

THE WAR IN THE EAST AS SEEN BY THE ROMANIAN VETERANS OF BUKOVINA

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Rezumat: Principala sursă de inspirație a acestui articol este reprezentată de interviurile luate în anul 2007 unor veterani (soldați, subofițeri și ofițeri) români originari din Bucovina, participanți la campania antisovietică a armatei române (1941-1944). În introducerea acestui articol sunt prezentate o serie de fapte și aprecieri care demonstrează că, în contradicție cu părerea generalizată în istoriografia celui de-al doilea război mondial, Armata Roșie se pregătea să atace România. În sprijinul acestei idei, autorul aduce în principal o serie de mărturii ale unor ofițeri sovietici de rang înalt, aprecieri operative ale serviciilor secrete române și o parte din analizele celebrului Viktor Suvorov (Spărgătorul de ghiață, Ziua „M” etc.).

În continuare, sunt prezentate o serie de episoade militare (lupte de aviație, infanterie și cavalerie) din războiul antisovietic, punându-se în principal accentul pe superioritatea calitativă a trupelor române și germane, îndeosebi în materie de aviație. Ulterior, sunt prezentate condițiile precare de existență din Gulagul sovietic, unde au fost închiși o parte dintre cei intervievați.

Articolul se încheie cu o serie de concluzii referitoare la sistemul totalitar sovietic și la faptul că România nu poate fi considerată agresoare față de Uniunea Sovietică, deoarece acest stat a răpit mai întâi României Basarabia și nordul Bucovinei. Totodată, Armata Roșie a intenționat ulterior să atace România, atacul sovietic fiind însă devansat de atacul german.

Between 1940 and 1941, the soviet army was not getting ready for defense, did not dig trenches and anti-tank digs, did not mine the fields and did not put up barbed wired barriers. “At the People’s Commissariat for Defense there will be a meeting with the leading people that will also be attended by Stalin”. Jukov received the task of elaborating a report on the main problem, *The character of the modern offensive operation*¹. The book written by the Soviet Union marshal Bagramean, focuses on the years 1940-1941, including the first six months of war, and talks only about the offensive. The defense of the USSR territory appears as a problem almost totally ignored. Bagramean shows the preoccupations of the Red Army: “the density of artillery and tanks per kilometre of breaking area; applications of commandment and general staff at the echelon front with the theme - offensive operation; offensive applications to division, troops and army; experimental application of a strengthened cavalry corps (hypo mechanized group) that act on the flank of an offensive army; the perfecting of the practical cooperation of the cavalry with the tanks, the great units of motorised infantry, aviation and air descent”². These were operations truly offensive, because the land troops can only cooperate with the air descent in the offensive. Only in Bessarabia and Bukovina “the soviets have today,

the 14th of June 1941, a number of 29-35 large divisions of which 5 motorized and 6-7 motto-mechanized”³.

It must be said that in the soviet nomenclature, the mechanized corps “had two divisions of tanks and a motorized division”⁴. The Red Army had sent in the two occupied Romanian regions and in Transnistria “960 fighters, 840 bombers and 240 surveillance planes and almost 2500 paratroopers”⁵. The Romanian secret services concluded: “the purpose of these force concentrations is related to taking offensive operations”⁶. The soviet air marshals remember: “Ivan Pstîgo: «in the fall of 1940 in Bessarabia, at Kotovski, our regiment was formed, 211 bombers, equipped with SU-2 planes». Also, colonel G.F. Siskov, the double hero of the Soviet Union: «at the end of December 1940 in Bessarabia was concluded the formation of the regiment 210 of bombers nearby. The aviators came from the civil air fleet»”⁷. To notice that there were formed bomber units, the offensive would be more appropriate. If Stalin thought about defense, he would not have formed hundreds of bomber regiments, but organized hundreds of fighter regiments.

The Sovietics build aerodromes close to the border. “The Russians, next to Hertza, built an aerodrome on a noble’s land property; they made parapets so not to see from the other side of the border. The plane came from Cernowitz, it was dug into the ground and hidden. There were about 10-12 military planes. The Bolsheviks wanted also to occupy the Germans after they occupied us”⁸.

