

ART OR MORAL BOOSTING PROPAGANDA? PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE ROMANIAN BATTLEFIELD DURING THE GREAT WAR

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Abstract

During World War I in 1916 Romania sided with the Allies and the General Army Staff included professional photographers in a newly established department providing official and propaganda images. That was known as *Serviciul Fotografic al Armatei* (The Army's Photographic Department). Head of this department was appointed Lieutenant Ion Oliva, a reservist who, in his civil capacity worked as an architect. Oliva carefully chose experienced photographers to include in his team. A wide range of subjects starting with portraits of Royalty were used extensively throughout the war for propaganda purposes. Many images captured King Ferdinand reviewing the troops or decorating the braves or Queen Marie caring for the wounded soldiers in a Red Cross apron. Other topics were offered by the front line: the crude images from the trenches, cannons and machine-guns in action, soldiers cleaning and greasing their weapons, troopers washing and sewing their rugged uniforms or eating their soup hidden on the bottom of the trench, young officers relaxing and reading or playing the violin. There were also the snapshots of German prisoners and heaps of German captured helmets and other trophies such as heavy guns and ammunition, destroyed railway stations, bombed towns or villages burnt to ashes. The suffering of the enemy, became in the logic of political warfare, equal uplifting as the heroic poses of our troops in action and key to moral boosting.

It was a team effort and it is difficult to state who did what, who was the specific author of any given picture. Some of the images made their way into published magazines and into illustrated newspapers due to their art potential. But many prints were sent out to various units to the frontline to raise the troops' moral as propaganda material, when propaganda was not yet a dirty word. Going through the archive today it is not so easy to dismiss as propaganda some of these prints. Acting as a buffer between the horrors of reality and the soldier's perception of the world, many of these images are more art than mere propaganda and would be difficult for any curator to draw a clear line.

Keywords: war photography, propaganda, art photography, The Great War, Ion Oliva

The era of picture taking as a specialized and niche domain that marked the dawn of photography in the 19th century – beginning with the Crimean War and ending with the Boer War – was long gone by 1900s. And the use of photography was to conquer the public domain and to enter the popular culture during the Great War. By now many officers and even privates had a camera in their kit and more importantly knew how to use it, not only for intelligence purposes but to photograph themselves in uniform or catch glimpses of places and people they came across during the long campaigns. In truth these were private images destined mainly for the family albums. And only later – many a times after the author was long gone and therefore without his acknowledgment and approval – such images got the chance to enter a public collection or illustrate a paper that documented and treasured the military past.

Apart from the occasional photo amateurs, each army had at least a professional unit commissioned to record and document their country at war. Their given mission was to assemble and build an image of WWI useful to the war effort and the moral boosting propaganda and also to document WWI for pure historic reasons.

Lately this valuable iconography – captured both by amateurs and professionals – caught the eye of the researchers and became the subject of various and sometimes extensive publications. Their common ground was to reveal – as objectively as possible – via the eye witness language of the photography, the dramatic reality of the Great War. In the second decade of the 20th century this war ravished for ever the quasi peaceful, opulent, cheerful and elegant society of the end of the 19th century, aptly labeled *La Belle Époque*. The old order as we used to know it vanished into thin air. Bodo von Dewitz, the reputed photography historian and former Director of Agfa Foto-Historama in Cologne, chose this subject for his Ph.D. thesis and later published the paper under the title: „*So wird bei uns der Krieg geführt!*” – *Amateurfotografie im Ersten Weltkrieg*.¹

¹ Bodo von Dewitz, „*So wird bei uns der Krieg geführt!*” – *Amateurfotografie im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Tudur-Studien, München, 1989.

In *Photographies de poilus. Soldats photographes au coeur de la Grande Guerre*², Frédéric Lacaille analyses in depth the snapshots taken on the battlefield and even attempts to organize and classify the different genres. Richard Holmes produces a whole catalogue dedicated to this subject, *The First World War in Photographs*.³ In *From the Front: The Story of War*⁴, a comprehensive study about war correspondents, Michael S. Sweeney dedicates a whole chapter to WWI imagery. Not to forget to mention Nick Yapp and his monumental *150 Years of Photo Journalism*⁵ where he allocates a fitted space to war photography covering this crucial moment of the contemporary history. In *War Photography*, a pocket volume from the *Photographie at the Musée d'Orsay* series, Joëlle Bolloch focuses also on the photography of the Great War.⁶ A chapter is dedicated to the world conflict in the album *A Century of War*, with its French edition, *Photographies de guerre*.⁷

In 2008, to celebrate ninety years since the Armistice, France published the *Almanach 1918*⁸ that brought to light the rich collection that lay largely unknown in the archive of Sections Photographique et Cinématographique de l'Armée Française (The Photo and Film Sections of the French Army). This publication was a seminal editorial event, a real template of how to assess the photographic archives with all the necessary indexes and references, paving the way for future academics and researchers to access identifiable images with accuracy (a cataloguing technique that unfortunately others did not take the trouble to emulate). Wolfgang Hanne in *Das deutsche Heer in Feldgrau 1907-1918*⁹ takes a bird's eye view of the German soldier in his field dress. The topic gives the author a splendid pretext to unearth a treasure trove of both studio and battlefield photography and to add some splendid comments to go with the still and the front line action images. Jozef Vričan produced a comprehensive monograph about the Austro-Hungarian campaign in Italy, *Po zapadlých stopách českých vojáků. Z Julských Alp k Jadranu*¹⁰ lavishly illustrated with pictures taken on both sides, thus covering two different points of view upon the same war. In 2013 were published two very important works: *1914-1918 in Bildern*¹¹ by Josef Rietveld, covering the Austro-Hungarian campaigns, and the monumental volume *The Great War*¹² edited by Mark Holborn, with texts and chronology by Hilary Roberts, focused on the British participation to the armed conflict.

We are fortunate to have some Romanian works on this topic too. Constantin Stoianovici talks about the input the Photo Department of the Army had in collecting frontline records during the Oriental War of 1877 – which was Romania's Independence War –, the Second Balkan War of 1913 and WWI, in his paper entitled *Fotografia, mijloc de reflectare a războiului*¹³ (Photography, a Way to Illustrate the War). Cristina Constantin and Luminița Iordache organized in 2008 at the National Military Museum „King Ferdinand I” in Bucharest the exhibition: “War Snapshots 1916-1918” that was accompanied by a richly illustrated bilingual (Romanian and English) catalogue.¹⁴ The volume *La Grand Guerre. Histoire et mémoire collective en France et en Roumanie*¹⁵, edited by Christophe Prochasson and Florin Țurcanu, does not dedicate a special chapter to the war photography, but it does it justice by including a rich iconography from the Romanian front line and the rear, taken by both professionals and gifted amateurs. A less known campaign of about 5,000 Romanian prisoners of war in Russia who volunteered for the Allied Expeditionary Corps, constituting the Romanian Legion of Siberia in Irkutsk, is documented and presented with a fabulous iconography in the album *Corpul voluntarilor români din Siberia (1918-1920)* (The Romanian Volunteer Corps of Siberia 1918-1920)¹⁶, by Ioana Rustoiu, Gabriel Rustoiu and Smaranda Cutean.

² Frédéric Lacaille, *Photographies de poilus. Soldats photographes au coeur de la Grande Guerre*, Paris, 2004.

³ Richard Holmes, *The First World War in Photographs*, London, 2007.

⁴ Michael S. Sweeney, *From the Front: The Story of War*, National Geographic, Washington, D.C., 2002, p. 117-148.

⁵ Nick Yapp, *150 Years of Photo Journalism*, Köln, 1995, vol. I, p. 364-409.

⁶ Bolloch, Joëlle, *War Photography*, Paris, 2004, p. 15-17.

⁷ Sam Hudson (editor), *Photographies de guerre*, Paris, 2002, p. 116-147.

⁸ Violaine Challéat-Fonck, Magdalena Mazaraki, David Sbrava, Constance Lemans, *Almanach 1918*, Établissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense, Ivry-sur-Seine, 2008.

⁹ Wolfgang Hanne, *Das deutsche Heer in Feldgrau 1907-1918*, Verlag Militaria, Vienna, 2009.

¹⁰ Jozef Vričan, *Po zapadlých stopách českých vojáků. Z Julských Alp k Jadranu*, Olomouc, 2008.

¹¹ Josef Rietveld, *1914-1918 in Bildern/in pictures/en images/per immagini*, Institut für historische Bildforschung, Wien, 2013.

