red Army if the coup had not taken place.

The path towards an armistice with the USSR is overemphasized by historians who argue that Romanians did not support Hitler's war of annihilation against "Judeo-Bolshevism." In fact, directed by the *Conducător*'s right-hand man Mihai Antonescu, Romanian diplomats in neutral capitals across Europe spread this narrative of Romanian reluctance after Stalingrad to justify Romania's continued contribution to the Nazi war effort – many of these diplomats continued to propagate this story after the war. They shaped the historiography up to today. The Antonescu regime never seriously considered a separate peace with the Soviets until defeat was staring it in the face in spring 1944, even then it shied away. Antonescu preferred to retreat to Transylvania, in a repeat of Romania's stand in Moldavia during the First World War, rather than accept Soviet terms. The choice not to negotiate an armistice before the second Iași-Chișinău offensive shows the continued strength of nationalism, religion, and anti-communism. Only anti-Semitism was less prominent, but it too remained inculcated in the officer corps and the ranks.

The Antonescu regime, and most Romanians, entertained fantasies of an anti-communist alliance between the Axis and the Anglo-Americans to save Romania from Soviet occupation.¹⁰ In a meeting in January 1943, Antonescu mentioned the idea to Hitler of a compromise peace with the Anglo-Americans so Nazi Germany to destroy the USSR. The *Führer* rejected the idea.

¹⁰ Crisan, *An Amazing Life*, 143.

The Anglo-American doctrine of “unconditional surrender” declared a few days afterward at the Casablanca Conference shattered Romanian hopes they might form an anti-communist alliance.¹¹ There were no additional efforts until after the Anglo-American landing in Sicily and the fall of Mussolini’s government. Antonescu met with Raoul Bossy, a diplomat leaving for neutral Bern to influence international opinion, on 1 September 1943. The *Conducător* laid out arguments to explain why Romania did not abandon the Axis. He had “had to enter the war against Russia” because Romania could not “receive Bessarabia as a gift from the Germans” and so lose northern Transylvania permanently. He was then “forced” to advance to the Don. “I did not persecute the Jews,” he lied. He could not withdraw troops from the Kuban bridgehead because the Germans would supposedly shoot Romanian generals “as they shot the Italians generals who retreated in Sicily.” He prevented the Germans from occupying the country, blocked the exiled Legionaries from coming back to power, and avoided the loss of southern Transylvania to Hungary.¹² These were all self-serving lies or half-truths designed to obscure Romanian commitment to the Axis and how deeply officers and soldiers had implicated themselves in Hitler’s war of annihilation. Nevertheless, they are still cited by historians. Antonescu used the same arguments at the trial of leaders of the Antonescu regime in May 1946 in Bucharest. The People’s Tribunal highlighted the *Conducător*’s role in persecuting Jews, Gypsies, and religious sects to discredit him, but it backfired. Antonescu’s defense was seen as honorable and patriotic, plus most Romanians had agreed with his harsh polices against these groups during the war, and most favored leniency for the former *Conducător* and six others condemned to death. Nonetheless, he was shot, along with

¹¹ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 119-120.

¹² A faction inside the Antonescu regime, mostly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, began to see their role as saving Romania from Soviet occupation by sacrificing the *Conducător* and gladly repeated his arguments that emphasized German coercion to neutral or Anglo-American agents, see, Bossy, *Recollections of a Romanian diplomat*, 455-456.

Mihai Antonescu, General Vasiliu, and Governor Alexianu, on 1 June 1946; the sentences of General Pantazi, Eugen Cristescu, and Radu Lecca were reduced to life in prison.¹³ Antonescu became an anti-communist martyr and the strength of his myth endures in Romania to this day.

The announcement, on 8 September 1943, of an armistice between Italy and the Anglo-Americans gave the Antonescu regime new hope that Romania might escape Soviet occupation. Mihai Antonescu, along with the liberal opposition, became obsessed with rumors of an Anglo-American landing in the Balkans and tried to encourage Allied representatives to commit to such an endeavor to act as a shield from Sovietization.¹⁴ While Romanian diplomats with links to the liberal opposition later claimed Antonescu was naïve about foreign policy, the liberal opposition shared the same hopes to escape from Soviet occupation and used the same arguments in parallel discussions with Allied agents. Both were rebuffed by Anglo-American representatives who told the Romanians they would have to deal with the Soviets. The Antonescu regime finally reached out to the Soviets after the Red Army overran northeastern Romania in March 1944. Beginning the next month, representatives began negotiating in Stockholm in neutral Sweden. Moscow told Bucharest its minimum armistice requirements were: the Romanian Army had to turn against the German Army, return to 1940 borders, reparations, and release of Soviet POWs. The Antonescu regime countered with: a window of time to let the Germans withdraw, a Romanian headquarters in the “Transylvanian plateau” the Red Army could not occupy, and a postponement on the fate of northern Bukovina and Bessarabia until after the war. The two sides argued back and forth

¹³ The group included 18 others, only some of whom were present, the rest were tried in absentia. During the trial, Iuliu Maniu testified in a way that cast the *Conducător* in a good light. Mihai I tried to find a way to commute all the sentences, but failed, see, Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally*, 249-259; Porter, *Michael of Romania*, 158-159.

¹⁴ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 286-288, 300-301.

until the pointless talks petered out in early July 1944.¹⁵ Frustrated, Stavka planned to overrun Romania anyway, but fortunately for Moscow Mihai I's royal coup presented the Soviets with a cooperative government to sign an armistice and legitimize Soviet occupation.