In 1941, “the whole soviet aviation was concentrated at borders. The campaign aerodrome of the regiment 123 was at about 2 km away from the German border. In case of war, fuel will be saved now when the airplanes penetrate the enemy’s area. Flights had to take place over the German territory, as well as the Romanian one”⁹.

The soviet aviators, including “the pilots in the fighter units, knew nothing about the air fights. They learned how to shoot at terrestrial targets. The pilots were trained in the sense of developing a single and amazing offensive operation in which the whole soviet aviation, through a single offensive, will surprise the enemy aviation on aerodromes and will obtain the supremacy in the air”¹⁰.

The Romanian pilots drew, from the time of the war, the conclusion that they were superior from the qualitative point of view, to the enemy. One of them considered that “the proportion of good pilots was only of 20%, the rest of them being incapable, in the red army, including the fighters. Only the large number of pilots and planes managed to turn the scale in the favour of the soviets. So, during the battle of Iassy (1944), over 80 soviet planes attacked 12 Romanian planes”¹¹. However, at the beginning of the war, “the Romanian aviation took the soviet army on the ground by surprise”¹².

In the south of Bessarabia, “the large number of soviet aerodromes near the Prut and the gathering of troops near the frontier in this area were certain proofs of the offensive that was arranged against our territory”¹³.

Before the start of the war, the sovietics placed a large number of soldiers in the region of Hertza and in the North of Bukovina. “Troops, infantry and tanks could be seen coming”¹⁴. There was still peace when the colonel Bagramean, Head of the

General Staff of the Kiev military region, sent “the army corps 31, 36, 37, 55 and 49 to come out to the border”¹⁵.

The tremendous military preparations of the USSR worried the Germans and the Romanians. Under such circumstances, Germany declared war to the USSR, offering the following motivation: “the information received in the last days, by the government of the Reich does not allow us to have any doubt about the aggressive character of the soviet troops concentration [...] the soviet government is guilty of: having continued and intensified its undermining manoeuvres of Germany, and Europe; having concentrated, at the German border, all its army forces ready for the war; preparing itself, obviously, and violating the German-Russian non aggression pact, to attack Germany”¹⁶.

Stalin himself appreciated the power of the soviet army – until the 22nd of June 1941. His statement was made in July 1941, in the presence of Hopkins – the American president’s delegate – to whom the Russians were asking for help at that moment. Stalin considered that “the Germans have 30.000 tanks in comparison with 24.000 soviet tanks”¹⁷. He told the truth about the number of the soviet tanks, but he lied about the number of the German ones. Actually, the Germans had “approximately 3.300 tanks”¹⁸. Stalin’s lie transformed him into a victim, in order to receive the help of the whole world, attempting (with foreign help) to communize as much as possible of the world. He was exaggerating in which concerned Hitler’s power, presented as aiming towards the worldwide domination, a thing that he wanted.

At the beginning, the battle on the Romanian front was static. “When the war began, it lasted for two weeks until our soldiers overcame. The Russians with their artillery on the Prut were bombarding day and night”¹⁹. Another veteran remembers, “I found an abandoned gun over the Dniester. I entered its barrel that is how big it was. When I crossed the Dniester, the duel was so strong that the shells were heating each other”²⁰.

As part of the enlargement and the arming process of the Red Army, “the number of artillery regiments, even before the German invasion reached almost 900. From 1939 until June 1941 the Red Army received 82.000 guns and mine throwers of the newest type”²¹. On the 6th of December 1941, Franz Halder, head of the General Staff considered that the soviets “lost 78.000 guns”²². The motto of the Romanian Army seems to have been in those days “At any price”.