¹² Mark Holborn (editor), Hilary Roberts (texts and chronology), *The Great War*, Jonsthan Cape, London, 2013.

¹³ Constantin Stoianovici, *Fotografia, mijloc de reflectare a războiului*, in „Document” nr. 2 (20)/2003, p. 59-61

¹⁴ Cristina Constantin, Luminița Iordache, *Instantanee de război/World War I in Photographs 1916-1918*, Buzău, 2008.

¹⁵ Christophe Prochasson et Florin Țurcanu (coordonateurs), *La Grand Guerre. Histoire et mémoire collective en France et en Roumanie*, New Europe College – Institut d'études avancées, Bucarest, 2010.

¹⁶ Ioana Rustoiu, Gabriel Rustoiu, Smaranda Cutean, *Corpul voluntarilor români din Siberia (1918-1920)*, Baia Mare, 2010.

A Photographic Department was not a novelty for the Romanian Army in 1916. The Special Task Battalion had already employed photographers to record specific events and covered the necessary iconography for different units during the maneuvers.

When Romania joined the Allies in the Great War effort it became obvious that photography had to play a greater role and a special unit would be better placed to report directly to the Army General Headquarters. The pressure to make a decision mounted when the General Headquarters received requests from the allied countries to document the freshly deployed Romanian army on the battlefield and therefore to allow access to foreign photographers on the Romanian home front. One of these requests came to the War Department on 30th August 1916 from the director of The Sport & General Press Agency in London and, by courtesy was written in French: „Au cas où vous n’auriez pas encore nommé vos propres photographes officiels, nous nous ferions un plaisir, si vous le désirez, d’envoyer, pour nous procurer ces photographies, notre propre Représentant qui se mettrait aux ordres du Ministère de la Guerre de Roumanie.”¹⁷

A similar request was made by The Film Bureau, on 13th of September 1916¹⁸ asking permission to send in a cameraman to film the home front. Both requests were denied, as it is specified in the notice No. 835/17 September 1916, „(...) it is not possible for the time being to allow visiting access to the battlefield.”¹⁹

In order to meet the demands for recording the campaign, the photographic units of the Special Tasks Battalion were put together (see Order 1014/29 November 1916)²⁰ in a single department, that became known as Serviciul Fotografic al Armatei (The Army's Photographic Department). That new department was under the supervision of the Intelligence Bureau of the General Headquarters. Head of this department was appointed Lieutenant Ion Oliva, an officer of the reserves who, in his civil capacity worked as an architect. Ion Oliva was born in Bucharest in 1888. He did his military service in the Corps of Engineers, first on the 5th Sappers Battalion and, afterwards on the Citadel Sappers Battalion. He was promoted second lieutenant (reserve) on 16th October 1914 by High Decree 3331.²¹ He was called to arms on 17th November 1914, only to be postponed to January 1915; Oliva does not respond to the second call and was declared insubordinate, see Order of the Day no 51/13 February 1915.²² We can only conclude that this misdemeanor was overlooked by the senior officers because, on 27th October 1916, we find Oliva moving up from the Citadel Sappers Battalion to the Special Tasks Battalion (according to General Order No. 1312) and overtaking The Army's Photographic Department (see Order of the Day no 682/1916). More, by High Royal Decree No 150 from 8th March 1917 he is promoted first lieutenant with one year in service from 1st November 1916.²³

On 2nd of January 1917 – while the country was in dramatic turmoil, Bucharest being occupied by Germans while the Romanian Army, the General Staff and the Government retreated to Moldavia – Oliva addressed a Memo to the General Headquarters for highlighting the targets his Department had to meet and the envisaged methods he wanted to apply in order to achieve them.

When taking pictures the photographers had to bear in mind certain goals. The images had to have propagandistic value as well as to be historically and artistically meaningful and respond to military purposes.²⁴ What exactly Oliva meant by these goals is then explained and meticulously detailed: crucial for the propagandistic message were the parades' photos, the images of prisoners of war, as well as the field artillery stock, the Corps of engineers or the aviation capabilities, etc., than scenes showing the ambulance services and supply chains running smoothly inducing the idea of abundance and good management and implicitly “the Army's moral and material might”. Equally important was to document the damages the enemy inflicted on towns and villages, especially on the civil or religious buildings. These had to be captured from different angles “to allow later the accurate reconstruction in keeping with the original”.²⁵ It came normal to Oliva, as an architect to think ahead of the reconstruction or restoration of the edifices that were damaged by the war. He also envisaged an historic archive with war related images: the trenches, the enemy's lines and deployment, the charges, the battlefield after engagements, the food and ammunition supply bases, etc.

¹⁷ Arhivele Militare Române, Ministerul de Război – Secretariat General, dosar 94, f. 521.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 520.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 518, 522.

²⁰ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Marele Stat Major, Secția 2 Informații, dosar 472, f. 286.

²¹ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Direcția Cadre și Învățământ, Memorii Bătrâni, litera O, căpitani, dosar 17, f. 2.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Marele Stat Major, Secția 2 Informații, dosar 472, f. 286.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

Oliva's department consisted of professionals picked up from different units were they've got conscripted at the beginning of the war. The idea was that they could prove more useful to the Special Task Battalion than left to serve in their combat units and be sacrificed on the front line. Each of them had to perform a specific task: for instance there were two photographers allocated to each service branch, "armed" with a camera and a designated quantity of negatives. Once exposed, the negatives had to be counted and securely packed in boxes and sent back by special courier to the Photographic Department to be developed on a three days basis. The photographers had to attach to their boxes of negatives a very thoroughly written memo addressed to their superior. In order to circulate freely on the battleground and not to fear being confused with spies, arrested and sent in front of a court-martial, the cameramen were to wear all the time a special pass with their picture to identify themselves.

At the other end, the laboratory assistants were dealing with the negatives by developing and copying them as soon as they were received. The standard format was established at 13 x 18 cm per each copy. The same assistants had to transfer the number of the negative to the back of the positive copy together with the afferent caption. Such a copy would then go to the archive and then classified according to the subject or to the location. Some images would end up in photographic albums, some would stick to the files with all the accompanying specifications.

It was only in the last paragraph of his memo that second lieutenant Oliva mentioned the film unit and the fact that the cameramen had to follow the same regulations as the photographers. Oliva thoughtfully suggested that any foreign cameramen sent on the battlefield by various film companies from abroad to be bound to develop their footage at the Army's Photographic Department. Thus, the department could keep a watchful eye on any foreign documentaries made in our war zone. Oliva also suggested the forbiddance of any photographic or filming activity on the home front without the special consent of the General Headquarters.²⁶ This was most probably directed to the amateurs who brought along their own cameras to the combat zones. Two pages were attached to this memo and they included the names of the Army's Photographic Department personnel signed and approved by lieutenant colonel Nicolae Condeescu, head of the Intelligence Bureau: apart from the group commander Oliva, there were two sergeants Ștefan Mladenovici and Nicolae Cristea, both cameramen, a number of privates like Nicolae Țațu (cameraman and retouch assistant), Ion D. Viță (laboratory assistant) and Sami Fucs (archive and laboratory assistant), and volunteer soldiers like Constantin Ivanovici, Ion Devizon and Emil Prato, who were in charge of the film section.²⁷

The film section was a novelty among the military special tasks. About a year and eight months ago, on 15 May 1915, Leon Popescu – who had become famous as the author of the first docu-drama Romanian movie launched in 1912, „The Independence of Romania” – offered his services to the War Department. It is to be mentioned that Popescu firstly volunteered his services to the Army in 1913, during the Balkan War and was granted access to film the Bulgarian campaign for posterity. In 1915 Leon Popescu would address a new craftily worded request to the War Department: „In view of the imminent events, I would highly appreciate if you would renew my filming license and kindly consider, for reason of discretion and national interest to grant me exclusive rights. I represent the only Romanian company, with solely Romanian personnel, possess all the technical equipment and a considerable experience. If you authorize and grant me exclusivity I will keep at your Department disposal all the personnel of my enterprise with all the necessary equipment and promise not to develop or distribute any film without being firstly submitted to the military censorship body to be vetted.”²⁸ The War Department asked for the General Staff's opinion regarding the opportunity of granting such a request. Generalul Vasile Zottu, in his capacity of Chief of the General Staff, agreed to Leon Popescu's offer but made some suggestions regarding the personnel and the *modus operandi* of the team: the cameramen should be exclusively Romanians and only in exceptional cases such as the absence of a certain specialist to take on a foreigner that could be fully accepted by the General Staff only after the Secret Service would check on him; the war zones that would be licensed to be filmed had to be specified by the Military Censorship Bureau and the cameramen's activity supervised by an officer; same bureau was later to distribute the film only after seeing it. It was suggested for the filming crew not to be allowed in any combat zone in the first stage of the engagement. Only at a later stage, commonly agreed between the Censorship Bureau and the General Headquarters they would be allowed to start filming or

²⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 287.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 289.

