

THE LEGENDARY HORIA AGARICI BETWEEN MYTH AND PROPAGANDA

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Abstract: *Captain Horia Agarici has certainly become a legend. His story has become a myth, and myths must live on. After all, they can't even be touched by time. The notoriety of the famous aviator was also preserved due to Păstorel Teodoreanu's poem, made into a song by Gherase Dendrino in the summer of 1941: "He went hunting, Agarici / He went to hunt Bolsheviks..."¹, a fashionable hit between 1941-1944, a period during which Romania was leading a crusade against communism! Broadly speaking, Horia Agarici's life was accessible to the general public after 1989, and it appeared, in part, even on the ultra-publicized Wikipedia [1]. But most of the details were brought to light, naturally, by post-communist newspapers. Horia Agarici (born April 6, 1911, Lausanne, Switzerland, d. 1982, Constanța, Romania) was a major aviator in the Romanian Air Force, one of the elite aviators of the Romanian Army during the Second World War, a poet and a Romanian author [2]. For his extraordinary deeds of bravery during the Second World War, he was also nicknamed "The Savior of [the city of] Constanța"[3].*

Keywords: *Agarici. pilot, aviation, The Second World War.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Horia Agarici went down in history. He was the first Romanian aviator to shoot down three enemy bombers in a single air battle [4]. However, in order to be correct, it should be mentioned that the reputation of the "Savior of Constanța", which the aviator has today in Romania, is an exaggeration. The six Soviet twin-engines could not have wiped the city off the map, even if they met with no resistance. Sorin Turturică notes that: "General Gheorghe Jienescu, the commander of the Romanian Royal Air Force, understood that he was wrong to leave Constanța defenseless. To divert attention from this, he called on the media to focus on the three bombers shot down by Agarici. Thus, Lieutenant Horia Agarici benefited from huge publicity. The newspapers and the radio presented the deed to him in detail, and within a short while, a song composed by Gherase Dendrino and based on a poem by Păstorel Teodoreanu came out to honor him. It began as follows: "He went hunting, Agarici / He went to hunt Bolsheviks"². He became known as the "Bolshevik Hunter", a name which, given his discreet nature, he probably did not even appreciate [5].

¹ The original lyrics were: "What do you hear coming from afar, O Leano? / Agarics, / He went to hunt the Bolsheviks / He left the horizon" (translation by Florian Bichir).

² Ion Dicezare, ace of the war and a group colleague claims that he was composed on June 23, 1941 at the restaurant "Tanti Lenuța" in the "saved city" - Constanta - by the taraf there. During the party given by Georgescu "The Snake" in honor of Agarici, Ion Țaralungă, our great aviation and naval painter, claimed from archival sources, including the testimony of radio master Illescu, that the text belongs to Păstorel Teodoreanu, idea claimed by ROMANIAN WINGS.

2. UNDER INVESTIGATION BY THE INTELLIGENCE BUREAU

In July 1941, General Ion Antonescu came to Constanța to award Agarici a medal of honor and talked to him for about half an hour. They're talking about the war, the Hurricane, and the legendary fight. It was too much for the denigrators, and the next day the false rumor circulated in the Squadron that Horia was wearing a green Legionnaire's uniform! It was hilarious that the hero had been arrested on the spot and referred to the Court Martial at that time for such a ridiculous challenge. It was said that when Ion Antonescu came to the beach to decorate Horia Agarici, the aviator unpacked his jacket and asked the General to pin the decoration on his green, Legionnaire shirt. The episode is not real. The Second Intelligence Bureau (a military structure) investigated the origin of this legend and concluded that it had been put into circulation by Legionnaire sympathizers on the front. Secondly, Antonescu was not the man to tolerate such an insult from a lieutenant and for Horia Agarici, serious consequences would have probably followed.