The Regiment 6 of cavalry was involved, one after the other in the unsuccessful attempt to enter Hertza, in forcing the Prut and then the Dniester “We must enter Hertza at any price...we will cross the Dniester at any price. The Dniester is such fast running water that tens of boats went down the valley. They shot from the blockhouses over there...they were shooting in such a tremendous way that the water seemed to boil. Next to us, there was the Regiment 8 of light mountain infantry (in Romanian: *vânători*) from Cernowitz. A corporal refugee said to us that they were completely crushed. They came with the tanks and put us back into the water. We managed to land and took them out of the first line of blockhouses on the Dniester. That was difficult to take out. From the other four lines, they ran away. We

demoralized them. In the war, that means something. If you get to run away, turn your back, the gas is off, they cannot hold it anymore. The blockhouses had an iron door with a locker, light ball, water and sewerage. They were armed with a light anti-tank, machine guns. They could keep firing for two months, they fired wherever they liked”²³.

“The Stalin line” that the Romanians broke “was sent since 1940 in conservation, and the armament destroyed. After the failure of the battle on the frontier, all the blockhouses there were installed with machine guns again, and in some were small calibre guns. Even if they did not represent an important value under the ammunition report and that of the garrison strengthening, still, the district represented an important force”²⁴. As Stalin was getting ready for an attack he decided “the disarming and destruction of the fortified line. That is because the line was disturbing the offensive of the Red army”²⁵.

The development of the war meets another such moment in 1944. In Moldavia the commandment of two divisions of German tanks “on the reason that their manoeuvre was stopped by the blockhouses of the Romanian fortified line, not having enough space, they asked the Romanians to abandon that line”²⁶.

So, “the Stalin’s line” had been reendowed, hastily, with guns and people in a non-corresponding qualitative and quantitative manner. Gathered in a rush, the defenders run demoralized. The weakly trained troop, seeing that the Romanian passed the Dniester went into confusion. The moral is responsible for three quarters of the victory. Hit unexpectedly, the soviets badly felt the shock. The fight was also difficult for the Romanians. “Look at each other to see how many of you will be when coming back. The cavalry fought amazingly”²⁷.

The Regiment 6 of cavalry, in which fought on the front Petru Ciornei accompanied a German unit of tanks. Moreover, for the average Romanian soldier it is obvious that the Romanian army is weakly armed. “We could not conquer Melitopol, even if we fought. If we had had heavy artillery, we could have entered. In Crimeea they had reinforcements, they were expecting us. They had guns on pins, with plates. On the right side, there was the Black Sea, on the left the Azov Sea. In the water, there were barbed wires. We tried to enter, but they were firing from all over the place. The Germans parachuted sheep instead of soldiers and photographed the places the projectiles came from. There came the Stuka bombers and we could enter”²⁸.

The difference of professionalism and equipments between the Romanian and German army was obvious. “There was no German without a bicycle, car, tank or motorcycle. In Ukraine at Harkov we caught a great arsenal of tanks. There were hundreds of hectares of buildings. We captured hundreds of tanks. But what could the Romanian do with them? There came the Germans, they took them, they painted the cross on them and went to fight”²⁹.

In 1933, the German colonel Heinz Guderian visited the locomotives factory of Harkov. Guderian said that besides engines, the factory has also a secondary production: tanks. The number of produced tanks: 22 per day³⁰. Even in captivity in the Camp of Poltava, the German officers were seen as “educated

people”³¹. For the Romanian officers the German colleagues were, in the case of the pilots, “almost all of them well trained”³².

The German troop made a good impression of some “constant, polite, nice, with whom you could get along except certain situations”³³. When occupying the Sevastopol, “the Romanians destroyed the bunkers with anti-tanks, but they had to hit the embrasure to destroy it. The Germans had a railroad gun and could destroy them much easier”³⁴.

The Romanian former fighter impressed by the German planes that decided the battle. “At Stalingrad, the Russians feared the German aviation. At Iassy, we stopped them with Stuka. It came dive-bombing at a few kilometres away and put the bomb on the tank or next to it, turned it upside down, they put it out of action. On the northern part of Iassy they made a tank cemetery”³⁵. The Germans impressed through their high moral. “All said «We will conquer the world», no one said «we will lose the war»”³⁶.