²⁸ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Ministerul de Război – Secretariat General, dosar 79, f. 28.

taking stills. It was also stipulated that “in the military interest, [cinematographers] would have to take photos of different military positions”. Therefore apart from the filming activity, the filming teams had to take stills too like the photographers, and gather, if needed, images to illustrate and historically document the war. General Dumitru Iliescu gave his stamp of approval on this memo.

But on 23rd of June 1916, the War Department issued the Order No. 1445 and circulated it among all the civil and military authorities stipulating that: “cameraman Mihalache Lăzărescu is fully authorized to accompany the machine gun section of the 2nd Mountain Troops Battalion, the «Queen Elisabeta’s Own», during the marches and activities this section is ordered to perform in the mountains.”²⁹

As is obvious from above, at the beginning of the Great War, the army had already assembled its own filming service without having to resort to Leon Popescu’s services.

During the Great War the Army Photo and Cinematographic Department had an intense activity with remarkable results all along. This could be easily proved by the substantial iconographic material held in various museums and photo libraries. The film footages was better known and thoroughly studied till now – being more spectacular and with a more immediate appeal when projected in either civil or army settings³⁰ – than the photo documents, which by nature of the medium had a more limited exposure. Unfortunately the whole 1917 archive is missing or has not been traced yet - and we miss vital information regarding the orders and missions performed following in the footsteps of different army branches to different war locations, telling details about requests for supplies and/or equipment, difficulties and shortcomings that the photographers had to face. It is only from 1918 that we have documents about the activity of this Department.

In the spring of 1918, Ion Oliva – who had been promoted (by the Royal Decree No. 345/1st September 1917) to the rank of Captain – was to be sent from Jassy to Bucharest, together with private Constantin Ivanovici, one of the cameraman. In that period, the capital city was still under German occupation. Consequently, the two need special passes to travel on enemy territory. In Memo No. 120/10th of April 1918, Colonel Nicolae Condeescu, their commander, requested the Department of the Interior to provide those passes.³¹ Only 20 days later, Captain Oliva was to be released from duty at his request dated 25th April 1918, by the Royal Decree No 1010/1st of May 1918.³² He was to be replaced, from 1st of May, by Lieutenant Sava Georgescu, also an officer with the Corps of Engineers and some experience with the Photographic Department.³³

By 8th of May 1918 the new commander was already presenting a Memo detailing the activity of the department in figures: 76 negatives from the battlefield with the First Army in Wallachia, 84 negatives with the Second Army in Moldavia, 48 negatives with the Army of the North which fought both in Transylvania and Moldavia – all taken during the first part of the campaign – 5,000 negatives from the second part of the campaign and 5,273 m of footage, while another 1,806 m of unprocessed film were in Paris.³⁴ From this enumeration it is obvious that, in the first part of the Romanian confrontation with the enemy, when the Photographic Department was not yet methodically organized, there were taken fewer pictures than in the remaining part of the conflict. The subjects covered by these images were: infantry troops, artillery, navy, ambulance service, war correspondents, ammunition stocks, prisoners’ camps, official visits, celebrations, snapshots from within the country. The commander mentioned that all negatives and all footages were clearly labeled specifying the date, the place and the topic covered. Colonel Condeescu, the commander of the Intelligence Bureau, concluded on the same page with the suggestion to log the material with the Historic Bureau of the Army in order to be catalogued. At a later stage, when more funds will be available, the photos should be printed and sold and the money raised should be used for charitable causes. The funds raised from distributing and screening the war films should serve the same purposes. To mention the Photographic Department had previously cashed 55,000 lei from similar commercial enterprise during the military campaign and the money were safely deposited with the Intelligence Bureau. Colonel Condeescu officially suggested the Quartermaster should supervise the management of this fond and its redistribution. Privately

²⁹ *Ibidem*, f. 189.

³⁰ Viorel Domenico, *Scutul de celuloid*, București, 1991; Idem, *Cinematografia militară*, în „Document” nr. 2. (20)/2003, p. 55-58; Viorel Domenico, Marian Țuțui, *Armata și cinematografia*, in Amiral prof. univ. dr. Gheorghe Marin (coordonator), *Enciclopedia Armatei Române*, București, 2009, p. 1234-1235, 1237-1238.

³¹ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Marele Cartier General, dosar 2440, f. 35.

³² *Ibidem*, f. 80.

³³ *Ibidem*, f. 79.

³⁴ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Ministerul de Război – Secretariat General, dosar 167, f. 48.

Colonel Condeescu suggested the money should better reach the Historic Bureau and be used to capitalize on the existing iconography helping to edit and publish the images into photo-albums or to multiply the moving pictures and make them available for screening; this way they should continue to benefit the army coffers. General Constantin Christescu, the Chief of the General Staff, approved the proposal. On 5th of June 1918 the 3rd Historic Bureau draws an inventory of the Photographic Department's available stock and classifies it into two categories: a) albums of catalogued photos and positive films footage with war action; b) still negatives, film negatives, cameras or other devices. As expected, the first category's inventory is recognized as useful and goes to the Historic Bureau while the second category remains under the jurisdiction and management of the Special Tasks Battalion. It follows that Lieutenant Georgescu is to be transferred to the 3rd Historic Bureau, thus enabling him to continue his job of photo identification. His position will be occupied by captain Zagoritz, still a war prisoner at the time of the appointment.³⁵ General Christescu accepts and approves all proposals.

In response to General Staff Memo No. 1513 of 25th January 1919, the head of the War Department, General Arthur Văitoianu, decides on 14th February 1919, to move the Photo-Cinematographic Department (notice the first time use of photo and cinematographic in one breath when naming the department) – under the umbrella of the IVth Corps of Engineers Department, Section 1, Bureau 1, starting with 25th of February (Ministerial Decision 50/14 February 1919).³⁶

On 25th March 1919, the Quartermaster sent an urgent address (No. 66236) to the IVth Corps of Engineers Department, Section 1, Bureau 1, asking Lieutenant Sava Georgescu to deposit immediately all the funds resulted from hiring out the movies and from selling the photos.³⁷ Lieutenant Georgescu executed the order the very next day and Major Petre Mateescu, the department's accountant was able to report to the General Quartermaster Ștefan Stanciovi, the amount deposited: a receipt from the Jassy Fiscal Authority for 82.000 lei and 3.204,61 lei in cash.³⁸

As mentioned before, no documents survived about the Department's activity during the 1917 campaign. But we could get an idea about the difficulties Captain Ion Oliva faced during his missions and the tasks this well regarded soldier did accomplish if we read the notes made by his superiors on his file: „(...) The Photographic Section, later to become Photo and Cinematographic Department was well managed by this highly skilled and devoted officer. A specialist in this field he was most instrumental in capturing documents of war as well as in rendering propaganda services. If the output of this Department was not greater than the input, this was due to the lack of supplies and of transport facilities; Captain Oliva put a lot of heart into expanding the work of his department but his wings were clipped by these serious shortcomings.

His initiative and skills benefited largely the organization of the war screenings at movie theatres all over the country. This initiative served well both the moral boosting propaganda and the fundraising for charities like «The Society of War Invalids» or «The Society of War Orphans». Both in his official and private capacity he proved a good companion, compassionate and well educated. Physically fit, Oliva proved well endowed and apt to endure all the hardship of the Campaign. His duty saw Oliva often on the front line; mostly when he accompanied HM King Ferdinand during HM inspections on the front line. Captain Oliva raised well to the occasion every time.

For his war activity Ion Oliva was awarded: a) the Crown of Romania Order with swords b) Queen Maria Order, Second Class.³⁹

This flattering characterization was undersigned by Colonel Nicolae Condeescu – Oliva's direct supervising commander – and by General Alexandru Lupescu, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff. In a Memo addressed on 6th of March 1918 to the VIIth Bureau for Decorations and Awards of the General Staff to request Queen Maria Order, General Lupescu highlighted Captain Oliva's contribution along Colonel Condeescu, Lieutenant Colonel Virgil Bianu and Captain Alexandru Eladescu (Quartermaster) to the founding of the “War Invalids” Movie Theatre in Jassy in July 1917 and mentioned that in less than a year that institution cashed in a substantial amount (745.313,30 lei) only to be redistributed as relief aid to war wounded and orphans.⁴⁰

³⁵ *Ibidem*, f. 46.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 191.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, f. 209.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, f. 210.

