

CRAIOVA UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND PHILOSOPHY

DOCTORAL THESIS

*ROMANIA AND THE PRISONERS OF WAR CAMPS
DURING WORLD WAR I*

- SUMMARY -

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The rich historiography about the First World War as well as the Romanian and foreign studies about prisoners of war and civilian internee has not been sufficiently analyzed. Documents of the time are rare, with less comprehensive information and testimonies of some of the contemporary events, fined by certain subjectivity.

Although Romania was preparing intensively for entry into a war which, in the opinion of his prime minister, "was great and essential interests" of neutrality in the short time could not exceed the correct perception of others towards us. Head of the British government, Lloyd George, provided that the Allies were pushing a defeat by the unprepared Romania risking a "Serbian tragedy." It is obvious that the interests of the military to manage prisoners of war and civilian internee has developed on the fly. General Dumitru Iliescu himself, testified in 1916 that the army is facing hardships.

On March 18, 1915, was issued a secret order of the War Department requesting the Third Division to establish an action plan in preparation for a possible war. Consequently Operations Office have been mobilized, Marine Bureau, Information Office and the Office of Subsistence.

Different assumptions were made for all actions of war on the concentration of troops deployed in special centers in areas of concentration and grouping them into larger units and military areas. All were decided ultimately by the heads of Main Headquarters. Were also prepared, all work on border defense troops threatened with coverage that were to be sent from the first day of mobilization, the concentration of bulk forces, starting from the premise that military operations can be undertaken that time period.

The implemented hypothesis was B-III (also known as the "Z" hypothesis), completed in May 1915. Provided the company a two-front war zones, namely: on the front north and north-west, against Austrian-Hungarian Empire and against its ally, Germany; on the southern front, against Bulgaria, where the state would be hostile. In any case, if Bulgaria would not have been uncertain and when our mobilization, it was necessary to mobilize all the forces needed to fight off the southern front.

On the southern front was engaged a strategic defensive, opposing any attempts to cross the Danube. In a second stage, after unloading, the advance of Russian troops in Dobrogea and alignment of the Cernavoda-Medgidia, would proceed with a limited offensive alignment safety device in enemy depth (Rusciuk-Şumla-Varna).

For the main war theater, an offensive was planned for the tenth day of mobilization, being made in three distinct stages, and should have been arrived on-line Ciucea Caransebes after 30 days. The first stage was two-

way forward: Brasov - Tg. and Rm Mures - Petrosani. After 20 days alignment would be the Mures Valley North East Army decisive confrontation. The second stage was aimed at issuing districts Dej, Cluj, Turda and battle group in the Apuseni Mountains. The third stage envisaged as the main group to come under a single command that unfolded offensive line for nine days on the Cluj-Oradea-Debrecen until the Tisza middle area.

The "Z" hypothesis spread around 576,408 people of which 420,000 for Transylvanian front and 142,000 on the southern front (Army III and V Corps Artillery at the General Headquarters). Also appeared 257.193 inside peoples for services, schools, health services.

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In 1912, the Law organizing the Ministry of War, in addition to Service Personnel set up a Statistical Office, which was responsible for recruitment and crime statistics in the army. In 1915, the General Staff found absolutely necessary to establish a "service" that had to deal with vital military surveys. Chief of General Headquarters proposed the establishment of this ministry in addition to a military Statistical Office. Thus was established within the Ministry of War, a Department of Statistics, independent institution, is called an advisory committee that would determine his duties.

Due to the outbreak of war, the Statistics Department has suspended the work itself and the whole staff was directed to moilor enforcement duties in connection with the conflict. Thus, this work has dealt with regarding the Romanian and foreign prisoners, interned civilians, missing, wounded and dead on the front line.

Statistics Directorate of the Ministry of War has undergone reorganization and transformation, becoming a "division" in 1919, which belonged to the Personnel Department, but the tasks remained the same, regarding to the war. Subsequently, the unit became the Statistical Service.

By Royal Decree no. 2793 of 14 August 1916, were set up at the Department of Statistics of the Ministry of War, two committees that dealt with prisoners of war, civilian internees respectively. Through several meetings and gatherings, these committees have established rules governing internment centers for civilian internees and POW camps. At the same time, in addition to the Statistics Department also founded a service of prisoners, interned civilians, and an information bureau, become service later.