In the Kalmuck steppe, “the Germans mocked us. There was no food, not even for horses, not for us. No German or Romanian supplies came. The grass was two fingers high. Horses could not feed themselves with it”³⁷. The Romanians compensated lack of armament through their courage. In front of a soviet attack with tanks, the dismounted cavalry fought against *Panzerfaust*. “Be aware. You shoot tank no.1; you shoot tank no. 2. Do not shoot two at the same tank. The racket was flying and a piece of the track jumped at tens of meters away. The Romanian cavalry also fought the Cossacks. Scouts went ahead and nobody came out, but when they came back we were attacked by Cossack horsemen. All I heard was the captain’s word: «get ready for the hand to hand battle». The one who hit harder, that one survived. There was no need for sharpening the sword, but we had. We fought for two hours. Five hundred Cossacks were left dead; the rest of them ran away. And we had a hundred and some dead people”³⁸.

The effort of the Romanian war always based itself on the soldier’s bravery and discipline, lesser on its endowment with weapons. “In the Anapa harbour we made sure that the Russians would not land. Then I saw a warship as it appeared as a mountain appeared in front of us with guns blazing. We answered with fire and she went back out at sea”³⁹. Actually, a cruiser of the Red Fleet of the Black Sea attacked them.

The Romanian anti-tank artillery was ineffective. Therefore, in the battles of Stalingrad “the shells bounced on the thick armour of the Russian tanks. It was a great battle. We could not succeed there. There were troops composed by Soviet officers and non-commissioned officers. The Russians got help from the Americans. There started our retreat. Our troops resisted for a short period, until the Germans have withdrawn their troops to secure the battlefield of Don’s bend. There, our army was captured”⁴⁰.

We must say that, at least until the contrary will be proven, that the Romanian army was an “auxiliary” to the German one. The lack of modern weapons made it vulnerable. When the Romanian army received modern equipment, it proved itself capable to resist. “The Russians attacked us; they came with infantry, with

tanks, artillery, with mortars. We set the 88 mm guns (received from the Germans) in position, and we stopped them”⁴¹.

The Romanian soldier fought offensively with the technique and tactics of the First World War. “When we took by assault an enemy position, we hit them with a barrage of artillery (guns and mortars), we hit them with machine-guns and anti-tanks, we discouraged them, and then we jumped from trenches and followed them. When they saw us came, they ran. At Melitopol, we called the Romanian artillery, and they bombed from seven in the morning until in the afternoon and we could not take them out. Only when the Germans threw with incendiaries shells the Russians ran away”⁴².

The discouraging functioned in the both armies. After Stalingrad, the Romanian troops “were in chaos, they scared our soldiers”. In the North part of Iassy, before the soviet offensive, I saw how part of our people went towards the Russians. I do not know what they talked. When they came back began a formidable barrage of artillery that lasted for days. They had a lot of tanks and planes. They fired with Katiusha rockets for days and days. You could see nothing because of the dust and powder. I left to the wing (of planes, our note) where I found general Radu Korne «What we do: we occupy Cetatzuia, above Iassy? » He said nothing. He got in a German car and he left”⁴³.

The Romanian army, discouraged after one year and a half of continuous retreat, resists with difficulty. More, the army leaders no longer believe in victory, in the possibility of stopping the Soviet Army. In the Gh. Bucur’s opinion, we could not resist any more. The Soviet offensive was unbeatable. “We could see every day, how they changed positions”⁴⁴.

In order to re-establish the front line broken by the Soviet offensive an appeal was made to the S.S. “We called S.S. They swore not to step back and fired with tracers to see where the shell was going, to know what to do”⁴⁵. According to Moisiuc Valerian’s testimony, S.S. was “Hitler’s most fanatic troops, but the Wehrmacht was discouraged by the war in Russia”⁴⁶. Even before the 23rd of August 1944 “it was known that something will happen”⁴⁷.