For the first half of the war the king had been a willing figurehead. Mihai I's portrait was placed alongside those of Antonescu and Hitler at all official celebrations, he visited the front at Tighina and Odessa, promoted Antonescu to the rank of marshal in August 1941, received the Order of Michael the Brave from Antonescu at the November 1941 victory parade in Bucharest, received German generals, and met with Hitler in December 1941. Mihai I and Queen-Mother Helen, to their credit, privately protested the deportation of Jews from Bukovina and Bessarabia to Transnistria in September 1941, managing to save a few individuals, and the massacre of Jews at Odessa in October 1941. They spoke against the deportation of the rest of Romania's Jews in 1942 and advocated for the repatriation of Jews from Transnistria in 1943.¹⁶ Between 1940 and 1943, Antonescu kept the young monarch isolated and uninformed, especially when a coup led by Serb officers put the 17-year-old King Peter II on the throne of Yugoslavia in 1941, triggering German invasion. The *Conducător* was anxious that Carlist officers should not use the monarch to depose him. He need not have worried as most officers remained loyal to his militarist faction until 23 August 1944. After Stalingrad the relationship between Mihai I and Antonescu began to change. The king chaffed under restrictions and censorship – his 1943 New Year's declaration was altered for allegedly indirectly criticizing Antonescu and the revised version still upset the German Military Mission for simply mentioning a hope for peace. Mihai I then invited members

¹⁵ Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 326-328.

¹⁶ Ibid., 308-309; in Berlin the queen-mother was referred to as “the Jew lover” and was blamed for halting the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz, see, Porter, *Michael of Romania*, 70-76.

of the liberal opposition to a royal hunting trip in February 1943. This was his signal that he was ready to take a larger role in politics, but he continued to publicly support the war.

Antonescu decided to appoint General Sănătescu as the Chief of the Military Household in March 1943. He was a cavalryman and longtime acquaintance that Antonescu trusted to keep Mihai I informed enough about military developments, as the king was now demanding, to keep him compliant, but politically isolated from the liberal opposition. Ironically, Sănătescu quickly came to see Mihai I as a means to increase his own influence and eventually engineered the coup against Antonescu. Sănătescu had been a prominent Carlist officer and one of the deputy chiefs of the General Staff in 1937. In 1940, as VIII Corps commander, he investigated the Dorohoi pogrom. After 1 February 1941 he commanded IV Corps, fought at Odessa and Stalingrad, and replaced General Constantinescu-Claps in command of Fourth Army between 11 February and 24 January 1944. At first Sănătescu tried to mediate between Antonescu and Mihai I, but soon began to help the king. His dual position as Chief of the Military Household and commander of Fourth Army provided Mihai I with accurate reports from the General Staff and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He also put the king in contact with other former Carlist officers who had been demoted or retired in 1940 after Antonescu took power and resented the *Conducător*.¹⁷

Mihai I used intermediaries to communicate with Liberal and National Peasant leaders and diplomats in the Antonescu regime who were sympathetic to finding a way out of the Axis alliance. The SSI kept Antonescu well-informed on these developments. He told his naysaying diplomats like Bossy, who believed Germany was near collapse in February 1943, that the small liberal elite were “misled by the aristocratic and cosmopolitan milieu in which [they] lived” and

¹⁷ Ibid.

that foreign diplomats in Bucharest, “Seeing only ladies from our upper class and moving only in anglophilic circles, they imagine that this country is pro-British, while in fact the people follow me one hundred percent.”¹⁸ While the *Conducător* was exaggerating, it was not by much. He correctly gauged the commitment of Germans to Hitler’s regime and, as a non-boyar who had commanded Romanian peasant soldiers for most of his life, he had a much better understanding of their support for the “holy war.” Antonescu mistakenly did not consider the king a threat.

By the summer of 1944, Mihai I and a few conspirators had developed a small network of liberal politicians prepared to back a royal coup. The king’s primary conspirators were: General Sănătescu; General Gheorghe Mihail, who was Chief of the Military Household, Sub-Secretary of the Ministry of Defense, and Chief of the General Staff under Carol II; General Aurel Aldea, a logistics officer on the General Staff and head of the Ministry of Army Endowment under Carol II; and Colonel Dumitru Dămăceanu, a staff officer of the Military Command of the Capital with the mission to convince General Teodorescu to back the coup when it came.¹⁹ On 20 June 1944, the Liberal, National Peasant, Social Democrat, and Communist parties agreed to establish the clandestine National Democratic Bloc, so it was in place to give the coup a democratic veneer of popular support.²⁰ The influence of these political parties, reduced to little more than their core leadership and a few thousand committed members operating illegally since 1938, was limited to the liberal elite. They did not represent a national consensus in favor of usurping the Antonescu regime. Mihai I and his conspirators knew that the officer corps could not be trusted to abandon the German Army and had seen what happened in Italy when a coup was launched before Allied

¹⁸ Bossy, *Recollections of a Romanian Diplomat*, 447.

¹⁹ Porter, *Michael of Romania*, 100, 114-116.

²⁰ Giruescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 320.

forces arrived – the Wehrmacht occupied Italy and restored Mussolini triggering a bloody civil war. Therefore, they chose the moment for the royal coup very carefully and very successfully.