In fact, in 1953, referring to this episode, Agarici wrote that had he shown the General his green shirt, he could have been given "hell, right then and there!" [5]. Documents in the custody of the CNSAS must be kept private in their circumstances. If in 1946 it was established without any doubt that Agarici was not a legionnaire, two years later, in 1948, the note was almost designated by a captain of theirs. The explanation is simple. The intelligence officers had begun to fill the prisons, and Soviet councilors or party members had taken over and were now fully installed in their seats of power.

It is certain that Horia Agarici does not receive very commendable notes from the Special Intelligence Service (SSI). A note from August 1946 summarized the notes on the aviator: "From the Special Intelligence Service the above-mentioned is known from the file 3089 vol. 56, tab 307, note of the General Staff - Information Section, Nr. 322070 of 16 September 1942, by which it signals that on the evening of 5 Sept. 1942, at the « Halelor » restaurant in Ploești, a group of legionnaires who were still active at the time participated in a party, in a repaired room, where they placed the portrait of Corneliu Z. Codreanu. Among those who participated in that party was Lt. aviator AGARICI HORIA.

It is suspected that it was about organizing a group, disguised as a party, and for the day of September 8th 1942, a new meeting was held at the same place and with the same people. With No. 24948 of 22 Sept. 1942, it is answered to the General Staff, that on the evening of 5/6 Sept. 1942, Lt. aviator AGARICI HORIA, had lunch with several aviation officers, at the restaurant « Halelor Centrale », in Ploești, leased by brothers Dumitru and Nicolae Călinescu, a party that lasted until 7 o'clock in the morning, mentioning it is known that the place does not have separate rooms, but only a small terrace, on which usually climbs the disguise Stângaci Virginia, with different individuals.

It is mentioned that Lt. aviator AGARICI HORIA, did not come to Ploești especially for that party, because he had been appointed since February 1942, and he was invited to the Târgșor Aviation Group. In addition, when he was not on a mission, he used to party with many different friends, through various places in the city. Since the above-mentioned date, Lt. aviator AGARICI HORIA has not been seen on the premises and according to the intelligence on the matter, he had gone on a mission, probably to the front.

It is noted that the "Securitate" branch of the Ploești Police Questor received several complaints against the Călinescu brothers, that they would contribute for the families of the imprisoned Legionnaires, with amounts of 26,000 lei per month.

It is shown that indeed, the place was auctioned, under the legionary regime and this situation forced the above to a quota for "Legionnaire Aid", but after the fall of the Legionnaire regime, the Călinescu brothers gave up their donations, for which reason they received telephone threats, that they would suffer for their attitude.

The head of the Ploiești Securitate claims that the named CĂLINESCU DUMITRU requested the help of the police, in order to catch a messenger of the Legionnaire movement who had come to ask them for money, so it is assumed that the complaints were made out of revenge.

At the General Directorate of Police, the former aviation captain AGARICI HORIA is known from doc. no. 19735, 1942, because of a note of the General Staff - Section II Intelligence, that on the evening of September 5th 1942, a group of Legionnaires together with AGARICI HORIA, partied at Ștefaniuc's restaurant "Halelor", in Ploiești, and it was suspected that the party had been a camouflaged Legionnaire assembly.

Ploiești City Police reports that Lt. aviator AGARICI HORIA was moved to the Târgșor - Prahova Aviation Group in February, and that when he was not on a mission, he was having parties in the city of Ploiești, with his friends. It is confirmed that the aforementioned on the evening of September 5/6, 1942, he dined at the restaurant "Halelor" with several officers and then partied until 4 in the morning, together with the owner of the place.

AGARICI HORIA was not been seen since then and is believed to have been deployed on the frontline. In the same case, J. Nr. 45330/942, we find the address of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Nr. 27729 of November 14, 1942, which requires information whether the aviator Capt. AGARICI HORIA, from an NCO school in Mamaia, was participating in the Legionnaire meetings of the village of Basarabeni, as he had often been seen, on a motorcycle, outside the city, going towards the said rural area, where he used to meet T.R. TEODORESCU, at the Basarab Collection Center and ȘERBAN CONSTANTIN, both leaders of the Legionnaire organization.