By the end of the year 1942, all the Romanian soldiers thought that the victory was near. “The Romanian officers said that the war would not last for more than two months”⁴⁸. Stalingrad was for everybody the turning point of the war. “Stalin said, «At any price, we must not let them to cross the Volga, contrary it is our end». The Russians kept firing. One night, they put us in a state of confusion, because of their artillery and rockets barrage”⁴⁹. The discipline in the Russian army was original. “If the Soviet soldier didn’t want fight, he was shot. He fought not because he wanted to do it”⁵⁰. The courage was not stimulated only by threat. “They gave them vodka before the attack. The drunken man has courage; he comes like a crazy man”⁵¹. At Stalingrad, “the Russian tanks came over us and destroyed the trench. We had to dig a round hole they could not destroy”⁵².

The soviet troops in offensive committed war crimes. “In Feodosia the Russians captured a few Germans; they tied them on a tree and poured water on them. The winter was heavy and they froze”⁵³. The offensive started on the 20th of August

1944 on the north side of Iassy, the Romanian troops retreat without organizing a defense. The act on the 23rd of August adds new elements of uncertainty. "Our train with anti-aircraft artillery was caught between the German and the Russian lines. We ran from the train into corn. The train was moving only a few kilometres per day. We protected ourselves from the lost bombs. Not even the Germans, nor the Russians wanted to shoot us on purpose. A soviet tank came and destroyed the locomotive. We had been taken prisoners, undressed and our shoes taken away by the Russians. They also took food from us. A Russian that came out of a tank took the captain's shoes. He pulled his boots by threatening him with the weapon. The stones on the road were broken by the tanks who passed by. By the time somebody gave the captain a pair of boots, his feet were full of wounds"⁵⁴.

The Romanians were caught between two lines of front. They did not know whom to fight. "We did not know who to run away from. It was such a chaos. The Russians were taking our boots, they were shooting us, and they let us naked in the middle of the road. A tank came from behind and killed the horses. The Germans on the other side shot us too. We passed on the other side of Buzau and we walked with a wounded colonel, in a wagon filled with the documents of the administration. You could not stay foot. We ran up to Oltenia"⁵⁵.

The soviets took so many prisoners that they could not guard all of them. "We ran from the line into the woods, wandering over there until we ran into a group of Russian tanks destroyed by bombs, they were turned on one side. At night, we went out through a field, to go to a house and eat something. On the field ran Cossacks on horses, looking for us. We walked for days, housed from time to time by people. We spent the night at a landowner's mansion, but there also came the Russians looking for some drinks. We were already wearing civilian clothes and as they were drunk, they did not mind us. We reached home, at Tzinteni, and after some days I realized that, it was no place to stay. The N.K.V.D border guards knew something and came looking for me at the house. Our people were with Russians, telling stories. My sister's husband worked with them, they drank and partied together. I did not trust my family either. The border guards were always looking for me. I came back to Romania to some relatives in a village. There too, came the border guards and searched. On Sunday, after people came back from church, it was winter; somebody told us that the Russians came in the village. The young people, the boys were jealous that we came into their village to some girls and I feared that they would betray me. The Russians were looking for me to take me back into captivity. I hid behind a cabinet in a corner. The patrol entered the house and then the room where I was. I felt like sneezing after the cabinet. The girls distracted the border guard's attention; they talked to them until they left. Seeing me so looked for and not safe, I decided to go back to the unit. It was better on the battlefield than in captivity. In Tzinteni the border guards continued to arrest and deport people in wagons. They took many of them in Russia for hand labour and few came back. In the village, the border guards had a jail at a landowner's mansion, where they kept the people. One sister of mine who one day did not go to work and was reported by one of her neighbours that she saw her in the garden, was arrested. They let her go after

threatening her that the next time they would deport her. A man was thrown alive at the border guards' dogs. I reached the Territorial Military Centre where I explained my situation. A sergeant major said «Ah, you are the one looked for by the Russians. I'll call them to take you to them». An officer who entered stopped the sergeant major and ordered me to present myself to the unit in Caransebesh. I travelled on the wagon tampons, filled with oil for the Russians. If the train guard caught you, they shot you. I reached my unit. I chose the battle field instead of captivity”⁵⁶.