As already experience of the conflict proved that bureaus within the Department of Statistics will increase greatly immediately after the onset of hostilities, it is considered necessary to prepare personnel and materials.

Activity Information Bureau of prisoners of war had two distinct parts: - a purely informative nature, establishing the identity of foreign prisoners held and the Romanian army in other countries – the second one, economic and administrative, relating to the gifts made, money sent and smooth objects, wills, etc..

Statistics Directorate tasks have changed, since the conflict started, working as required by specific war instead of peace. Section prisoners and civilian internee cover maintenance and use of prisoners, staff management, accounting and financial control of the deposit, correspondence with the enemy and their representatives through the neutral Red Cross. It still had the censorship of correspondence work and duties of prisoners on prisoners of war and interned civilians.

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War situation has created a critical need to create and adapt regulations and measures. The existence of a military conflict requires a rigorous regulation and a documentary based on prisoners of war and in that moment Romania did not have it.

Prior to 1914, Romania concluded bilateral treaties on the status and treatment of prisoners and wounded. An agreement was also signed with the Ottoman Empire on 23 November 1878, which became law on 13 April 1879. Romania has signed the Geneva Convention and Protocol relating to the improvement of the wounded and sick in armies found in the war zone.

Following the "Report to State Secretary of the Department of War, No. 1, submitted to King Ferdinand, on 14 August 1916, by Royal Decree, registered under no. 2793, "Regulation of prisoners of war." was published in Official Gazette no. 20 of 22 August 1916. Regulation was divided into six chapters and is the basis for the most part of the provisions of the Hague Convention in 1907. In the first part of the regulation issues were dealt with belligerents and their status while in the second part was the status itself.

On 21 August 1916, Bureau of Prisoners of War POWs for Braila, Tecuci, Galati, Şipote, Hagieni Isalnita camps sent a series of rules concerning the admission of prisoners. In principle, for officers and soldiers, prisoners had to be hospitalized in separate places so that you can not communicate with them. All of Romanian prisoners were interned separately, the others were admitted to the joint.

Procedure Rules of the activity in POW camps also provided covering all aspects of life, according to Romanian laws and regulations under wartime conditions. There were regulations regarding the status of both

prisoners and staff and its activities deposits (commanders, officers, officials, staff on duty), which deals with management.

On 4 / 17 January 1917 was dealt the "Convention on exchange of prisoners of war invalids. From the Central Powers was made a delegation under the chairmanship of Commander von Mackensen. The Romanian delegation was comprised of mr. Mitilineu, Bănescu Captain and Dr. Sutoianu Tabacovici. It was drafted by 6 copies in German and Romanian.

Also, the General Headquarters organized a "loss office." The reports of troop losses at the front, received by the General Headquarters, were dispatched to the Statistics Directorate. Were all losses included on the front: dead, wounded and missing. By the end of 1917, contained 104.118 name lists of prisoners, summary and consist essentially of bulk.

At the beginning of 1916-1918 campaign, centers were set up for civilian internees and POW camps. The first camps were held prisoners at Tecumseh, Barlad, Manchester, Șipote, Isalnita, and Vaslui.

Due to permanent front line changes and the withdrawn, the camps and centers network known internal transformation.

In August 1916 the centers have been established for admission of foreigners, having a director in charge for the region internees. First was held in Slobozia, Baragan. Once the enemy occupying regime installed in the south ,in late 1916, the institution which deals with the internment of foreign nationals staying in Romania was transferred to Moldova, where admission was organized to South (Husi) and North (Dângeni) regions. The regions were divided into "sub", "center" and "substation." From January 1917 commanders internment centers have received from the Ministry of war and civilian internee Commission, a set of instructions on housing, food, health and daily regime of the internees. Each center was established by a committee elected by and from among hospitalized, a real "internee quarter, consisting of 5-10 members, who tended to the needs of internee and took measures to improve their condition. Centers in Bărăgan were organized at: Bora, Sudiți, Țândărei, Macavei, Ograda, Urziceni, Mărculești, Acsintele, Aliexeni, Frumușica, Bucu, Cosâmbești, Monasia, Perieți, Ciulnița, Andrășești, Căănăești, Bohaci.

On 12 August 1916, General Headquarters submitted to the Ministry of War, Statistics Department, "Statement of deserters and refugees" from other armies. The total was two lieutenants, two sub-lieutenants, eight cadets, 18 warrant, 40 sergeants, 64 corporals and 1499 soldiers.