At the Special Intelligence Service, the named person is known from file No. 25, table 306, by which known Legionnaire CERNEA - the owner from Tunari - is reported to be spreading the rumor that "Lt. aviator AGARICI wears the green Legionnaire shirt under his aviator jacket". In reality, the subject of the said description was not and is not a Legionnaire. In File 26, tab 16, there is a note from July 24, 1941, which indicates that the Legionnaire circles had adapted by means of a new type of propaganda, by the statements that most acts of bravery are due to the legionary elements, and in this context quoting AGARICI HORIA.

Such versions of historical biographies were intended to create propaganda in favor of the Legionnaire movement. In file 30, tab 484, there is an informative note out of 24 which states that the legionaries began an intense informative activity with the German Legation, seeking to convince the Germans that the Legionnaires are their sincere collaborators, for which purpose they provided the information that the hero pilot AGARICI HORIA had been tried and convicted, for the fact that he expressed his beliefs openly, spreading Legionnaire propaganda in the military and even having asked to be allowed to wear a green shirt.

In file 56, pages 307–308 there is an informative note from the Intelligence Service of October 28, 1942, by which AGARICI HORIA is reported to have been seen repeatedly, riding his motorcycle Basarab - Constanța, to get in touch with T.R. TEODORESCU, from the Basarab Collection Center and ȘERBAN CONSTANTIN, both leaders of the clandestine Legionnaire organization.

The verifications made for this purpose, and communicated with Nr. 47705 of November 9, 1942, shows that according to the population of Com. Basarab - Constanța, AGARICI HORIA allegedly took part in some parties in the pub of a Legionnaire called ȘTEFAN, together with several other Legionnaires, including the so-called ALEANDRESCU PUIU, former collector, who was the spiritual leader of the movement, ȘERBAN CONSTANTIN, a main pilot in Legionnaire propaganda and TEODORESCU GHEORGHE, a platoon leader.

AGARICI HORIA was coming by car or motorcycle from Constanța, but it could not be proved that he had taken part in the Legionnaire meetings. By an informative note from January 1944, the said AGARICI HORIA is reported as a Legionnaire sympathizer during his service at the "Mamaia" Shooting and Air Bombing School, during which he was observed in the entourage of several notorious Legionnaires.

As a confirmation of this mutual affinity, which the pilot enjoyed within the Legionnaire circles, it is mentioned that the Legionaries used to hum with predilection the song: "Agarici went hunting". In file no. 52, we find the address of the General Staff - Section II Counter-Intelligence No. 2118406 of 2.VIII.1942, accompanied by an informative note stating that a very brave young aviator shot down several Russian bombers, knowing how to fly on a Russian silhouette plane.

The superiors of the young aviator, enthusiastic about his success, proposed him for a medal, but on the day when the decoration was to be made, the general asked him how he had managed to act with such bravery and how he had so much courage, the young aviator took off his military coat, pointed to the green shirt, saying that it represented his courage and his very soul. Then the general refused to give him the decoration and erased it according to the table that had been approved.

With such propaganda systems, it has come to Ploiești that many other former Legionnaire supporters had once again shown their impudence and threatened the peaceful citizens, whose mentality refuses to believe what the interested parties had said. The Special Intelligence Service, on August 12, 1942, responding to the General Staff, shows that the new aspect of the legionary propaganda mentioned in the raised note is known to that Service, a few months before and this propaganda is designed within clandestine Legionnaire circles, in order to maintain the morale of the memories of the movement, sometimes claiming that the fake episode had happened to Lt. av. AGARICI HORIA, whose decoration shows that it was to be awarded by the former Marshal I. Antonescu.

At the Capital's Police Prefecture, it is now known, from the information and verifications made on the field, that HORIA AGARICI took part in several naval air battles since 1943/1944, by order of the Ministry of the National Apostle, and was assigned to the 1st Pipera Hunting Base. In the circle of his superiors and acquaintances, he is indicated as an evil element, being often punished for misconduct and negligence in office.