Another Romanian soldier captured on the 25th of August 1944 managed to run away from the prisoners' line. “I changed my military clothes with some civilian clothes and we went together with some other people towards the house. I was close to the village when I saw a cart with two soviet officers coming in my direction. A villager told them apparently, that I came from the battlefield. I ran, and the Russian officers shot at me and they caught me. They put me in the cart between them. When I reached a place, I knew I hit them both and jumped from the cart, running towards my parents' house. They shot at me, but I jumped over fences, I entered the people's yards and I hid in a red mace marsh. The Russians had their own men in every village where they installed a form of control administration. They went to my mother's house, and later I saw how they broke my mother's leg to make her speak and to make me come out. I left to the unit, so not to be sold by the Romanians to the Russians. There were enough of those who collaborated”⁵⁷.

The Romanian soldiers knew how badly the Russians treat their prisoners. That is what the experience of the battlefield taught them. In this respect, until 1942, the Italian soldiers preferred to “die fighting rather than surrender to the Russians. Many were convinced that the Russians killed all the prisoners they had”⁵⁸. The Romanian prisoners entered the wide system of the soviet gulag that put no price on the human life and that did not protect the war prisoners according to the Convention of Geneva. USSR refused to recognize the signature of Imperial Russia on this document of international right. “I was prisoner at Vaslui. There, we were surrounded and they took us to the Camp of Vaslui. On the road, many tried to escape but they were shot. If you made one-step outside the line, they shot you. They took us to the Camp of Vaslui. A guard who wanted to give me medicines for the malaria took me. A Russian came to the sentinel and said: «Shoot him, why do carry him like that?». A Russian captain helped me and said that we were allies. They shot prisoners especially their own people enrolled in the German army. That is how Stalin ordered them. «The traitors must never come back home». I do not know how they could recognize them, as they wore the German uniform. At Vaslui, in the Camp, we were so many that the fountain dried out and they took us to take water from a river. There was not enough water, we took water up to the mud, and still it was not enough. Many died from typhus. They took us to Bârlad and from there to Bacău. All the time, they promised us «we will let you go home». We were taken to Iassy at the University, on the hill of Copou. Thousands of prisoners died from typhus and were too weakened; they were not able to feed themselves. They gave us lentil to eat. At Iassy, some prisoners died because they ate raw meat. From Iassy they put us on a train in about ten coaches, 40-50 in a coach and took us beyond the Prut. I knew that

the train was slowing down but I could not escape, because the window was covered with barbed wire. The coach was full; you could barely make a step. They took us to Rostov, then to Harkov and from there to Poltava. They locked us, at night, in an abandoned church and in the morning, they made us surround the Camp. Many died from dirt, from typhus. The Camp was surrounded with barbed wire and a ploughed area. Many of the prisoners ran away, but their tracks were found by the Camp security with dogs. In the Camp, there was all kind of prisoners: Polish, Germans, Italians, Hungarians, Slovaks and Romanians. There were only 15 Romanians.

The daily portion was a soup ready to be given to dogs and 600 g of bread per day that if you squeezed, there was water running out of it. Many died, that there was a room full of bodies. People had 35-40 kg. Hungry, they took you out to work in the forest, to cut trees, to repair collective farms, and agricultural labours. People ate mangle. I don't know if half of us who went to Poltava would ever come back⁵⁹.

In other Camps, there also, were piles of bodies being gathered up. "The stacks of death laid that winter in the cold and in the snow at Oranki and Ela-Buga, at Sverdlovsk and Urali"⁶⁰. Only the C.R. (i.e. "commanded rest") that could no longer work, were left alone⁶¹. They were so weakened (by dystrophy, cachexy) that they were spared from any kind of work, expecting the end. The Camp was large because "it had almost 1500 people, but the Camps from Urali and Siberia had 6-7000 people and from there, fewer people came back than us. I was pretty good. Being the chief of the POW in the camp, I had everything for myself: food, and butter from America. The soldiers of a Georgian lieutenant ensured the security. He was taken prisoner by the Germans and released by the Sovietics. As he was taken prisoner, he was told that he is traitor and was deported to the army arsenals in Siberia. There, he distinguished himself through labour and then was released; after that, he was still followed and mistrusted, and that is why he was not sent on the battlefield. He feared that he would be arrested again. The military commander of the Camp and the doctor ate in my room and I gave them something to take home. They both had wives and children to take care of. The Guards came and borrowed food products that they never returned. All the supplies were from "America"⁶².