The armistice negotiations took place in Moscow during early September. The Soviets dismissed Romanian efforts to leverage the royal coup or inclusion of the Romanian Communist Party in the National Democratic Bloc for better conditions. The Soviet-Romanian armistice was appropriately harsh for a defeated enemy that had participated in the German invasion from the first day, carried out atrocities across the Soviet Union, and occupied Transnistria. Its 20 articles required: free movement of Soviet forces, liberation of Soviet POWs, payment of the costs of Soviet occupation, reparations in goods or materials worth 300 million dollars, arrest and trial of war criminals, and dissolution of organizations “of a Fascist type.”²¹ Two important conditions were Article 1 that demanded the Romanian Army field a minimum of 12 divisions for the Red Army and Article 18 that established an Allied Control Commission to occupy Romania. There would be no inviolate “Transylvanian plateau” or de facto royal dictatorship under Mihai I.

The demands of the Soviet-Romanian armistice of 12 September 1944, soldiers’ intrinsic motivation, and institutional extrinsic motivation explain the Romanian Army’s contribution to the Soviet war effort after 23 August. The Romanian Army eventually contributed 19 divisions to Soviet campaigns in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, seven more than required by the armistice. After the royal coup, many of the 245,000 men who were not captured by the Soviets, believing the war was over, simply went home and it took weeks to remobilize these soldiers. First Army, improvised from rear or training units in Wallachia, fended off German-Hungarian attacks along

²¹ For the full Soviet-Romanian armistice, see, R.Y. Malinovski, L Patrascu, D. Damaceanu, B. Stirbey, and G. Popp, “The Armistice Agreement with Romania; September 12, 1944,” The Avalon Project, accessed 4 May 2018, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/rumania.asp>.

the western frontier in September to cover the Soviet advance. Fourth Army supported the Red Army operations in October to liberate northern Transylvania from Hungarian occupation, which went a long way to legitimizing Mihai I's coup. First and Fourth armies participated in the Red Army's campaign in Hungary, helping seize Budapest, until December 1944. Then they fought in Czechoslovakia.²² The king launched the coup to spare Romania the ravages of war and avoid the Sovietization of his country, it was partly successful in the former and failed in the latter.

The Romanian Army faced conditions as difficult as any before 23 August 1944, perhaps worse, but Romanians soldiers continued to fight because of the same deep-rooted motivations as before – except anti-Semitism was discouraged and flogging was officially banned. Nationalism motivated Romanian soldiers to fight to Stalingrad, and now to the gates of Prague. If northern Bukovina and Bessarabia were lost, northern Transylvania was redeemable. In *Sentinela*'s third to last issue, on 10 September, after reading the king's proclamation Private Neața celebrates and then advances with Soviet-Romanian forces against a mustachioed Hungarian soldier as the sun dawns over the mountains, "Forward, comrades, for us the sun has risen!"²³ The reality was far more prosaic and confused. Sergeant Ezechil's colonel confirmed the radio broadcast by visiting the Military Command of the Capital and then told his men that soon Red Army soldiers would arrive and some "will not forget about the conflict [we] had with them. They will try to provoke us to make a scene." He warned they would try to demand their pistols.²⁴ Corporal Cârlan, who had been demobilized after escaping Crimea in April, was at home and preparing to report to his regiment on 23 August after a gendarme delivered a message that veterans of Crimea were to be

²² A few Romanian armored units fought in Austria, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 199-202, 209-214.

²³ Rădulescu, "Pățanile Soldatului Neața," *Sentinela*, 10 Septembrie 1944, 3.

²⁴ Ezechil, *La porțile infernului*, 84.

mobilized for the front. The next morning, he learned of the royal coup, but he still reported to his regiment in Brăila where he and his comrades were put to work replacing hay in mattresses to prevent them from discussing the troubling events. A few days later they were ordered to set up patrols on the highways to round up German soldiers, “Many among our soldiers looked on with sadness at these prisoners with whom until yesterday we were comrades in arms and now we treat them as enemies. Nevertheless, there were Romanian soldiers that during the night robbed them of wedding rings, watches, pens, etc.”²⁵ Soldiers carried out their duty with heavy hearts as former allies were interned and former foes allowed to pass.

After the German Army enlisted the Hungarian Army to attack Romania in September, Romanian soldiers were less sympathetic towards their erstwhile allies. 2nd Lieutenant Crisan, demobilized after fighting at Odessa to run a militarized factory in his native Arad because of a medical problem, had to flee east as German-Hungarian forces advanced. He and a couple other Baptists evaded Axis patrols on foot and then took a train to the Carpathian foothills where they met the Red Army, “Soon they were coming in swarms from every direction, it seemed. It was the most amazing thing I had ever seen. An ocean of people marching!”²⁶ The Tirol Training Center threw the 988th, 989th, 990th, 998th, and 999th Independent Infantry battalions into the fray to bulk up understrength units.²⁷ By 19 September enough Soviet and Romanian reinforcements had arrived to allow a counteroffensive. On 28 September, General Racovița, the new Minister of War, officially abrogated the 1941 orders regulating flogging, declaring “beating was always considered as a degrading punishment,” and on 13 October ordered, “I completely ban this brutal

²⁵ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 196-201.

²⁶ Crisan, *An Amazing Life*, 138, 143-146

²⁷ Fond CI Nr. 5 Sărata, dosar 376, f. 2, 56-57; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 195-198.

manner of punishment.”²⁸ While flogging may have ended, unofficial beatings most likely did not, and Romanian commanders – under pressure from Soviet superiors – still used threats.