He is also known to have been suffering and is being treated for an illness that made him almost unfit for service. Also, the commander of the 1st Pipera Hunting Base informs that while AGARICI HORIA was on duty at the Constanța Naval Bases, in 1941, while we were at war with the U.R.S.S., he shot down several Russian planes during an air battle.

On this subject, a public rumor began to circulate that on occasion of the ceremony during which medals were supposed to be awarded, Lt. AGARICI HORIA had opened his jacket, showing his green shirt and asking that those decorations be attached to his green shirt.

According to the commander's statements, AGARICI HORIA, taking note of these versions of the story, wrote a memorandum to General JIENESCU, then Undersecretary of State for Air Command, asking him to communicate through the press that those versions were inaccurate and that the appointee was not a Legionnaire.

In response, several intelligence reports noted opposite facts. For example: "PROPOSITIONS: We believe that this report, together with the attached items, should be presented in the final report to the Director of the Security Police of this Police Headquarters, in order to dispose on the necessary steps to be taken". Another note from 19 July 1948 added: "February 1941: from the inquiries made at the Pipera Air Flotilla, we established that Commander of 47 Hunting Squadron AGARICI is a fanatical Legionnaire and does not shy off from carrying out a lively Legionnaire propaganda among the Air Force officers and soldiers".

"January 28, 1946 - February 1, present year, Commander SARACELI from the British Mission, accompanied by Capt. AGARICI, were reported to have been to Galați and Brăila together, photographing port facilities, workshops, docks and warehouses as well as some uninhabited positions. In one of these cities, the local Soviet Commander banned them from entering the port. After having lunch with the Soviet port Commander, the two received permission to enter the port to take pictures" [6].

2. „I HAVE BEEN ACCUSED EITHER OF ANGLOPHILIA, OR OF LEGIONARY SYMPATHIES, AND EVEN OF BOLSHEVISM”

For years, Horia Agarici struggled with this story of Legionarism. Although "Signaling Serv. S.S.I. of July 11, 1941 established that all the above were nothing but legions of Legionary propaganda, in reality Agarici was not and is not a legionnaire".

As early as 1943, Horia Agarici had written a memorandum to the Minister of the Air Command. Here is the "Report No. 12 Confidential-Personal, of March 18, 1943 to the Minister of the Air Command": "I feel compelled to respectfully report that one day after Mr. Marshal Antonescu's visit to the 53rd Squadron in Constanța, from July 1941 until today, I have suffered unjustly and continuously the slanders spread among the military and civilians throughout the country, which are supposed to demonstrate that I am a Legionnaire.

The first time I found out about this was the day after the visit reported above, from Lt. Av. Toma Lucian Eduard (now Captain Aviator, dead), who, after being evacuated in the city of Constanța on the evening of his visit, communicated to us the next day, at the table, in front of all the navigating personnel of the Squadron, the following, which he had overheard while back in the city: it was said that the Marshal congratulated me on the battle of July 23, 1941 and wanted to distinguish me with the Mihai Viteazul medal of honor, and that I would have then unbuttoned my coat, full of emphasis, requesting that my decoration be attached to the green shirt ... which I had been allegedly wearing under my military coat. Everything is a lie, as all the officers who were present know. When the Marshal was kind enough to speak to me, the Marshal congratulated me, told me that he had decorated me, and then he was kind enough to keep me informed about the material (flying material) and the methods of maintenance and combat. Later, when I saw that this absurdity communicated to us, and too soon, by Lt. Av. Toma Lucian, was spreading all over the country, I first suspected Lt. Av. Thomas Lucian himself of having spread this rumor, but I could not prove anything.