The Italian prisoners were also saved "with a daily contribution of proteins- with an inestimable value as certain doctors said- made of Soya, sent in Russia by the Americans for the war prisoners"⁶³.

To the weak ones, the Soviet guards gave a small quantity of milk from a nearby collective farm. Therefore, they managed to survive, but it was difficult for a man to recover at 40 kg. When I told people that we were going home, they started jumping around like savages. They no longer needed food; they needed nothing. They came from the woods back into the camp. There came the escort that was supposed to take us. The Officers and the troop put us on the floor and put a cast-iron kettle to boil with potatoes.

«You see our officers; they eat at the same place with the soldiers not at the officer's mess. What would you say in Romania about how you lived with us?» What to say? Good. The cars came and they took us to Ungheni, but on the Romanian part, nobody came to take us. They were afraid to come because the last time they were

called, they were captured. The Russians told us that if nobody comes for us they take would us back to the camp. Finally, the mayor of Iassy came with warm food, with bread and took us out of there”⁶⁴.

We have to specify that in the Soviet Union, the war prisoners were assimilated with the political convicts and sent in gulag for extermination. The war prisoners had to be exterminated in their majority, and those who came back, had to bear witness through their physical status, the process of mass killing. Therefore, it was desired to terrorize last surviving prisoners before they were returned to their country.

Of course, in the Soviet Union, the life conditions were bad. The civil population, even the army officers suffered from hunger. If there had been goodwill, the huge mortalities would not have existed. Actually, the conduct of the Soviet authorities wanted, especially, to kill the prisoners. The Soviet leaders knew until one year ago two of these people were their enemies. They are still “fascists” meaning they do not accept the Soviet domination; their country is not yet tied to the USSR, meaning it is still a formally independent country, but actually another soviet republic. The Soviets run their own population and army through lies and terror, through indoctrination, through inspiring hatred towards the non-soviet exterior world. The 20th century was the century of totalitarianism with expansionist vocation. It was the bad luck of Romania, but also that of the whole world that the Bolshevik totalitarianism got roots in Russia and remade the Russian empire, but under an ideology much more dangerous than the tsarist one. It was a universal ideology, a messianic one on the rescue of the human gender. It was the bad luck of the 20th century that the communist totalitarianism conquered the power in the biggest country of the world, with a huge population, and with, almost never-ending richness.

Romania did not attack the Soviet Union; this one, through the rape of Bessarabia and the north of Bukovina committed an act of war. In 1941, Romania answered to the aggression as much as the USSR did, brought to the border huge terrestrial, air and navy forces endowed with abundant modern weapons. The Soviet forces were not getting ready for defense, because they had just eliminated the Stalin fortified line that was stopping them in their offensive manoeuvres.

At the question “What did you look for at Stalingrad?”, we can answer: not only Bessarabia and Bukovina, but also the release under the imminent soviet offensive. When Romania was “liberated”, this happened in 1944 not in 1941. The survivors - the veteran of the East War give us information that confirm and bring back into the light newer and older sources. They talk about the courage under the enemy fire, about the ability to endure wounds, about their intelligence and skills.

¹ Ivan Histoforovici Bagramean, *Așa a început războiul* (That is how the war began), Bucharest, The Military Publishing House, 1974.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 20-42.

- ³ Cristian Troncotă, *Serviciile secrete românești. Despre iminența războiului germano-sovietic* (The Romanian secret services. About the imminence of the German-Soviet war), in “Dosarele istoriei” (The history files), II, 5 (10), 1997, p. 59.
- ⁴ I. H. Bagramean, *Așa a început războiul.*, p. 71.
- ⁵ Valeriu Avram, *Cruciații aerului* (The air crusaders), in “Dosarele istoriei” (The history files), VI, 7 (59), 2001, p. 59.
- ⁶ Cristian Troncotă, *Serviciile secrete românești*, p. 26.
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