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FOUNDATION OF THE EARLY PILOTING SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The current paper focuses on the topic of the early schools of piloting due to the fact that, on the one side, on the 1st of April, 2015, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of “Henri Coanda” Air Force Academy of Brasov – the successor of the Romanian military aeronautical education, and on the other side, in our opinion, knowledge of traditions of the military piloting school stands for a necessity when forming and professionally training military pilots. The history of the Romanian piloting school represents the foundation of the local military aeronautical education, both at present and for the future.*

Keywords: *aeronautical education, school of aviation, pilots*

1. INTRODUCTION

We can state that Romania’s contribution to the founding of aviation, through its national pioneers, was sound and the Romanian aeronautics left its imprint on the early world aeronautics. Among the Romanian inventors who contributed to the flight development by means of apparatuses heavier than the air, a distinct role was played by Traian Vuia, Aurel Vlaicu and Henri Coanda. In this context, the emergence of a school or schools of piloting in our country was inevitable; consequently, in the following sections of this paper, we are going to detail on these aspects.

At the beginning of the past century, in Bucharest, there were established the earliest schools of piloting. In this respect, airships from other countries were purchased; specially designed workshops were set for the maintenance and repairing of the technique, and, at the same time, there started the training

of the first Romanian pilots, all of which assuring the optimum conditions for the foundation of the Romanian military aviation.

2. THE PILOTING SCHOOL FROM CHITILA

The Romanian lawyer Mihail Cerchez, born at Bârlad, Galati County, is the initiator of the first school of piloting in our country. While in Paris, Mihail Cerchez got fascinated by the flights performed by the aviation pioneers, such as Traian Vuia, Alberto Santos-Dumont or Louis Blériot. Animated by the frenzy of flight and motivated by the appearance of the schools of piloting in France, Cerchez returned to his own country in the summer of 1909 and decided to establish a school of piloting.

Being in possession of a reduced financial support, Mihail Cerchez found himself in the position of asking for help from friends and acquaintances, so as to accomplish his dream,

and on the 20th of November he managed to record a constitutive document entitled "Company Contract". Cerchez, together with other twenty-nine people, on the one side, and the Romanian state, on the other, makes legal the birth certificate of the company meant "to exploit the air locomotion under all its aspects" [3], at the Ilfov Court of Justice.

The company starts its activity in the summer of 1910, on the field near Chitila, where the first aerodrome of the Romanian aviation was settled. The Romanian lawyer managed to have five hangars built over there, some workshops necessary for the construction and repairs of the airships, stands for the lookers-on and some administrative buildings for the employees. Once the infrastructure had been completed, Mihail Cerchez purchased four aircraft from France: two biplane aircraft of Farman type that were destined to carrying out the training flights of the future pilots, one Demoiselle aircraft and a Wright aircraft for the ground instruction. Later on, Cerchez managed to have the Farman aircraft constructed in his school's workshops, under a French patent.

Nicolae Filipescu, the Minister of War at that time, foreseeing that aviation might be used during military operations, at Mihail Cerchez' recommendation, approved of the future military pilots to be trained at the School of Piloting from Chitila.

Starting with the 1st of April 1911, the School of Piloting from Chitila received "six officers: Major Ioan Macri, Captain Fotache Ionescu, First Lieutenant Stelian Boiangiu and Second Lieutenants Ștefan Protopopescu, Gheorghe Negrescu and Ștefan Drușu"[5] to be trained as military pilots. Meanwhile, the Ministry approved the funding for the construction of four Farman aircraft, at the school's workshops, so as the first military pilots should be trained on them. Thus, we can state that the first school of piloting began its activity in Romania, having the six officers for its trainees, to whom Polihroniade Vacas, a volunteering adolescent adhered later on.

The first pilots-trainees put enormous efforts in their flight training on the aircraft found in the school's logistics because all the aircraft of the early time were fragile

apparatuses, lacking good aerodynamic performances and holding poor feasibility. The biggest disadvantage of the time was the fact that the flight instructor could not participate in flight together with his trainee, since aircraft were not double-seaters and the pilot under training had to learn all the flight maneuvers on the ground.

Throughout the month of July of the year 1911, the School of Piloting from Chitila scored its first successes. Out of its trainees, two officers that proved to be more advanced in their training, managed to start their flight training sessions requested for the obtaining of their pilot Licenses. Accordingly, on the 9th of July, the Second Lieutenant Ștefan Protopopescu obtained the first License issued in our country, followed by the Second Lieutenant Gheorghe Negrescu, with his third License issued on the 17th of July.

Another achievement of the school established by Mihail Cerchez is represented by its participation, with two Farman aircraft, in the army's maneuvers from Moldova, in the fall of the year 1911. The School of Piloting from Chitila supported the 3rd Armed Corps of our army and obtained pretty satisfactory results for that time.

Unfortunately, due to the wreckage of the airships and upon the commander of the pilots-trainees' recommendations, major Macri, toward the end of that year, the state ceased the financial support of the School of Piloting from Chitila and decided to settle a new school at Cotroceni, which was this time subordinated to the armed forces. Mihail Cerchez tried to recover the logistics of the school from Chitila, but, in the absence of airships and specialized flying personnel, and most importantly, in the absence of financial resources, Lawyer Cerchez was forced to close both the school and its premises.

Mihail Cerchez will be considered, by the history of the Romanian aviation, the initiator of the very first training school for pilots, of the first airdrome and of the first premises for fixing and building airships, just the same as his school of piloting, even if its existence was rather short, will be remembered by the history of the local aviation as the place where our



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first aviators-pioneers of the Romanian army were trained and specialized.

