

PERSONALITIES OF MILITARY THOUGHT IN ROMANIA GENERAL VIRGIL ECONOMU – AVIATION AS AN ELEMENT OF COVERAGE

Alina PAPOI

Romanian General Staff, Ministry of National Defense (alinagmr@yahoo.com)

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Abstract: *Aviation is one of the fundamental elements of an army. A century ago, in full World War, the Air Force gave a dangerous exam. As a weapon freestanding, it proved its viability. It was able to execute many various missions successfully.*

General Virgil Economu dedicated many pages to this weapon, and he described the ability of an army to raise his aviation and its power to adapt to the harsh conditions. In “România Militară” journal, the author described with memorable, but realistic words the aviation’s role in defending the territory, based on numerous lessons learned. From these lessons learned, the army can learn more.

Keywords: *strategy, Balkan Wars, maneuver, aviation, military doctrine, Clausewitz*

1. INTRODUCTION

General Virgil Economu was the Editorial Director of the journal „*România Militară*”¹ in the period 1927-1935. He was one of the most important mentors of the Romanian military doctrine and art, alongside names like N. Alevra, C.N. Hîrjeu, Ion Jitianu, Ioan Sichițiu and Mircea Tomescu, the personalities of the Romanian military thought. His studies on the problematic of military life, by developing many materials, articles, they formed the basis of proposals or solutions adopted by policymakers and military leaders, in the interwar period especially.

The national independence and territorial integrity were two of the most significant and delicate topics on the agenda of politicians and military leaders of Romania, from the earliest times. Those were two main themes that represented the subject of debate for the formation of viable plans to strengthen defense and military power of our country. People like those up mentioned have delivered valuable ideas; they have come up with innovative solutions, which were materialized in a series of tactical studies or outstanding works.

¹ „*Romania Militară*” was founded in 1864, as a publication issued by Romanian Army Forces General Staff. In its 150 years, it had different names, like „*Cultura militară*”, „*Probleme de artă militară*” and, since 1990, „*Gândirea militară românească*”, a military theory and science journal published by General Staff.

Thus, Romanian military doctrine was the result of long and prolific approaches in areas such as economic, political and military, given the geopolitical realities of the years. Based on analyzes prepared, the Romanian military theorists were those that sketched the concept of „*military thought*”, a phrase rather controversial today as they are some opinions according to which the military issue should be studied only by military analysts! In the 80s, this concept has been defined as „*all ideas, concepts, theories and doctrines that addresses the phenomenon in an era military*”. [2, p. 31] In 2013, in a study about military theory and concepts, Ross A. Miller, PhD., a former officer in the U.S. Navy, said that although „*Military strategy was long described as a theoretical - an art that could only be fully comprehended by military genius, this contention is no longer held, as military staffs, comprised of experts and specialists, are able to formulate strategy aided by mini-theories of strategy and a process that takes advantage of collective wisdom rather than singular genius*”. [4, p. 3]

Over the years, the concept was developed into military science, military history, military geography, military doctrine, social sciences with applications in military field, war philosophy [13, p.14]. In addition, there are authors who believe that military thought addresses the issue of armed struggle, the institution as such, factors underlying the preparation, command and outcome of armed conflict [3,p.10]. Beyond these assessments or, perhaps, on that source, I believe that the study of military thought is an important and necessary step for understanding both the personalities of military life Romanian and currents of opinions and ideas that built this edifice of science. In this regard, Liddell-Hart stressed that „*history is the universal experience, not the experience of one man, but several people who work in varying conditions*”. [11, p.3]

2. JOURNEY THROUGH BIOGRAPHY

General Virgil Economu was born in 1875. After graduating from the Military School of Infantry and Cavalry Officers in Bucharest (1896-1898) and the complementary Staff Course (1909-1910), he promoted all military ranks, toward the general. It had an important role during the campaign of 1916, where he was an officer attached to A.3 Command and Defense Group „Danube”. On the way to the 25th Infantry Division, where he was to be appointed chief of staff, he was wounded and taken prisoner by the Bulgarians (20/21 November 1916), where it will stay a year and a half in camp Sliven, Bulgaria [12, p. 154].

After the First World War, he had several functions, such as the Director of School's military regiment and commander of brigade. He taught military history at the Higher School of War (now, “Carol I” National Defense University, Bucharest) and was chair of the editorial board of the journal “*România Militară*” in the interwar period. According to specialists, it is considered one of the most active and prolific thinkers' Romanian officer for the reason of his great works and studies that it has developed and which has materialized in publications, especially in “*România Militară*”, between 1933 and 1934. Among his workings, include „*Study on maneuvers royal of 1910*” (1911), „*The discussions of a concept in the Russo-Japanese War*” (1912), “*Seven applications tactical map*” (1927), „*Discussions about the wars in the Balkans. 1912-1913*” (1926), „*Study on tactical operations of 2/5 November 1916*” (1932), „*How we reduce the*

military service” (1933), „*An historical impossibility*” (1933), „*The organization of the nation for war*” (1933), „*The war that is coming*” (1939).

He was member in the Joint Commission for delimiting the borders between Romania and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1921-1922) until the decision of the Paris Peace Conference [12, p.154].

Unfortunately, based on what I searched, I have not found data on the death of the General Economu.