The Soviets and the General Staff tried to harness Romanian nationalism to keep soldiers fighting. Article 19 of the Soviet-Romanian armistice promised the return of “Transylvania or of the greater part of it,” leaving its final frontier unclear, but Article 4 explicitly restored the 1940 border in eastern Romania. Third Army reported on 9 September that two *basarabeni* asked to be demobilized or at least given leave to find their refugee families and decide on if they would stay or go home.²⁹ Some nationalists believed that Romania might expand its western frontier at Hungary’s expense. During Fourth Army’s advance into northern Transylvania, soldiers scrolled “To the Tisa!” on their equipment. Northern Transylvania was kept hostage under direct Soviet military control after its liberation.³⁰ Those fighting farther into Hungary were told they were fighting to ensure the return of northern Transylvania and possibly to annex territory to the Tisa, although by November some plaintively wrote “We crossed the Tisa” on their guns.³¹ Northern Transylvania was returned to civilian control on 9 March 1945, not due to a feat of arms on the front, but Mihai I’s installation of a suitable pro-communist government in Bucharest.

Romania was the first Axis country occupied by the Soviets, but not the first to exit the war and Anglo-American occupation of southern Italy greatly influenced the Soviet occupation of Romania. The first Allied Control Commission was established over Italy on 10 November 1943 by the Anglo-American forces who used their military clout on the ground to set policy,

²⁸ He actually quoted an order from Carol I written in 1902 in which the monarch said, “I wish that striking would disappear, finally, from My army” to support his ban, see, Fond Corpul de Cavalerie, dosar 266, f. 105, 121.

²⁹ Fond Armata 3-a, dosar 3047, f. 5.

³⁰ Csaba Békés, László Borhi, Peter Ruggenthaler, and Ottmar Trașca, ed., *Soviet Occupation of Romania, Hungary, and Austria, 1944/45-1948/49* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2015), 15-17.

³¹ Scafeș, *Armata română*, 127.

even over Soviet objections, and Stalin was determined to use the Red Army to do the same in Romania.³² Marshal Rodion I. Malinovsky, commander of Second Ukrainian Front, was named head of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission and began meddling in politics. He encouraged the Romanian Communist Party to organize an armed “Patriotic Guard” and create the National Democratic Front, which excluded the Liberal and National Peasant parties. Some in the king’s clique complained that the Anglo-Americans had betrayed them.³³ General Sănătescu, Prime Minister from 23 August to 5 December 1944, adopted the Italian policy of “co-belligerency” to try to win Anglo-American favor against the Soviets.³⁴ When the Romanian Communist Party demanded his resignation he switched places with General Nicolae Rădescu. The 70-year-old Carlist had been interned at Târgu Jiu during 1941-1942 for outspoken anti-German comments, so he could not be accused of being a fascist, and after 15 October 1944 had taken over as Chief of the General Staff. Rădescu remained in office from 7 December 1944 to 1 March 1945 with Sănătescu as Chief of the General Staff until 20 June 1945 and the two continued to try to bring the Anglo-Americans over to their side by maximum commitment to the Allies.

The Soviets wanted Romanian troops as cannon fodder for the front, but on 28 September 1944 the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission demanded that all units in Romania be dissolved or demobilized.³⁵ This was due to both military and political reasons. The Romanian Army had

³² Békés, *Soviet Occupation of Romania, Hungary, and Austria*, 18.

³³ Porter, *Michael of Romania*, 126-127, 129.

³⁴ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 202; known as the Italian Co-Belligerent Army, Army of the South, or Italian Liberation Corps, it began with a motorized brigade in December 1943, eventually the British equipped four Italian divisions that fought at various times, but the policy was not effective and did not save Italy’s empire in Africa, see, Richard Lamb, *War in Italy, 1943-1945: A Brutal Story* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 185-186, 197-201

³⁵ Those to be dissolved: Third Army; I, II, III, Cavalry, and Moto-Mechanized corps; 10 infantry/mountain, three cavalry, and a moto-mechanized division. Those to be demobilized “as peace units” were: V and Mountain corps; and three infantry/mountain divisions. It probably no coincidence that these units included most of the Red Army’s primary Romanian adversaries (Third Army, Cavalry Corps, and Mountain Corps) during the previous three years of combat on the Eastern Front, see, Békés, *Soviet Occupation of Romania, Hungary, and Austria*, 39-43.

to equip and supply its units and lacked the means to outfit both units for the front and the rear. Stavka still had great difficulties supplying the Red Army, so it was not about to waste resources on a distrusted former enemy. It did outfit the Tudor Vladimirescu and later the Horia, Cloșca and Crișan divisions, in 1943 and 1945 respectively, recruited from prisoners in Soviet camps who had gone through Soviet political indoctrination the Soviets considered reliable. Indeed, General Sănătescu planned to use units in Romania to try to keep the Soviet occupation in check, which the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission frustrated by requiring their demobilization.

