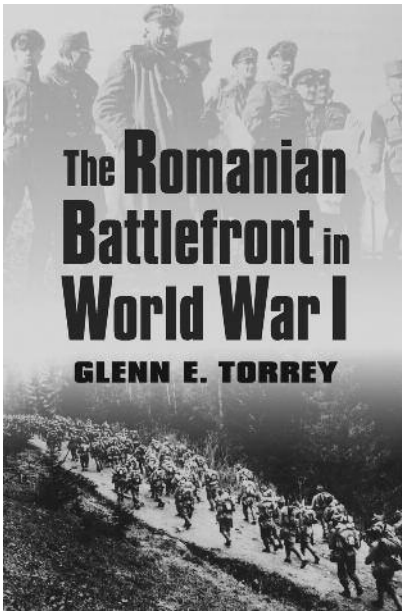

EDITORIAL EVENTS

From Negotiations to Open War: Romania in WWI As Seen by an American Historian

LUCIAN TURCU



GLENN E. TORREY, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I*
(Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011)

THE MILITARY events of World War I came to the attention of historians even before the guns actually fell silent. The considerable interest shown by specialists in the events unfolding on the various battlefronts stemmed from the very magnitude of the conflict, from the diversity of resources it mobilized, from the strong impact it had upon the countries involved and, last but not least, from its duration, which far exceeded even the boldest estimates made at the beginning of hostilities. Over the past hundred years, the historiographies of the belligerent countries (and not only) have sought to explore the multiple dimensions of this dramatic conflict, but the recovery of the relevant data, testimonies, or documents is far from complete.

The efforts invested by national historiographies in the examination of the multiple facets of World War I was sometimes accompanied by the interest shown by historians belonging to other cultural spaces in events involving other countries than their own. This is the

Lucian Turcu

Ph.D., Faculty of History and Philosophy,
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

case of American historian Glenn E. Torrey who, for decades, has been thoroughly and professionally investigating Romania's history in the early years of World War I. Evidence in this respect is the latest book dedicated to this topic by the emeritus professor of Emporia State University and which is the object of the present review.

The book is structured into 17 thematic units, covering all the stages in Romania's participation in World War I. The active military presence of Romania on the battlefield is preceded in the book by an inspired presentation of the heated debates that rocked Romanian society since the beginning of hostilities and which concerned the position that the country's leaders were expected to assume in regard to the war that had just broken out. Glenn E. Torrey highlights the manner in which representatives of the various powers already involved in the war put pressure on the Bucharest leaders in order to draw Romania to their side. According to the author, this diplomatic lobbying only came to strengthen the already existing belief of the country's leadership: only a guarantee that the Romanian-inhabited territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would be annexed by the Kingdom of Romania was likely to make Romania change its status from armed defense to actual offensive. Realizing that the active involvement of Romania in the war would relieve some of the pressure felt on other fronts, as the belligerents would have had to direct resources towards the Romanian front, eventually the Entente decided to meet the most important request formulated by the liberal government in Bucharest. Following the author along the tortuous and narrow path of the military negotiations, we come to discover the risks that the agreement in question entailed for Romania, beginning with the very moment it entered the war.

The second chapter presents the final preparations for war and the battle plans devised by the Romanian high command. It also includes a detailed inventory of Romania's logistical capabilities, of its supplies of weapons and military equipment, not forgetting the references to the level of training and performance of those leading the various branches of the armed forces. The data provided and analyzed by the author paint the portrait of a country that had overestimated its capabilities for combat and resistance in the new type of war that it was about to join. Another flaw manifest with the Romanian army right before it entered the war was, according to Glenn E. Torrey, the fact that many commanders were not fully trained in the combat tactics and techniques that had just been introduced; also, Romania's transport infrastructure could not cope with the demands of a general mobilization, and some high-ranking officers did not meet the high standards required for the positions they occupied or were downright incompetent, owing their places in the military hierarchy to political connections rather than to personal merit.