³⁹ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Direcția Cadre și Învățământ, Memorii Bătrâni, litera O, căpitani, dosar 17, f. 5-6.

⁴⁰ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Statul Major General, Biroul Decorații, dosar 98, f. 9.

From the brief information incorporated in the file it transpires that the Army Photo-Cinematographic Department experienced a shortage of supplies and transport vehicles that jeopardized their activity and hindered the gathering of a larger portfolio of images. For Oliva to be near HM King Ferdinand more often than not was an occupational hazard, mainly when the King would inspect the front line or would take part in a ceremony. This explains the vast amount of snapshots where the King reviews the troops (Fig. 1), awards medals and orders to soldiers who proved themselves brave in fighting the enemy (Fig. 2, 3) or to whole units by pinning the medal to the flag (Fig. 4), surveys the positions (Fig. 5), confers with his generals while they study the maps and the battle plans (Fig. 6) or talks to the high ranking officers from the French Mission (Fig. 7). In some frames the King is accompanied by Queen Maria (Fig. 8), quite often dressed in her trademark Red Cross albeit white nurse uniform that the sovereign wore constantly during the war. At many ceremonies one could see also Queen Maria attaching her own order on a brave soldier's chest (Fig. 9, 10). The Queen was also present in the middle of the soldiers in their hour of need, in the military hospitals (Fig. 11) and her presence as "Mother of the Wounded" would be an enduring image captured by professionals and amateurs alike see for instance the caption of an image taken in a typhus camp: „photo amateur Henry Ginsberg". The "Mother of the Wounded" turned into an icon which was copied by photographers while having more modest models such as a sister of mercy posing in the act of reading to a hospitalized soldier (Fig. 12). King Ferdinand visited sometimes the ambulance and friendly talked with the wounded officers trying to give them courage and hope in a soon recovery (Fig. 13).

In another frame we can see the Queen visiting the American Mission of the Red Cross, surrounded by military surgeons, nurses and nuns from the local monastery, all tending to the wounded (Fig. 14). We can also see Colonel Henry W. Anderson, the Commander of the American Mission of the Red Cross present in Romania between 1917-1919, paying his respects to the Queen and kneeling on one knee not far from Her Majesty. Another picture captures Colonel Anderson sitting at his desk and proudly wearing the white cross of Queen Maria Order that he had been rewarded with, around his neck. On the wall behind him there is a Romanian carpet as a background for a panel with a portrait of Queen Maria, dated and dedicated to the colonel – excellent clue that we are in 1919 (Fig. 15). The large American Mission is captured in the same year spread cleverly on the steps and at the foot of the hospital stairs while American and the Red Cross banners are displayed on the hand-rails. Surgeons and female nurses dressed up in their uniforms: man's jackets and ties, hats with large brims, all surrounding their commander, Colonel Anderson.

General Henri Mathias Berthelot, the Commander of the French Mission would be often present at such ceremonies, giving himself decorations in the name of his Government (Fig. 16). A larger than life figure, dressed in campaign uniform, but with a parade red kepi embroidered with golden thread, General Berthelot would attach the order personally and embrace the rewarded soldiers (Fig. 17). The skilful general was always surrounded with friendliness and respect by his subordinates, both French and Romanian (Fig. 18).

There are also images where the Royal Family and their guests are relaxing; for instance the one where the sovereign is captured with the young princess Ileana and prince Nicolae (dressed as a boy scout) among British Army officers like Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Birdwood Thompson, the UK Military Attaché and the Canadian Colonel Joseph Boyle (Fig. 19). Thompson is present also in another shot towering over a Russian officer and some Romanian friends, surgeons and staff officers (Fig. 20). In other photos the Queen is accompanied by General Eremia Grigorescu, in Moldavia. It is a telling contrast between the Queen's white garment and the sad unwedded landscape of the upper bank of the Siret River: her white statuesque figure having at her feet a vivid black spaniel cocker offered a rewarding composition for the photographer (Fig. 21).

Joe Boyle is often present in Queen Maria and her children's entourage. With his instructive but funny games, slight naughtiness and presents meant to cheer up the children in difficult circumstances, Boyle became a sort of surrogate uncle always ready to protect and comfort. He never stopped to marvel the children with his wise guidance and story telling from the Klondike gold rush era. A photo with remarkable artistic qualities captures Boyle in the process of shooting his little friend, Princess Ileana with a big camera, in the garden of a country lodge at Bicaz, a Royal summer retreat (Fig. 22). As hazard has it, the picture Boyle took of Princess Ileana was recovered and shows a suave little girl almost covered up by two huge tulip stems (Fig. 23). To catch an amateur photographer the very moment that he was framing his subject and was ready to shoot, was a fortunate but isolated case. There are some of those pictures invested with artistic qualities.

Besides official photos, that means those depicting solemnities attended by commanding officers and the Royal Family, which had to follow special compositional requirements, there were others more freely approached, uninhibited by the presence of high positioned characters.



Fig. 1. King Ferdinand followed by General Constantin Prezan and Prince Carol reviewing the troops, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 2. King Ferdinand congratulating an officer after a medals' awarding ceremony, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 3. King Ferdinand decorating a brave soldier who distinguished himself during the Battle of Mărășești, 2 August 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 4. King Ferdinand decorating a regimental flag, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 5. King Ferdinand surveying the trenches, Oituz Valley, 15 July 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 6. King Ferdinand (seated) discussing the battle plans with General Alexandru Averescu (standing in the middle) and other officers, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 7. King Ferdinand (studying a map) with the French Mission; in the middle: the Romanian Prime Minister Ion I.C. Bratianu, General Henri M. Berthelot and French Minister Albert Thomas, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 8. King Ferdinand and Queen Marie talking with soldiers who distinguished themselves in the Battle of Cireșoia, Târgu Ocna, 30 August 1917, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 9. Queen Maria decorating a brave soldier; she was accompanied by General Alexandru Averescu, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 10. Queen Maria decorating a hero; King Ferdinand and Prince Carol in the foreground, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 11. Queen Maria as “Mother of the Wounded” reading to a hospitalized soldier, National History Museum of Romania.