3. THE PILOTING SCHOOL FROM COTROCENI

Returned from France, Prince George Bibescu "*brought with him one Voisin Canard aircraft and one Blériot aircraft (the airship that managed to cross its constructor across the English Channel), having the intention to establish a piloting school. For the same purpose, later on, he ordered three more Blériot aircraft. The school began its activity on the field nearby Cotroceni, in the summer of 1911, less than one month after the Piloting school from Chitila had begun its activity.*" [3] The Ministry of War, upon the recommendation of Prince Bibescu, in his capacity as the school Principal, ordered the deployment of three officers to this school – "*Lieutenant Mircea Zorileanu and Nicolae Capșa of the Cavalry, and Lieutenant Constantin Istrate of the Navy*" [5], for the purpose of their obtaining the pilot Licenses. After being granted the army's support, Bibescu brought three more Blériot aircraft to his school.

Found in a real competition with the School of Piloting from Chitila, George Bibescu's school was to gain notable results at the time when Lieutenant Mircea Zorileanu obtained the second pilot's License conferred in our country, on the 15th of July 1911, and Second Lieutenant Nicolae Capșa obtained the pilot's License no. 4, on the 18th of July.

Similarly with the school managed by Mihail Cerchez, another achievement of the school of Cotroceni was the participation, with three Blériot aircraft, at the maneuvers executed by the army troops that had taken place in Moldova, in the fall of 1911. The School of Piloting from Cotroceni was active within the "*Army Group North, the 4th Army*

Corps" [2] and executed reconnaissance and intelligence missions in favor of the troops deployed between Roman and Pascani.

4. THE MILITARY SCHOOL OF PILOTING FROM COTROCENI

"*Based on the High Decree of 27 of March 1912*" [2], on the 1st of April, 1912, the Military School of Piloting was established, and it replaced Price Bibescu's school, under the management of Major Ion Macri. The latter had completed some courses in Paris, and, upon his return to Romania, brought to the country the project necessary for the construction of a new Farman aircraft, model of 1912.

In the month of April, 1912, the Minister of War ordered that 20 officer belonging to all army branches should be deployed to this newly founded school to learn how to fly an aircraft. The flight training of the first promotion of trainees-officers of the School of Piloting from Cotroceni took place in two stages: the former one comprised flying two-seaters Farman aircraft, under the supervision of the flight instructors – the Second Lieutenant Ștefan Protopopescu and Gheorghe Negrescu, whereas the latter implied the continuous training on Blériot airships, under the supervision of the flight instructors, the Lieutenants Mircea Zorileanu and Nicolae Capșa. the School of Piloting from Cotroceni was under the command of the Engineers and it displayed a very good organization for that time. During the first year of the school, only Lieutenant Simion Chișcăneanu managed to graduate and he was conferred the pilot's License no. 5, on the 16th of June. This fact was due to a reduction in the flight activity, after the month of June of the year 1912. The reduction in the flight intensity was partly caused by the accident of the 20th of June, when Lieutenant Simion Chișcăneanu died,

and on the other side, due to the lack of airships that broke so often that the maintenance workshops could not keep up with the repairs. The next year the school managed to have 15 pilots licensed, among whom was Sergeant Polihroniade Vacas, who had participated at the military maneuvers from the fall of the year 1911, but because of some misunderstandings he only gained his license so late.

The military school of piloting from Cotroceni trained numerous pilots. Until Romania's participation in the First World War, many of them had proved their value during the battles of the years 1916 and 1917.

5. THE FLYING SCHOOL OF THE NATIONAL AERONAUTIC LEAGUE

The fourth school of piloting mentioned by the annals of aeronautics was established in the year of 1912, from the initiative of the same enthusiast, George Valentin Bibescu, who had not given up his desire of promoting the aeronautics. Through his and other contemporary people's effort, on the 5th of May 1912 the National Air League was founded. It was meant to "*equip the Romanian Army with airplanes*" [1], fact mentioned by article 1 of the league's Charter. As a result, the collection of funds was possible in a relatively short interval of time, which allowed for a new aerodrome to be constructed at Baneasa and also for the National Aeronautic League School of Piloting to be established.

In order to equip the school, Bibescu purchased six aircraft, out of which four were Blériot monoplanes and two were Farman biplanes, afterward, he proposed to the Minister of War to agree with his training of military pilots. "*The Minister approved of his proposal..., at the same time the Minister ordered the deployment of the two flight instructors, Mircea Zorileanu and Nicolae Capșa- who had worked for the second stage at Cotroceni, and their two Blériot monoplanes to the school from Baneasa, together with the trainees that had been selected for the school from Cotroceni*".[2]

6. CONCLUSIONS & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The existence of the piloting schools, the training of the officers-pilots at these schools, as well as the successful use of airships-during the military maneuvers from 1911 and 1912-, constituted the reasons that made the Romanian authorities to approve of the law for the foundation of the Romanian military aviation. Thus, on the 1st of April, 1913, the law was voted and it granted the establishment and functioning of the MILITARY AERONAUTICS as a distinct branch of the Romanian armed forces. This law was published in the Official Record no. 15 of 20th of April, 1913 as the "*LAW FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MILITARY AERONAUTICS*" [2], whereas, for the history of the Romanian military aviation, the day of the 10th of August, 1913, when the Permanent Corps of Aeronauts was established through the High Decree no. 305, remained the most important.

In conclusion, we can state that the understanding and awareness of the component phases of the forming process of military pilots start from the identification of the historical landmarks of the Romanian school of aviation, necessary for its integration within a continuum.

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