Fighting alongside “godless communism” was hard to justify. In September 1943, due to pressure from the Allies, Stalin initiated a rapprochement with the Russian Orthodox Church and Soviet propaganda used the news to try to undermine Romania’s “holy war” rhetoric, with little success. Russian Orthodox priests blessed the Tudor Vladirmirescu Division’s colors when its soldiers swore an oath to Soviet-Romanian friendship and to “liberate” Romania from fascism.³⁶ After the royal coup, open anti-Semitism was no longer tolerated, but most soldiers and officers still believed in the insidious nature of Jews. On 30 August 1944, the General Staff feared that ending the policy of segregated labor battalions of Jews and assigning most Hungarian or Slavic soldiers to labor battalions in the rear was going to lead to a flood of minorities into the officer corps, especially Jewish reserve officers or NCOs. It argued that the policy had been unpopular and misguided because it spared minorities from the front and forced Romanians to bear all the losses. The General Staff, then under General Mihail, suggested capping the number of minority

³⁶ Romanian Army propaganda combated these claims by pointing out continued Soviet persecution of religion, see, “Comuniștii și religie,” *Soldatul*, 21 Septembrie 1943, 1; for text of the oath taken by Romanian POWs, blessed by Russian Orthodox priests, see, Șperlea, *De la armata regală la armata populară*, 48, 257n106.

cadets in reserve officer or NCO schools to 25 percent of each class; the rest would be sent to the front as privates.³⁷ The officer corps still did not want minorities, especially Jews, in its ranks.

Anti-communism remained an important motivation, although it was no longer overt, as the sooner the Germans were defeated, Romanian officers and soldiers calculated, the sooner the war was over and the sooner the Red Army occupying Romania would be required to leave. For all the talk of a return to democracy, generals Sănătescu and Rădescu acted on behalf of a new royal dictatorship trying to prevent a communist coup in Romania. In comparison to Romania's voluntary alliance with Nazi Germany, the coerced alliance with the Soviet Union was much less popular. In Focșani, Colonel Panaite endured meals with a Soviet general, another officer told him he was sure that "the Russians will be destroyed by the British," and he spent 14 September 1944 reading the armistice's 20 articles "[each] one heavier than the other." Two days later, now in Bucharest, along with 60 officers, 40 NCOs, and 1,000 men, Panaite swore a new oath to the king; it was his sixth – to Carol I in 1913, to Ferdinand I in 1915, to the Regency and Mihai I in 1927, to Carol II in 1931, to Mihai I and the *Conducător* in 1941, and to Mihai I alone in 1944. Following the ceremony, "The idiot from [the General Staff] struggled to explain the oath and the allying with the U.S.S.R."³⁸ The crimes carried out by Soviet soldiers in Romania added to anger about the armistice in the ranks. While German soldiers in Romania had caused trouble from time to time, and in March 1944 retreating German soldiers temporarily treated Romania like the USSR, Soviet troops in Romania initiated a sustained period of criminality. Red Army crimes were not as horrific as later in Hungary or Germany, most were associated with theft of

³⁷ Trașcă, "Chestiunea evreiască" în documente militare române, 880-882.

³⁸ Fond Manuscrite, MSS 625, f. 40, 49-50.

property or looting, but rape and murder were common.³⁹ 2nd Lieutenant Teodorescu wrote in early October that after Soviet and Romanian troops occupied Târgu Mureş drunken Red Army soldiers looted the city, vandalizing the mostly intact city, and that three broke into where he and other Romanian officers were lodging. The Soviets threaten Teodorescu and his comrades with pistols as they went through their things looking for watches, cash, or other things to steal.⁴⁰ The knowledge of Soviet crimes in the rear had a terrible effect on morale and motivation.

A few Romanian officers and soldiers chose to continue to fight the Soviets. The Nazis set up a puppet government set up in Vienna under Horia Sima on 10 December 1944. It acted as a magnet for disaffected officers who were captured or deserted across enemy lines as fears grew that they may be prosecuted for criminal actions the USSR. Eventually, an estimated 6,000 Romanian soldiers served in Sima's "National Army." A few were arrested in Germany, where they had been training on 23 August 1944, but most were captured in battles in Hungary. Some faced harsh conditions in POW camps in the Reich where they were despised as traitors and used a labor. The SS decide to recruit a Romanian SS division from these men and plenty of officers jumped at the chance to fight the Soviets again. The *Waffen* Grenadier Regiment of the SS (1st Romanian) was formed in November 1944, a second and third regiment followed, but only the first saw combat and were not trusted to fight against their countrymen. The *Waffen* Grenadier Regiment of the SS (1st Romanian) was destroyed in March 1945 defending Pomeria.⁴¹

When First and Fourth armies were sent to Czechoslovakia in December 1944 morale and motivation markedly weakened. 2nd Lieutenant Teodorescu's 7th Mountain Battalion had

³⁹ Békés, *Soviet Occupation of Romania, Hungary, and Austria*, 31-38.

⁴⁰ Teodorescu, *Mândreia vânătorului de munte*, 185

⁴¹ Heinen, *Legiunea "Archanghelul Mihail,"* 432-434; Scafeş, *Armata română*, 208-210.

been sent home to Deva in late October but was now remobilized to reinforce the 2nd and 3rd Mountain divisions on the front. He recalled that “I cannot make a comparison with [my] other departures for the front.” The first in June 1941 was quiet to keep the coming invasion a secret, soldiers stern-looking, and in passenger cars; the second in July 1942 was a great celebration, soldiers smiling, but only officers and NCOs in passenger cars; the third in August 1944 was confused, soldiers worried-looking, and in passenger cars; and now the fourth under new Soviet “masters,” resigned soldiers, and even the officers in freight cars. He angrily blamed “godless communists” for making them leave two days before Christmas, “our great Christian holiday.”⁴² Romanian troops had to attack uphill against German positions in the mountains of Slovakia and whenever they finally crested a ridge they were usually stopped by German positions on a river in the valley below that they had to force their way across. Sergeant Ezechil recalled that on the Hungarian plain they used frontal attacks after short artillery bombardments, but they were not always synchronized with the attack and hit the infantry.⁴³ Such tactics were even less effective in mountains and First and Fourth armies were stuck in bloody battles until early April 1945.