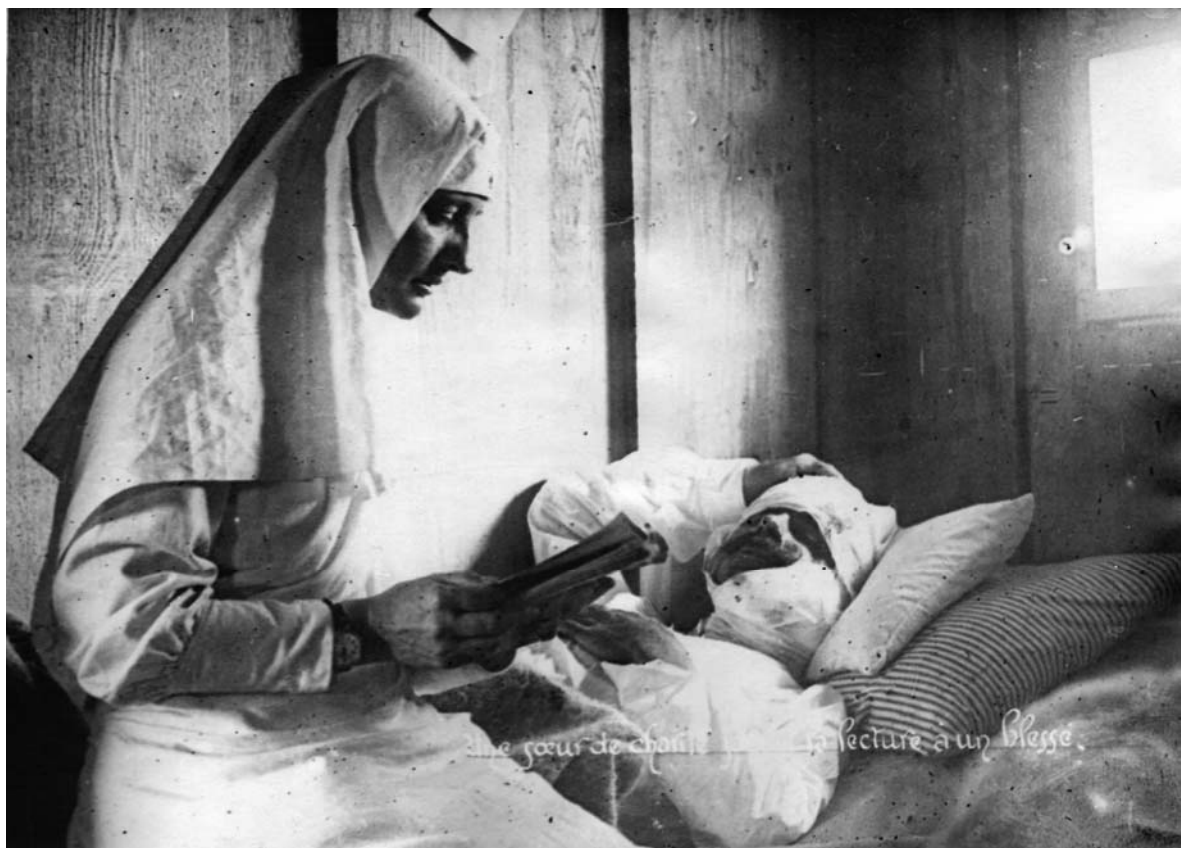


Fig. 12. A Sister of Mercy reading to a wounded soldier, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 13. King Ferdinand visiting an ambulance, 23 August 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 14. Queen Maria with Colonel Henry W. Anderson (kneeling) at the American Red Cross, 1919, Romania's National Archives.



Fig. 15. Colonel Henry W. Anderson, Commander of the American Red Cross in Romania, 1919, Romania's National Archives.



Fig. 16. General Henri M. Berthelot awarding the Légion d'Honneur to General Arthur Văitoianu and other generals, Onești, 19 June 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 17. General Henri M. Berthelot embracing a decorated high ranking officer, 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 18. General Henri M. Berthelot among French and Romanian staff officers, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 19. Queen Maria among a group of British officers; the tallest officer is Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Birdwood Thompson (middle) while in the far right is Colonel Joseph Boyle, Jassy, 7 March 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 20. Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Birdwood Thompson among Russian and Romanian comrades, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 21. Queen Maria on the borders of the Siret River, 7 August 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 22. Colonel Joseph Boyle photographing Princess Ileana, private collection.



Fig. 23. Princess Ileana as portrayed by Colonel Joseph Boyle, private collection.

Identifying the subject proves easier sometimes than identifying the photographers; it was a collective activity of the Photographic team and it is almost impossible to attribute a certain photo to a certain cameraman active in the Department. We can only notice some differences regarding the quality of the images: some are too pale, fading away, some are less skillfully framed, some lack clarity, in some the characters are out of focus or overlapping. The less than ideal results were due to the weather conditions, not always favorable and to the tense atmosphere on the battle ground, many a times under enemy fire or in rapidly changing circumstances that the photo-technology of the time could not keep up with. The photographers risked their lives more than once while taking pictures in trenches. Such a picture shows a machine-gun in action while a shell bursts not far in front of it. As long as there was no zoom in that period, it is obvious that the photographer was just behind the machine-gunners (Fig. 24). In another snapshot is shown a spectacular explosion produced by engineers in order to open a military road (Fig. 25).

The war horrors, the destructions inflicted by the enemy and the brutal treatment of the civil population were sure bet in the war propaganda, with immediate effect. Images with demolitions after battles get into this category with propagandistic value: The bombed warehouse in Tecuci on 20th of July 1917; Houses from Târgu Ocna destroyed by the 10th of August 1917 shelling; Mărășești in ruins, 15th of August 1917 (Fig. 26); Destroyed railways at Mărășești, 10th of December 1917. There is a picture with a ruined house taken on an unidentified place where the sun penetrated through debris giving an aura to the burnet walls and beams (Fig. 27).



Fig. 24. Machine-gun and bursting shell, Mărăști, 28 August 1917, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 25. Explosion, Cristești, 20 December 1917, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 26. Ruins at Mărășești, Romania's National Archives.



Fig. 27. Sun through debris, National History Museum of Romania.

The trenches from Bălărețu village are taken on 23rd of January 1918 like diving in (Fig. 28). Another very daring photo, from a surprising angle was the remains of the Cozmești Bridge: the metal structure, not broken yet dangles completely unsafe over the Siret River. It's surreal how some officers and a chaplain are posing where the Bridge reaches the Romanian occupied side, ignoring the danger. Two compositions have a sense of greatness in their apprehensive quietness: that is the barbed wire over the Siret River (Fig. 29) and the desolate landscape surrounding the front line at Movilenii de Sus, both overwhelming in solitude (Fig. 30).

The war spoils were signs of war victories and a moral booster for the troops: a bunch of German helmets and tins piled on the ground at Coțofenești, were photographed on 1st July 1917 (Fig. 31); crates with ammunition and shells of 150 mm, packed in basketwork, captured at Mărăști, on 25th July 1917, as well as heavy guns captured also at Mărăști on 30th of July, stocked on freight train platforms; and a group of unshaved, rough and confused prisoners of war observed by a little baffled Romanian officer that was passing by (Fig. 32), all these were images with a strong, unmistakable message, easy to grasp by the viewer.

The images with Romanian troops in action were intended to be proof of their bravery and efficiency. These rich series of photos were aimed equally to the military men in the trenches and the civilians back home, who had to trust the army as unflinchingly defending them. Some were carelessly captured, like routine documents, rather dry and aloof: marching units, transport of supplies, building of a shelter (Fig. 33), soldiers in trenches, clusters of machine-guns, artillery ready to fire, units' headquarters – like that from Piscul Hulubelor where the building was camouflaged with branches and young trees resembling more a forester's hut than a military post (Fig. 34) –, food preparing and food serving, removal of the wounded, makeshift ambulance (Fig. 35), soldiers relaxing. While picturing military men, the photographer was still indebted to studio portraits' rules of posing, no matter if he took it inside a cabin or in the open (Fig. 36).

In truth the photographers had to hurry all the time in order to cover all the jobs they were commissioned to in any given war zone and had to balance the quality versus the quantity and the efficiency of sending back the documents to their unit in time. And more often than not they were in the trenches and their life was as much in danger as the combatant soldiers they were taking pictures of.

But one could also spot some exceptionally beautiful snapshots, of high artistic value where the artist would invest emotionally and would prove to be visually educated – alas he would remain unknown to us today, his name lost among this collective work.

Sometimes an unusual subject would present itself on a plate and would not stretch a bit the fantasy of the photographer. As for instance the Field Telephone in a tree where the operator is in a very uncomfortable position hanging of the leafless branches, his figure cutting a spot of color on the white of the snow.

Sometimes the effect was the result of the author's inspiration and his eye for turning the banal into artistic. An inspiring picture is "*Observation post*" (Fig. 37). Here a soldier mounts the steps of a rudimentary and very steep ladder to reach the observer's platform up on a tree; the sunshine penetrates through the rich green crown of the tree. "*The telephone operator hidden in the hollow of the tree*" (Fig. 38) slightly resonates with the 1874 "*Merlin getting out of a hollow*" of the British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, image made to illustrate the poetry opus "*Idylls of the King*" by Alfred Tennyson.³⁹ A soldier asleep in the trenches embracing his rifle tightly to his chest, his head in the helmet propped on a slight curve of the ground illustrates the harsh life of a combat trooper that has to take advantage of any peaceful moment to restore his strength (*Resting in the trenches, Verdeia 1917*). Often such photos inspire legitimate compassion for the humble, unnamed soldier on the front line: "*Soldiers eating in front of their tent*" (Fig. 39) or "*Soldier eating on the front line, Dealul Porcului 1917*" (Fig. 40), presents infantrymen with their kit worn out and incomplete (peasant sandals instead of boots, woolen stockings of different colors on each foot) sipping the soup from the tin, sitting down in the middle of a fight devastated terrain, among weeds and chopped tree trunks. In the last one depicting a lonely soldier on a deserted field, the shot was taken using a slightly mounting view and so the poor peasant-turned-fighter, projected on the bare surroundings, got a monumental dimension which is quite touching in its statuary greatness. Another picturesque snapshot is that showing two kneeling soldiers packing a knapsack in the open (Fig. 41).

³⁹ Victoria C. Olsen, *From Life. Julia Margaret Cameron and Victorian Photography*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, P. 221-241; Colin Ford, *Julia Margaret Cameron, 19th Century Photographer of Genius*, London, 2003, p. 71-72.