Starting with the fourth chapter, the book focuses on the topic announced in the very title. The first to be discussed are the operations undertaken by the Romanian Northern Army, which crossed the Eastern Carpathians into enemy territory, where it was met with joy by the Transylvanian Romanians, elated by the arrival of their liberating brethren. The author focuses on the tactical and strategic errors made by the Romanian army in this phase of the war, also highlighting the fact that the Romanian invasion of Transylvania triggered a strong offensive of the Central Powers in southern Romania, in Dobruja. The book analyzes each major engagement occurred on the Romanian front, skillfully presenting the preparations for each battle, the strategies adopted by the two sides, the errors made by the commanders, the situation of the available troops and equipment, and also the manner in which each side profited from victory or sought to limit the consequences of defeat. Examples in this respect are clashes such as the one occurred at Tutrakan, the Flămânda operation, the Austrian-German offensive in Transylvania (which drove the Romanian army out of this Austro-Hungarian territory, barely 40 days after it had crossed the Carpathians), Mackensen's offensive in Dobruja that led to the evacuation of Constanța by the Romanian-Russian army, the engagements fought on the passes across the Carpathian Mountains, the two battles on the Jiu, the loss of Oltenia and then of Bucharest and Ploiești (together with the oilfields located nearby, an essential resource for the enemy forces operating in Romania). The author subtly approaches the enthusiastic welcome given to the German army (but not to the Turkish or Bulgarian ones) by those local inhabitants who had decided to remain in the capital city, before turning his attention to the military and political consequences of the withdrawal of the Romanian army and administration to Moldavia. When the Russian allies assumed command of the Romanian front, the French Military Mission was relegated to a secondary position in terms of military decision-making. This allowed the delegation led by General Henri Berthelot to focus on the training of the Romanian troops. The results were fully seen during the summer campaign of 1917, and the new state of affairs was recognized even by Romania's enemies, who found themselves in front of an army that had clearly improved its battlefield behavior and tactical knowledge, and which was now able to use to maximum effect the modern military equipment it had finally received. The recovery of the Romanian army is presented from several perspectives, starting from an analysis of its status at the time when hostilities were suspended and then moving on to aspects such as the measures meant to improve sanitation and increase morale, through the involvement of public figures or through the initiation of reforms that were highly significant for most of the enlisted men: the agrarian and the electoral reform. As we have already indicated, these concentrated efforts brought concrete results

in the battles fought in summer of 1917, presented in great detail in the book. In fact, the battles fought at Mărășești and Oituz marked the end of the offensive on the Romanian front, the Central Powers turning their attention to the western fronts (especially to Italy and France). However, the hardest blow dealt to the Romanian front did not come from an enemy, but rather from an ally: after the revolution of March 1917, many Russian soldiers refused to obey their officers and commit to a new offensive, demanding instead that a peace be signed.

The fifteenth chapter takes the reader behind the lines, to the home front, discussing issues such as the war propaganda, the involvement of the Austrian-German secret services in the destabilization of the Romanian front, as well as the measures taken against deserters by the authorities in Moldavia. The preparations for the signing of the armistice of Focșani, as well as the general context represented by Lenin's ascent to power and his intention to conclude a peace with the Central Powers are all carefully analyzed in this chapter.

The next thematic unit is devoted to the situation of Bessarabia during what turned out to be the final year of the war. The stability of the territory located between the Pruth and the Dniester rivers, now also under threat from the Bolshevik soldiers on their way home, was seen as essential for the continuation of the war on the eastern front and even for the very survival of Romania. In this chapter, Glenn E. Torrey discusses the political developments occurred in Bessarabia, its emergence as a confederated autonomous territory of Russia, the declaration in favor of the union between this province and Romania, and the consequences of this decision upon Romania and upon the other states in the region. The author does not overlook the motivation behind the presence of the Romanian army in this province, or the manner in which this presence was seen by the local inhabitants and by the Bolshevik authorities in Russia. The return of this territory to Romanian control, after more than a century, was overshadowed by the tragic events experienced by Romania at that time. The provisions of the Peace Treaty signed at Buftea and their implementation, the tensions manifest on the Romanian political stage, and especially the uncertainty regarding the very future of the country weighed heavily upon the shoulders of every Romanian. The author describes the spectacular reversal of fortunes in the opposing camps (after the defeat suffered by the Central Powers at Piave) and the manner in which Romania sought to profit from the situation and show its allies that it had remained faithful to the initial cause. The remobilization of the Romanian army, the concessions the Central Powers were willing to make in order to stop Romania from re-entering the war or at least to secure its neutrality, the withdrawal of Mackensen's army, the occupation of the "Promised Land" (Transylvania), the advance of the Romanian army into the neutral zone and the tense relations with the author-

ities in Budapest—all are presented in the final chapter and in the epilogue, coming to illustrate the difficulties surrounding the end of the war in this part of Europe.

The thoroughness of Professor Glenn E. Torrey's work is also demonstrated by the great variety of sources employed: various collections of documents from Romania, Austria, Germany, France, Russia, Great Britain, Italy, and the United States of America; many previously unpublished documents, general texts (Romanian and foreign), a large variety of studies and even memoirs belonging to the main participants in those events. Despite being inherently subjective, this final category of sources comes to shed new light on already familiar data and to take us into the minds of their authors, offering us glimpses of the plans they made amid those troubled events and of the manner they responded to defeat or victory on the battlefield.