After helping to liberate northern Transylvania, the Romanian Army deployed 210,000 men with the First and Fourth armies in Hungary between 6 October 1944 and 15 January 1945 and peaked at 248,000 in Czechoslovakia before the end of the war. During each campaign the army suffered 42,700 and 66,500 casualties respectively⁴⁴ The Romanian Army’s poor training, lack of equipment, supply shortages, and lack of mobility resulted in heavy losses with few left to replace them. Corporal Cârlan, acting as a telephone operator because all radios were broken,

⁴² He dismissively called them “bull cars,” see, Teodorescu, *Mândria vânătorului de munte*, 197-198.

⁴³ Ezekial, *La Porțile Infernului*, 93-94; Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 210-211.

⁴⁴ Many of the casualties were from frostbite, see, Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 209-210, 214.

was required to fight with other telephone operators as infantry because manpower was so short. A colonel gave Cârlan his watch as a reward for leading a defense against an attack in April. He noted that in his regiment was a 17- or 18-year-old “volunteer Turk,” armed with a Russian rifle almost as tall as he was, who disappeared on his own to come back with prisoners.⁴⁵ Worse than the deprivation and casualties on the front was the news from home: families starving because of Soviet reparations, the Romanian Communist Party growing in power, and crimes by Red Army troops. Recent accusations the Red Army was purposefully grinding down the Romanian Army in the mountain battles exaggerate Soviet malevolence because the Romanian mountain troops were trained to fight in such terrain, the other underequipped infantry not good for much else, and Romanians were simply not trusted to fight in key battles by their Soviet masters.

The Soviets distrusted Romanian officers, for good reason, but needed their assistance for campaigns in Hungary and Czechoslovakia – at least until the NKVD uncovered evidence of war crimes or alleged betrayal. During September 1944, the Soviets had almost all army, corps, and division commanders in Third and Fourth armies dismissed. A few like generals Dumitrescu and Șteflea were arrested, the Red Army used other senior officers who had fought against it before 23 August 1944. General Macici led First Army until 12 February 1945 when he was arrested to be tried in Bucharest for his role in escalating the massacre of Jews in Odessa in 1941. Generals Avramescu and Dăscălescu were shuffled back and forth to command Fourth Army over the next seven months.⁴⁶ On 2 March 1945, the second time the Soviets relieved him, Avramescu and his

⁴⁵ Cârlan, *Păstrați-mi amintirile!*, 243, 247-248, 251.

⁴⁶ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 208.

chief of staff (now-General) Dragomir, who had issued the unauthorized retreat orders to Fourth Army after the failure of Operation Winter Storm in 1942, were arrested and disappeared.

Their arrest quickly became a cause célèbre at home. Avramescu's son-in-law was Ilie Vlad Sturdza, son of Prince Mihail Sturdza, who was in Vienna acting as the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Sima's puppet government. Ilie Sturdza had been an officer with Fourth Army and had surrendered to a German unit in November 1944. He was not the first Romanian officer to collaborate with Nazi Germany after 23 August 1944. General Platon Chirnoagă, a former staff officer for General Dumitrescu, had been captured with most of 4th Infantry Division in October 1944 on the Tisa after a German counterattack. He embraced his former allies and soon became Minister of Defense under Sima. He later escaped into exile, after a brief stint in a POW camp run by the Anglo-Americans, and in 1965 wrote his anti-communist, pro-Legionary account of the war. A few other officers from Fourth Army headquarters had also disappeared during the winter of 1944-1945 and the Soviets assumed they deserted to the Germans. After Fourth Army had difficulty carrying out an attack as ordered, the Soviets appear to have become convinced that Avramescu was sabotaging his own attacks and was planning to lead a large part of Fourth Army in a mass defection to the Germans, so he was arrested. They also arrested his wife and daughter, who had followed him to the front, on 3 March 1945. After repeated inquiries about his whereabouts, the Soviets claimed months later that Avramescu had been killed in a German air attack, but it's possible he was executed by the Soviets.⁴⁷ While it is not likely Avramescu

⁴⁷ Only one bullet hole was found in Avramescu's staff car, whereas if he had truly been the victim of a German air attack the vehicle would have been riddled with bullets. Although nationalist historians favor NKVD murder, thus making him an anti-communist martyr, it is possible that he shot himself, especially after the recent arrest of Macici for war crimes and his own guilty conscience for ordering the deaths of Jews and Soviet civilians in Crimea. His daughter, wife of Ilie Sturdza, committed suicide, but his wife survived to return from Siberia in 1956. Avramescu's body was buried in Budapest, where it remained until 23 October 2000 when it was returned to Romania and re-

was planning to defect, the fact that officers were deserting their posts shows how unpopular the alliance with the Soviets was, especially as there are no comparable examples during 1941-1944. Furthermore, most Romanian officers captured by the Germans almost immediately collaborated, whereas it took months to convince only a few in camps in the USSR to collaborate.