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Heavy duty detention for officers and soldiers was compared, in many situations with that of cattle, being differences in ethnicity and grade, between the French and British prisoners on the one hand, and Russian and Romanian, on the other hand. Under the pretext that the last were accustomed to a life less comfortable, were left homeless.

The main causes of mortality were generated mostly by physical exhaustion due to starvation treatment, lack of food and clothing, excess employment, transport, long and exhausted from work to "concentration camps".

In an equal number of prisoners, the Romanian registered in only four months, the same number of deaths that Belgians reported him in four years.

In 1918, through the International Red Cross, have been collected lists of names of more than 135,000 Romanian prisoners captured by enemy troops (81,540 in Germany, 33,975 in Austria-Hungary, 13,590 in Bulgaria and 6795 in Turkey. For the territory occupied lists contained 51,783 names. Of these, 17,500 were released and sent as agricultural workers to continue working the fields. In the same year he achieved a fairly accurate representation of the loss of data resulting from official acts Statistics: 1.285.000 mobilized, 255,300 dead or missing, 90,379 wounded, 161,408 taken prisoners. Further analysis corrected number of prisoners: 147,891 in Germany, 51,000 in Austria-Hungary, 25 000 in Bulgaria and 6.000 in Turkey. The total amounted, around 230,000 people.

To establish accurate number of prisoners was the main factor to be considered in the repatriation of Romanian soldiers captured or killed in battle. The Romanian government has examined the political and military situation and Romania, despite the wishes of its allies who had direct interest to maintain a united front in the south-eastern Europe, began truce talks in late November 1917. On December 9, provisional truce was signed in Focsani. Three months later, on 5 March 1918, Romania signed by its representatives, the peace preliminaries in Buftea and on 7 May the Peace in Bucharest.

Under the contract concluded by the Romanian state with enemy countries on 23 March 1918 began the prisoners exchange with the Central Powers. But Germans systematically circumvent the terms set out in official documents, it's main argument being that still have need the workforce. 2191 prisoners were repatriated infirm and disabled. Until July 1918, the Department of Statistics recorded repatriated Romanians: Germany - officers 1661 / 3697 troops, Bulgaria - 729 officers / 11,000 troops, Turkey - 6 officers / 1,000 troops, Austro-Hungary - 472 officers / 33.920 troops. In

1919 there were 11 international locations where the Romanian military tried to solve problems related to repatriation of prisoners.

Starting in 1918, the entire operation to repatriate prisoners interned in Russia had been reconsidered. The non-participation of Russia to the Paris Peace Conference, opened the path of direct or indirect contacts with the new Soviet power in Moscow. Either directly or through other countries or international structures (International Committee of the Red Cross, League of Nations) countries which have troops as prisoners in Russia have been required since 1919 to start negotiations for the repatriation. Former prisoners of war coming from the existing Central Powers armies in the Far East, were scattered in three areas which, politically, had no links with each other: China, Central Siberia Central and Eastern Siberia. Many of them were not even in the camps but were scattered as workers in mines or villages, or individuals working on the basis of their own households and families. Due to large distances, lack of communications and information, most people did not know which state prisoners are being very suspicious and skeptical of change in Europe.

Gathering the war prisoners was receiving, sending them to Vladivostok, where they were sent home from. These procedures were done through the triage centers: Cita, Madjuria, Harbin and Khabarovsk.

The real number of romanian prisoners taken by the enemy armies has been uncertain for along time because of imprecision lists of prisoners arrived at General Headquarters. Summary, they were impossible to be used.

The prisoners repatriation was one of the problems presented at the Paris Peace Conference. The General Secretariat of the Conference of Peace established Special Committee for all matters relating to Allied prisoners. The repatriation activities have directly involved with the International Committee of Red Cross and the League of Nations High Commissioner. In each of the participating countries have been created repatriation committees, with the limited objective to coordinate the repatriation of prisoners of war and civilian internee.

After the end of the World War I, Romania was keen to leave something in the collective memory of European presence in the trenches of the great battles. It raised (in France, Germany, Austria and other countries) memorials created by sculptors such as Oscar Han, Miliță Pătrașcu, homage shares, memorial service attended by monarchs, dignitaries and personalities of political, military and scientific areas. All sacrifices were dedicated to the Romanian people who gave their life in the struggle for independence and national unity in that years.