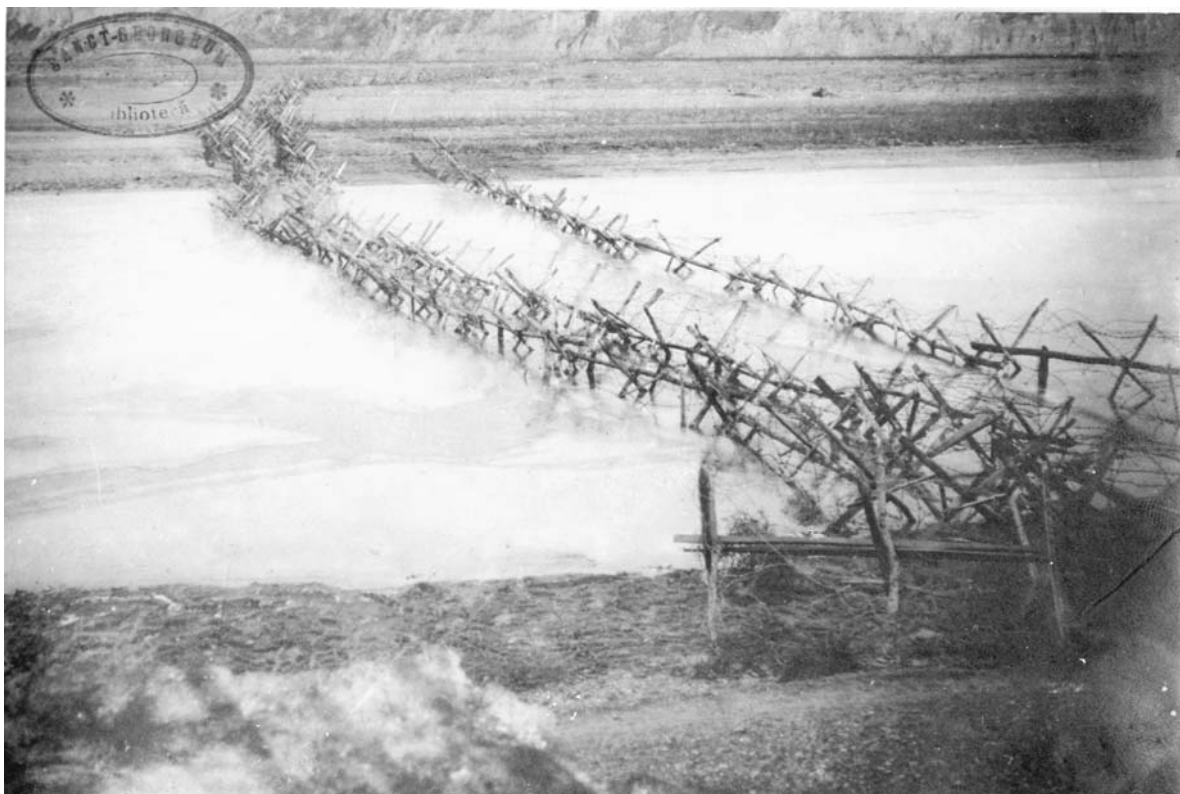


Fig. 28. Barbed wire over the Siret River, Cosmești, 23 February 1917, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 29. Second line of trenches at Băltărețu, 23 January 1918, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 30. The front line, Movileni, 15 January 1918, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 31. Captured German helmets, Coțofenești, 1 July 1917, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 32. German prisoners after the Battle of Mărășești, August 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 33. Dugouts of the 19th Infantry Regiment, Fitionești, 15 October 1917, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 34. Battalion headquarters at Piscul Hulubelor, Movileni, 8 February 1918, National Library of Romania.



Fig. 35. Ambulance, Cașin Valley, National Military Museum „King Ferdinand I”.



Fig. 36. A general surrounded by his officers, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 37. Observation post on a tree, Cașin Valley, 15 August 1916, Romania's National Archives.



Fig. 38. Telephone operator on a hollowed tree, National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I".



Fig. 39. Soldiers eating in front of their tent, National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I".



Fig. 40. Soldier eating on the front line, Dealul Porcului, 1917, National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I".



Fig. 41. Soldiers packing a knapsack, National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I".

Pictures like the previous ones are snapshots of real life. Others were minutely staged, sort of tableaux vivants reminiscing of the 1900s studio pose. This apply for instance to the image depicting a unit's headquarters in Valea Ocnei, dating from September 1917: the elderly general, pipe in hand, focuses on a map and is assisted by a high ranking staff officer, who is respectfully keeping the distance, standing by the edge of the rough table. Meantime in the background, young Lieutenant-colonel Rujinsky have just received news from the front line via the campaign telephone and makes emphatic gestures to convey the alert to his commander. Soldiers and non-commissioned-officers are shyly peeping round the corner of the log shelter, a rather humble campaign abode (Fig. 42).

The life-death antithesis is no longer so scary on the front line because the soldier was always faced with a death hazard. More important seems to be restoring one's strength, no matter the circumstances and/or the surroundings with a macabre twist. So much so that having a nap on the bare ground under the pale spring sun, on the Pig's Hill, in the near proximity of some crosses indicating that a few of his comrades might sleep there for good, looked like the most normal thing on earth (*Soldiers at rest, Dealul Porcului, March 1917*). In the forefront the only awoken soldier takes advantage of a quiet moment by taking off his boots: he was focused on his tired and perhaps march-damaged toes. Sometimes even a funeral is pictured: saddened soldiers carrying on their shoulders the coffin of a dead comrade in a solemn procession. The composition reminds Camil Ressu's painting *Burial in the countryside*, completed just a few years before, in 1913, the place of the priest being taken here by the officer on the lead (Fig. 43).

Other artistic pictures bring in a dose of lyricism, like *In trenches, Valea Stariței, May 1917*, where a soldier with the helmet pushed on the back head, his palm to his jaw, stands leaning on a dry cracking clay breastwork looking ahead and day dreaming (Fig. 44). He is more of a tired man lost in his thoughts than of a vigilant observer on duty. No gun can be seen at first, as it leans on the parapet and only a little of the butt can be distinguished. The luxuriant foliage above the soldier borders the trenches and brings an air of peace to this composition that seems from anywhere else but the front line. The angle used gives monumentality to the character. Loneliness is obvious in all these pictures: each soldier was facing alone his fate. He seems to be always ready to die and this taught him to enjoy each moment of peace, of sunshine and of some rest. A tender, dreamy note encompasses the next composition, a soldier who plays the violin in a shelter, with the score on a tripod in front of him (Fig. 45). The composition is pictographic, the player is shadowed and the bulk of light in front of him guides the eyes to the score. The happiness of the soldier player is overwhelming. The favorite pastime was reading newspapers and letters. That kept soldiers informed of how war was waged on other fronts and about life back home. Many a picture showed soldiers reading on the bottom of their trench (Fig. 46).

Other images have a humor undertone – but far from being hilarious like *Haircut on the front line* where the soldiers wait their turn for a haircut (Fig. 47), or *Shower on the front line for the 29 Infantry Regiment* with the military personnel who got in, naked and caring clean underwear in one hand, into a barrack that had a water container on top (Fig. 48). The amount of water was strictly measured by a soldier turned shower attendant. But not everybody could enjoy a solid shower room for his private hygiene: in another image we can see pillars in the open with sheets in-between, to give some privacy to the shivering bather, while a comrade would pour water from a bucket of cloth normally used to water the horses.

Not only foot-soldiers were depicted by the operators from the Photographic Department, even though those were predominant because they were the main actors of the war.

Some photographers were sent to the navy units on the Danube or to air force division. Those working on those areas were sometimes much rewarded by topics and background. A daring composition is that of two boats towed at full speed by a torpedo boat on the Danube. The photographer was on the deck of the ship and he used a plunging angle to depict the sailors charged to fishing the mines on the river (Fig. 49). The national banner proudly flows over the brave sailors' heads. On another picture is depicted a dangerous moment: the launching of a torpedo (Fig. 50).

A bridge built by engineers over pontoons (Fig. 51) is as spectacular as one of Franz Duschek's shots back in 1877, during the War of Independence. A military airport is in itself a hot topic (Fig. 52). But when you have an observation balloon and tens of soldiers trying to keep it still, with ropes, for not taking off too soon into the sky, it is something quite spectacular (Fig. 53).



Fig. 42. Lieutenant Colonel Rujinsky giving orders,
Valea Ocnei, September 1917, National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I".



Fig. 43. Burial, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 44. Solitude in trenches, Valea Stariței, 1917, National Military Museum “King Ferdinand I”.



Fig. 45. Violin player in a shelter, National Military Museum “King Ferdinand I”.