3. STRATEGY'S APPLICABILITY

Almost a leitmotif, the profession of faith of General Virgil Economu was condensed into the following statement: „*The entire study military history to be dominated by a single didactic purpose: strategy' applicability*”. [6, p. 75] On this statement, he was convinced that each campaign to which the Romanian army took part gives one or more so-called „*lessons learned*”. This means that each campaign has its significance, because in „*all these campaigns, our army participated effectively*”. [6, p. 76] In this regard, General Economu argued that the main campaign in which Romania participated should be studied not only from the military perspective, but also from the geographical, political and economic one. Thus, about the Balkan wars, he said that the value of its headquarters and army on the battlefield is a reflection of the care and attention that the politics has given to it. His argument was because an army cannot be formed in a short period, quickly, but the feedback is at least several years of training and equipping. As an example, he used the defeat of Turkey in the first Balkan war, because, among other things, it was a lack of consistency in the army and an absence a fleet powerful to be able to guarantee supremacy in the Aegean Sea: “*The campaign of 1912 demonstrates that the fleet for a country whose territories are separated by sea is indispensable complement of the army (...). Turkish organizers did not understand that the reorganization of the fleet is a vital issue for empire*”. [6, p.28]

A major aspect that General Economu analyzed in her studies refers to the methodology of design and applications solving on tactical map and on the ground. The main feature of these applications was the spirit of coordination and connection between those participating. People were asked to think together for the same purpose. For example, he analyzed the activity of Division 2/5 (a combination between Division 2 and Division 5, at October 17, 1916), led by General Alexander Socec [1], and he drew up a study in three parts, detailed in journal “*România Militară*” [8, p.23]. It is about the Division's mission 2/5 in wide-ranging activities organized by the General Staff: Battle of the Neajlov-Argeş or the Fight to defense the capital Bucharest. The mission was to get out the Central Powers forces across the Danube and defending the city Bucharest in this way. In this battle, they used two divisions: 2/5 and 9/19.

The author made an extensive study, an objective analysis of the mode of action of division to reach Flămânda-Târnave, highlighting the negative aspects of the mission, too. Of these, General Economu thought being important: „*ignorance of the exact situation, lack insecurity and lack of judgment*” [8, p. 8]. Division was in a precarious location, without adequate safeguards, without freedom of action.

Also, commandant's portrait is grim, „*his decisions lacked conviction and firmness*” [8, p.9], an extremely serious problem not only in such crucial moments, but always. The value of a commander, wrote General Economu, depends on the value of the whole army!

During the three parts of his study in “*România Militară*” journal, General Economu approached relevant and potential solutions, based on the situation on the battlefield, from the known data, the Division's organization, but also about the order received by it. Division's mission was its entrance into Old Letca's region, in Giurgiu. Moreover, what was more important, namely, the element of „*surprise*”, could not be implemented, the surprise being “*a condition essential in the execution of maneuvers in flank and rearward*” [8, p.9].

One of the essential topics of General Economu in his writings was the maneuver used by divisions under cover. In this regard, he established some principles and stages of maneuver of major units arranged in coverage, which he detailed in “*Maneuver in retreating on troops from coverage*” [7, p.24].

In addition, in the study of “*România Militară*”, he concluded that large units operations arising principally from operations for the previous day: “*These operations previously performed contributed to the abnormal situation and to involuntary Group's maneuver, approaching the Neajlov during the day. If, on the contrary, the group of maneuver would be approached by marches night, would be done in good conditions with all the required elements of surprise, strategic and tactical, and on the other hand, would have avoided serious losses of the Division*”. [8, p.63].

4. AVIATION – AN ELEMENT OF COVERAGE

Also in the journal “*România Militară*” towards the end of 1933, General Virgil Economu debated maneuvers carried out that year, a “*true school of realities*”, as the author confessed in „*The maneuvers of the royal autumn*”. [9, p. 77] In the author's opinion, the core of these maneuvers it was the broader use of aviation and its cooperation with other combat arms. Such maneuvers have emphasized that aviation plays an important role in preliminary operations of the war, especially in the case of external aggression. [9, p. 81] The author emphasized the need for aviation, whatever the political color has the government: “*Aviation, whatever the attitude of a party - offensive or defensive -, besides other missions, must to attack, because in the air is more than on earth the best way is <to attack>. Aviation created a high impression, and most people have been impressed to see that the air is important for aviation and to better understand its role to give impetus needed for this warfare*”. [9, p.81.]

General Economu made a number of proposals in terms of preparation for war, based on integration the regiments and training units operated higher. In this context,!, said the general. As element of coverage, the aviation is the first called into action. In 1933, the author concluded his statement with the affirmation of the king that the army will be equipped with suitable material technical advances, and with the speech of Minister of national Defense, which said that “*we must not expect the war to prepare our army to*

resist under the pressure of outside events and conditions which very often can be harmful". [9, p. 82.] It was 1933s...

CONCLUSIONS

In the nineteenth century, Romanian military theorists had as a landmark work the studies of Carl von Clausewitz. The German thinker's ideas led to the formation of many Romanians military life personalities. „Each period, therefore, Clausewitz said, would have held its own theory of war, even if the urge had existed always and universally to work things out on scientific principles. It means that the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities”. [5, p. 593]

I appreciate that the Romanian military thought, especially in the interwar period, had a significant role in promoting the key ideas and concepts, opening the way to knowledge of European military thought, later the universal one. Also, military theorists of that period were able to propose a series of military solutions to the problems that our country had. In this context, I believe that the study of Romanian military thought represents an experience in order to know how to get future, because „the army means the whole country, which embodies the entire Romanian people, and we must know our past like our Holy Bible, like a guide to faith and duty”. [10, p. 324].

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