Whatever officers' anti-communist hopes, the Romanian Army's contribution in the last nine months of the war against Nazi Germany did not save Romania from continued occupation and Sovietization. From 80,000 in May 1945, the number of Soviet troops in Romania grew to 616,000 in March 1946 as the Red Army demobilized, but 240,000 stayed until the November 1946 elections.⁴⁸ On 19 March 1945, the new pro-communist Petru Groza government passed a law allowing officers or NCOs to be retired "if they surpass army staff needs" and purged 1,878 officers and 4,081 NCOs. Further purges were carried out after the end of the war as the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission made sure the army was demobilized to 136,345 by August 1947, as small as in 1932, the worst year of the Depression.⁴⁹ Its transformation from the royal army to popular army was well underway before the official communist seizure of power in 1948.

As the war ended, the Soviets directed left-wing and communist members of the Groza government to begin prosecuting officers. Immediately after the armistice, the NKVD tracked down SSI agents in Romania to interrogate them about spies they had recruited in the USSR, and in the process uncovered evidence of crimes committed by the Romanian Army.⁵⁰ During 1945-

buried in a military cemetery in Cluj in Transylvania, see, Victor Nitu, "General Gheorghe Avramescu," WorldWar2.ro, accessed 29 March 2016, <http://worldwar2.ro/general/?language=en&article=97>; Manuel Stănescu, "Generalul Avramescu, trădător sau victim a NKVD?," Historia.ro, accessed 14 May 2018, <https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/generalul-avramescu-tradator-sau-victima-a-nkvd>

⁴⁸ Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 215.

⁴⁹ The Soviets targeted the core of royal officers, see, Giurescu, *Romania in the Second World War*, 394-398.

⁵⁰ Békés, *Soviet Occupation of Romania, Hungary, and Austria*, 44-46, 50-52.

1947 the People's Tribunal tried senior officers for war crimes, especially the Odessa massacre. The first group were judged alongside Antonescu, such as generals Pantazi, Șteflea, Macici, and Trestioreanu, and sentenced to death. All had their sentences commuted to life in prison. A few, such as generals Dumitrescu and Dăscălescu, were released due to insufficient evidence. A new wave of prosecutions began after the Romanian Communist Party took power in 1948. During 1948-1956 these trials included generals such as Racovița, Ciupercă, Constantinescu-Claps, and Korne. Most were guilty of ordering atrocities on the Eastern Front, but they were imprisoned primarily for political reasons. Constantinescu-Claps managed to have his prison sentence of 15 years hard labor for ordering a group of 4-6 partisans hanged reduced with testimony from Jews from Bacău who said he took pity on them during the war.⁵¹ He was one of few to receive such a defense and was released in 1955 after four years in jail. Since 1989, nationalist historians have depicted all Romanian generals as victims of communist persecution.⁵² While politics did play a larger role after Mihai I was forced into exile on 30 December 1947, the arrests and prosecutions were legitimate. In fact, more officers and soldiers should have been tried for war crimes.

Conclusion

Romania's "holy war" was a disaster of its own making. It was a conservative society with deeply held anti-Semitism that also despised communism. The creation of *România Mare* strengthened nationalist expectations for a powerful state that benefited ethnic Romanians and a homegrown fascist movement helped radicalize Romanian politics in the 1930s. The Depression

⁵¹ They credited him for preventing a pogrom – like the one in Iași – from breaking out in Bacău in July 1941, said his treatment of Jewish hostages in 1941 was not harsh, reported he stopped a few Jews from being deported to Transnistria in 1942, and believed he convinced Racovița from setting up ghettos in Fourth Army's rear in Moldavia after March 1944, see, Fond Personal, dosar 8434, vol. 1, f. 114, 148-150; Fond Informativ, dosar 138870, f. 8.

⁵² Alesandru Duțu, *Drama generalilor români: 1944-1964* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997).

only exacerbated pre-existing ideological cleavages between the populist majority and the small liberal establishment. As the international situation deteriorated after 1936, Carlist politicians chose neutrality and edged into the orbit of Nazi Germany. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, fall of France, and Soviet occupation of eastern Romania decisively altered Romanian foreign policy. King Carol II would have allied with Nazi Germany if Antonescu had not seized power first due to popular protests. After 1941, Romanian soldiers participated enthusiastically in Hitler's war of annihilation against "Judeo-Bolshevism" because of nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism. As the war dragged on soldiers fought on for many reasons: comrades in their primary group, fear of punishment by officers, promise of reward, fear of the Soviets, reasons of honor, and blind obedience. Officers and soldiers were ready to fight to the end, but the clique around Mihai I executed a well-planned and perfectly timed coup on 23 August 1944.