Fig. 46. Newspaper reading in trenches, Mărăști, 15 May 1917, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 47. Haircut on the front line, National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I".

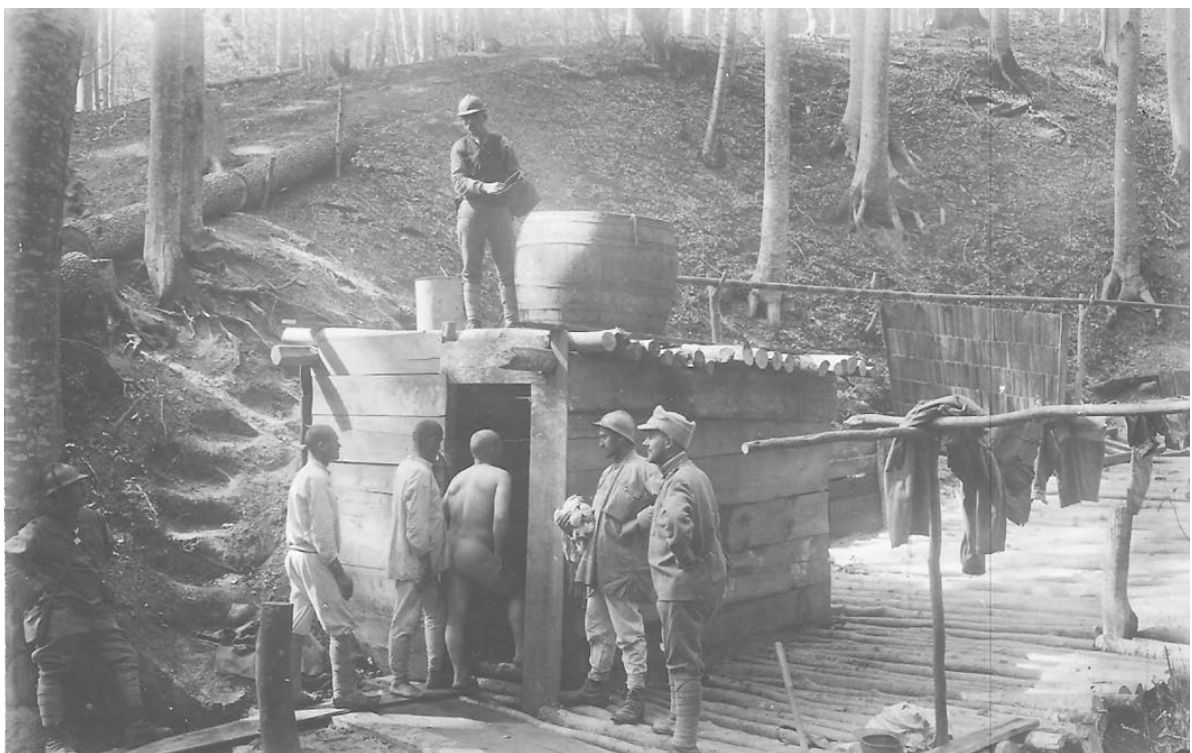


Fig. 48. Taking a shower in the front line by soldiers of the 29th Infantry Regiment, National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I".



Fig. 49. Sailors from a torpedo boat fishing mines on the Danube, Ismail, 8 May 1917, National Library of Romania.

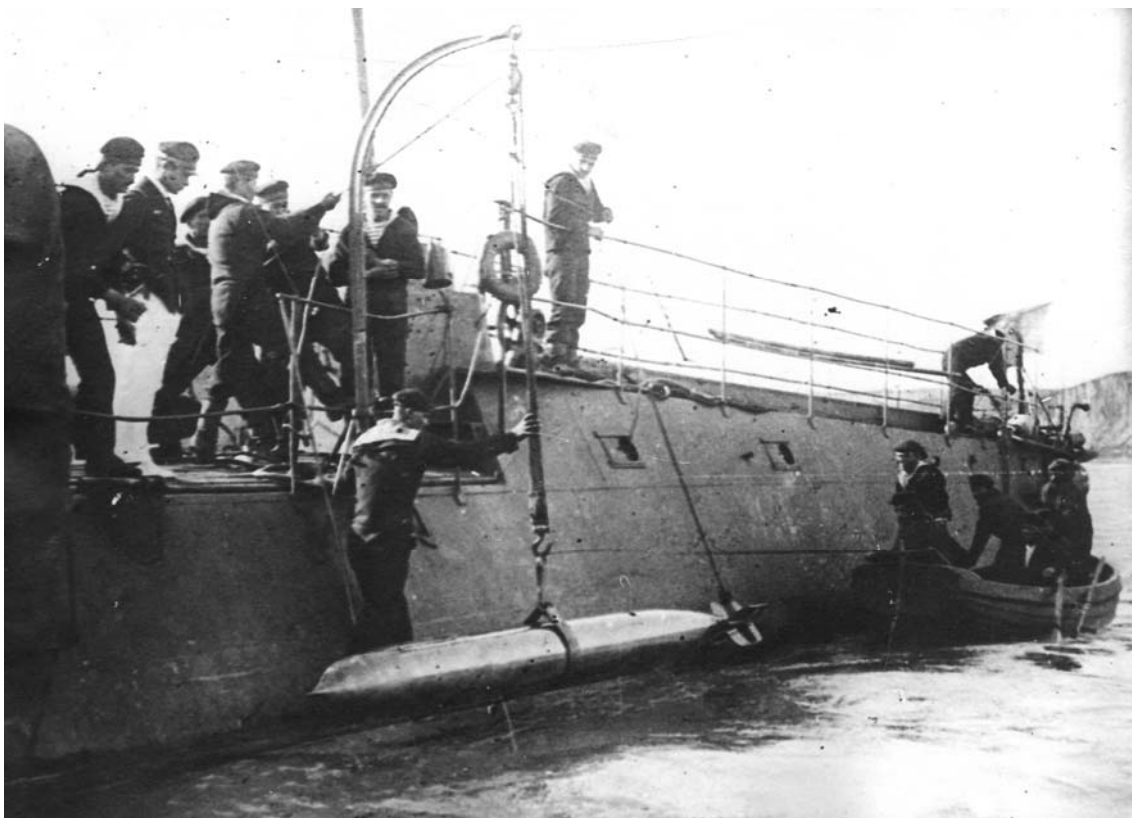


Fig. 50. Launching of a torpedo, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 51. Bridge over a river, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 52. Farman planes at a military airport, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 53. Observation balloon, National History Museum of Romania.

Roaming from one battlefield to another, the photographers often met groups of scared refugees fleeing their battered villages on the front line. The operators were saddened by the fate of those miserable peasants who were carrying all their belongings in broken carts (Fig. 54) or made short stops for eating their meager meal (Fig. 55). Some of them even begged for a hunk of bread to feed their starving children. Thus, the war reporters turned ethno-photographers, following on the steps of 19th century photographers such as Szathmari, Duschek, Zipser, Schäffer and many others who were fond of such topics. There was not unusual for the invaders to molest some poor, undefended peasant women because they refused to share with them the few provisions and fodder they had. Such a woman showed her bruises and scars to the astonished photographers for documenting the brutality of the enemies (Fig. 56).

Other pictures with strong propaganda significance were those showing Romanian prisoners of war who were released from Austro-Hungarian prisoners' camps in March 1918 and return home in rags, starved, exhausted and some of them even ailing or lacking a limb (Fig. 57).

The great number of retrieved images and their exceptional dimensions – 18 x 24 cm – indicates that lots of positive copies were taken after the glass negatives, and sent to the Army units and to the General Headquarters for propaganda purposes. The great majority of images have a caption attached on a piece of paper that can be folded on the back of the photo. The pieces of information supplied by these images are very important and clarify certain moments of the evolution of the engagement. One of photographers' duties was, as mentioned before, to date and localize rigorously the images they sent and to accompany them with detailed reports useful for the archive cataloguing. The most important pictures were selected and bound on albums which were stored at the Military Museum.⁴⁰

Some of these images were used to illustrate a magazine edited in Bucharest, under the direction of Ioan Gorun and called "Războiul nostru și Războiul Popoarelor" (Our War and People's War). There were mostly studio portraits of generals and statesmen which were printed on the cover but none from the battlefield. Unfortunately there were but few pictures offered by the Romanian military photographers dating from the first months of war when the Photographic Departement was far from being organized and active. Soon that periodical stopped its publication when the Capital fell on the hands of Germans in late November 1916.