This is all I proved: the next day after the visit of the Marshal, Lt. Av. Toma Lucian was the first to tell the story of the green shirt at the table, in front of Capt. Georgescu Emil, Second Lt. mechanic Gomolea Matei, Chief Master Sgt. Rădulescu Andrei, Master Sgt. Popescu Constantin, Master Sgt. Comenceanu Eugen (†), Master Sgt. Cordescu Petre, Master Sgt. Bânceanu, all part of the 53rd Hunting Squadron, then in Mamaia. After that and until today, absurd rumors followed constantly, which always insisted on the fact that, for reasons of my Legionnaire sympathies, I would have been punished, taken to camp, exiled, imprisoned in the mountains, etc.

At one point, my father, out of his mind, went to the General Staff, to General Mazarini, and to other senior officers, for clarification and to suppress these rumors once and for all. There he was told not to worry because these rumors have no basis for all possible controls and that they are based on an agreement between Legionaries to spread rumors that anyone who had carried out any act of bravery brought to the notice of the country, would be labeled a Legionnaire. General Dragalina, much higher in rank and with other possibilities, accused by the legionaries on the radio, expressed his denial in the newspapers, which closed the mouths of the slanderers. I, too small in rank and disregarding rumors started on such an absurd basis, did nothing but report to the Air Force and the M.S.M. where I was called and from a military point of view, I shed light on the truth, without denying the lie in the press. I was also advised by General Mazarini and other senior officers, both from the Land Forces and from the Air Force. However, it turned out that I was wrong, because the lack of an adjustment, from a civilian point of view, had the consequence that the rumors, resumed from one end of the country to another, following the attention given to me according to the MCG Communiqué (Communiqué of the General Headquarters No. 2), continued in a more and more fanciful manner, with the result that today there are a lot of people who, even if I tell them personally that I never had anything to do with the Legionnaires, would not believe it. What is even more serious is that there are high-ranking people in civilian positions and senior officers, who, based on this rumor, came to be convinced that the stories of the Legionnaires and myself were true.

Anyway, due to the fact that I am not too malleable with any arrangement and due to some envy, probably aroused in some people, this rumor can be used against me successfully at any time, if I do not end it. In view of the above, and in order to be able to deploy quietly and with peace of mind and all my unbridled work power, to the front, where I know I will go trying, I am honored to ask you to intervene and approve for me to obtain permission to publish a disavowal note for three days in three major newspapers". Horia Agarici proposed a model of denial: "DISCLAIMER: Air Force Capt. Av. Agarici Horia categorically denies having had the slightest relationship with the Legionnaires, announcing that he was not interested in or ever sympathized with this movement. All the rumors so far have been just unfounded fantasies. At the same time, Capt. Av. Agarici Horia announces that he will immediately prosecute anyone who will be proven to support such rumors. For this, please contact ... (Here is the address of CFA or SSA or of my parents: Constantin Agarici, Alexandru Lahovari Street, Aleea Biserica Albă No. 1 or my own address: Bul. I. Brătianu No. 24, all from Bucharest, as will be approved). I propose to publish this denial for three consecutive days, the first day in a corner of a front page, at least in a newspaper, and the other two days, somewhere in the body of the newspaper, in three newspapers, for which I propose "The Universe", "The Courier" and "Life".

Since there is not the slightest justification, since I have never had anything to share, not even affinity, with the Legionaries, as there is no one in the family, among acquaintances, among friends, among comrades, in all my life, who isn't aware of how little I have to do with politics, which I cannot bear, least of all Legionarism, since I have been accused either of Anglophilia, or of Legionary sympathies, and even of Bolshevism, etc., by persons who do not deserve to be quoted here, I have the right to respectfully ask you to kindly forward this Report to the Minister of the Air Command, allowing me to accompany him if necessary. In any case, in view of my imminent deployment, and considering that this situation can no longer last, I respectfully ask you to admit the urgency, forwarding this report hierarchically to the Minister of Air Command, with the request that it be solved favorably.

Cpt. Av. Agarici Horia."Unfortunately, his effort was in vain, as the accusation would follow him until the end of his life, being taken over by the communists³!

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³ Sorin Turturică claims that the confusion is explicable: Horia had a cousin, Costachel Agarici, with whom he was a comrade in the fighter aviation, and the latter was imprisoned by the communist regime.