According to Romanian records, the butcher's bill was very high indeed. The Romanian Army suffered 624,740 casualties fighting alongside the Wehrmacht between 22 June 1941 and 23 August 1944 which included 71,585 killed, 243,622 wounded or sick, and 309,533 missing.⁵³ Most of those listed as missing were killed or captured. Soldiers who became prisoners suffered terribly in POW camps in the USSR, especially those captured during Stalingrad. An estimated 70,000 Romanian soldiers went missing during the battle, the Soviets reported that they captured 38,000, but due to Soviet supply shortages – and apathy – by the end of May 1943 only 20,317 Romanian POWs were still living. The promise of adequate rations was the main reason 9,800 Romanians, out of 25,000 POWs, joined the Tudor Vladimirescu Division in October 1943. Yet

⁵³ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 9; these numbers are slightly different from Axworthy's who calculates: 72,291 dead, 242,425 wounded, and 283,332 missing, see Axworthy, *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*, 216.

despite harsh conditions in the POW camps, and while 90 percent of soldiers or NCOs selected accepted, only 15 percent of officers approached by communist recruiters did. The largest group of prisoners was taken after 20 August 1944, over 120,000 soldiers according to Soviet records, increased the number to 156,000 Romanian POWs, but again high mortality during the winter reduced the prisoner population to 106,000 by March 1945. The Soviets recorded a total of an estimated 187,000 Romanian POWs taken by September 1944, of which 132,000 soldiers were eventually repatriated by April 1956, for a mortality rate of 29.1 percent.⁵⁴ Romanian soldiers fought on after despite such losses primarily because of intrinsic motivation, although extrinsic motivation played an increasingly important role as the war continued.

After the royal coup on 23 August 1944, the Romanian Army fought a much less popular campaign alongside the Red Army. In the last nine months of war, it suffered on average 2,400 more casualties each month than in the previous 38 months, which eventually totaled 169,822 casualties and included 21,035 killed, 90,344 wounded, and 58,443 missing.⁵⁵ For a campaign against a weak German Army, without any large encirclements, the number of missing soldiers is unusually high, and many were probably deserters. Soldiers considered the campaigns to defend western Romania, to liberate northern Transylvania, and even to invade Hungary as worthwhile, on the other hand they believed the campaign in Czechoslovakia was futile. Particularly because soldiers' sacrifices seemed in vain once northern Transylvania was returned and while the Soviet occupation hurt Romania, but military discipline and obedience to the state kept most fighting.

⁵⁴ Vittalie Văratie, coord., *Prizonieri de război români în Uniunea Sovietică: Documente, 1941-1956* (Bucharest: Editura Monitorului Oficial, 2013), xx-xi.

⁵⁵ Duțu, *Armata română în război*, 12.

The Romanian Army perpetrated murder on a mass scale on the Eastern Front because of soldiers' intrinsic motivation. The Antonescu regime was responsible in one way or another for the murder of an estimated 300,000 Romanian and Soviet Jews in territories that it administered between 22 June 1941 and 23 August 1944, most died during the first year of the war. At least 50,000 Jews were murdered in eastern Romania or during the deportations from Bukovina and Bessarabia. An estimated 50,000 Jews were killed in Iași and Odessa. Approximately 100,000 Jews were executed by soldiers, gendarmes, SS militias, and Ukrainian police during the winter of 1941-1942. Another 100,000 Jews died in ghettos or camps in Transnistria from starvation, exposure, or sickness from 1941 to 1944, but most during the first winter. An estimated 50,000 of the 125,000-145,000 Romanian Jews deported in the fall of 1941 survived to be repatriated or liberated. How many Soviet Jews survived is unclear as the Romanian authorities never cared enough to keep an accurate count, but it was probably roughly equal. Only 6,000 of the 25,000 Gypsies deported to Transnistria returned to Romania in May 1944. It is likely that more than just this small numbered survived, left behind or not counted, but many historians estimate that roughly half of those deported to Transnistria eventually died there. The estimated 300,000 Jews west of the Prut were fortuitously spared deportation to Auschwitz.⁵⁶

The Romanian Army collaborated closely with the SS east of the Bug. Romanian troops provided support or directly murdered thousands of Soviet Jews, both under the direction of the SS and on their own initiative, but the exact number is impossible to parse from German crimes. Without a doubt, *Einsatzgruppe D*'s thinly stretched force enlisted the help of Romanian soldiers to carry out the "Final Solution" in Crimea. A sizable number of the approximately 40,000 Jews

⁵⁶ Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, 224, 236, 242.

murdered in the peninsula were either turned over to the SS, knowing that they would be killed, or shot by Romanian soldiers themselves. Additionally, Romanian soldiers carried out crimes against Soviet civilians and partisans. Romanian commanders ordered the taking hostages and execution of civilians in reprisal for attacks west of the Dniester, so officers quickly adapted to German anti-partisan tactics east of the Dniester. Thousands of Soviet civilians, partisans, and POWs were shot in cold blood by Romanian troops during the campaign in the USSR.

Romania soldiers were not simple peasants who lacked motivation on the Eastern Front, nor was the Romanian contribution to the Nazi war effort solely Antonescu's war, rather it was Romania's "holy war." Nationalism, religion, anti-Semitism, and anti-communism were strong ideologies compatible with Hitler's war of annihilation. The Romanian Army used extrinsic motivation in the form of propaganda, coercion, and remuneration to reinforce soldiers' combat motivation. Propaganda played a role in atrocity motivation. Without the Romanian Army, the Wehrmacht's Army Group South would have experienced greater difficulties during Operation Barbarossa. Fourth Army bottled up Odessa and Third Army provided desperately needed men for the conquest of Crimea. Case Blue would have been impossible without the contribution of Axis allies, especially Romania. German High Command could not have held onto the Kuban bridgehead for most of 1943 and onto Crimea into 1944 without the Romanian Army. Similarly, SS efforts to implement the "Final Solution" would have been less effective if Romanian troops had not so willingly participated. The royal coup of 23 August 1944 was carried out by a small group of conspirators who decided to seek an armistice with the USSR that the Romanian people did not ask for and neither the Antonescu regime nor the officer corps were unwilling to make.

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