When the southern part of Romania was invaded by the enemy troops, the Germans brought in their cutting edge photographic skills and their well trained camera crew to capture images for "Săptămâna Ilustrată" (The Illustrated Week), a newly-founded weekly magazine published in Bucharest to support the occupants' goals. In spite of the propaganda, it is to be said to its credit, this periodical amassed attractive and well-documented articles on cultural, artistic and economic issues and news from the battlefield – albeit with a predictable twist, always stressing the German victories and their humanitarian behaviour. The rich and high quality illustrations provided a positive take on the German occupation: the un-denying disciplined and corruption-free military administration, the friendly gloss put upon the relations between occupants and locals, the neat and clean Bucharest (compared to the more bohemian laissez faire atmosphere of the capital city run by the Romanian authorities), the pragmatically Teutonic approach such as vegetables cultivated in the Cișmigiu Garden, German cooks feeding the poor, etc. With such images the German military administration wanted to show they were not simply stamping their power upon the civilians, they offered a well meant helping hand to the inhabitants, which is a little bit gross. The circus was completed with carefully choreographed glittering pageants, all too often presented as exhibitions of force cum benevolence. It goes without saying this was a „reality” viewed through the lenses of photographers in the occupants' payroll. The Germans were not famous for their sense of humour and sometimes some staged images were really funny and brought ridicule on the protagonists: to mention Field marshal August von Mackensen taking a morning horseback ride followed by street urchins with whom he joked and made little pranks to become popular among children (Fig. 58). Kaiser Wilhelm II visited Romania between 20 and 24 September 1917, and his tour to various places of historic or economic importance was covered by those photographers (Fig. 59, 60). The armistice parley at Focșani and the signing of the preliminary peace treaty at Bufta (Fig. 61) and afterwards the final one, signed in Bucharest, on 24 April (old style)/7 May (new style) 1918, were extensively documented by the German photographers. That humiliating peace didn't last long: as long as the fortunes of war turned towards the Allies in November 1918, the Romanian government gave an ultimatum to the German army to leave the country. Consequently, the enemies evacuated Romania and King Ferdinand and his government returned to Bucharest.

⁴⁰ Arhivele Militare Române, Fond Direcția 4 Geniu, dosar 1047, f. 187.



Fig. 54. Refugees, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 55. Refugees eating their meager meal, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 56. Refugee woman showing her scars, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 57. Romanian prisoners of war released from an Austro-Hungarian camp, 15 March 1918, National History Museum of Romania.



Fig. 58. Field Marshal August von Mackensen taking a morning horseback ride followed by children, "Săptămâna Ilustrată" No. 24/17 December 1917.



Fig. 59. Front page of "Săptămâna Ilustrată" No. 19-20/24 October 1917.



Fig. 60. The Kaiser and Field Marshal August von Mackensen visiting a former battlefield on the Carpathian Mountains, National Library of Romania.

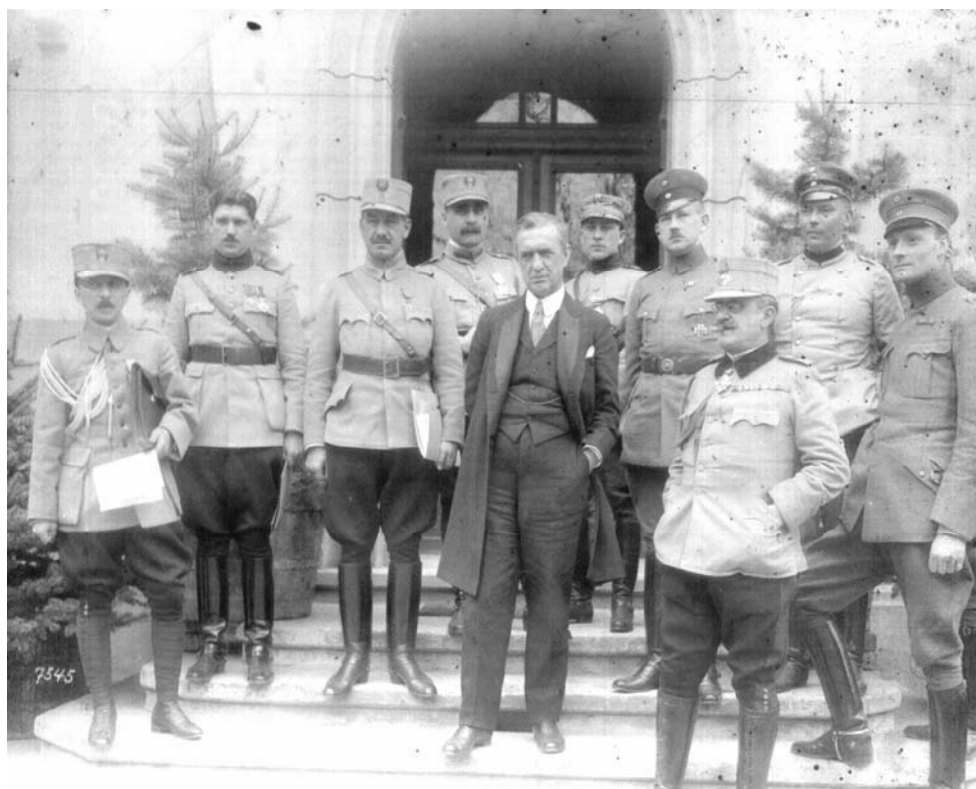


Fig. 61. Constantin Argetoianu (in civilian clothes), General Lupescu and Colonel Mircescu after the signing of the Buftea preliminary peace treaty, 1918, National Library of Romania.

It was now the turn of the Romanian operators from the Photographic Department of the Army to take pictures of the celebrations that followed: First December 1918 marked the Victory Parade and filled the main streets of Bucharest with cheerful crowds. The wide avenues were lined up with soldiers honouring King Ferdinand and Queen Maria passing by on horseback along General Berthelot (on their left) and young Prince Nicholas – who was still far from the age of soldiering being just a boy scout – on their right. The magnificent cavalcade was worth to be photographed (Fig. 62).



Fig. 62. Victory parade on the Kiseleff Avenue, 1st December 1918, National Library of Romania.

After the end of the war, part of this material was used to illustrate studies and papers dealing with the Great War. The trend was set by the French magazine „L’Illustration” and its editorial team who valued the rich iconography gathered during the war and published, in 1922, an imposing work in two volumes: *Album de la Guerre*. One can find there some images taken by the Photographic Department of the Romanian Army and published under the caption *Nos alliés roumains*.⁴¹ For the Western world it was hard to believe that our soldiers went to front encouraged by the plaintive tune played by a fiddler marching at the head of the column. Far from being the fierce Highland warrior’s counterpart whose courage and abnegation in battle was fuelled by the savage sound of pipes, the Romanian soldier was a rather mild character for whom the violin sounds were reminiscent of family, friends and the good old days back home. That picture toured the world and gave an idea of the Romanian bravery (Fig. 63).

In 1936, at the 20th anniversary since Romania joined the war effort, the “Sfarmă Piatră” magazine dedicated a whole number to the Great War with articles signed by Nichifor Crainic, Pan M. Vizirescu, E. D. Boroianu and Niță Mihai all of them richly illustrated with war images provided by the Military Archives⁴² (Fig. 64, 65).

A word also about those unsung heroes, the ones behind the camera, who captured so brilliantly the First World War’s history in the making, but whose faces were rarely recorded. And merely by accident: sometimes an amateur or civilian cameraman would include a military photographer or a camera man in the background of his snapshot focused mainly on a different subject (Fig. 66).

⁴¹ *Album de la Guerre*, L’Illustration, Paris, 1922, Tome Second, p. 780.

⁴² „Sfarmă Piatră” nr. 38/Joi 13 August 1936.



Fig. 63. Nos alliés roumains, *Album de la Guerre*, L'Illustration, Paris, 1922.



Fig. 64. Front page of "Sfarmă Piatră" No. 38/ 13 August 1936.



Fig. 65. Illustrations by military war photographers published in “Sfarmă Piatră” No. 38/ 13 August 1936.



Fig. 66. Military ceremony at Târgu Neamț attended by the Royal Family; a military operator, camera on tripod, in the foreground, Herscovici-Spack photographers, Târgu Neamț, National Library of Romania.

Consumed professionals and inspired artists of the camera, the military personnel of the Photographic Department of the Army documented life on the front line from the average combat soldier up to His Majesty King Ferdinand and Queen Maria, capturing with immediacy various aspects of the ongoing conflagration. The information supplied by these images are extremely important to clarify certain moments of the campaign, these frames restore in front of our eyes like a puzzle the difficult years of the Great War.