

The Romanian Military Elite in the National Reunification War (15/28 August 1916–20 March 1920)

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1. General Overview

THE CLASSICAL theory of elites is based on the perspectives advanced by Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, being established as such between the late 19th and the early 20th centuries.¹ Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) played an important role in the development of the modern theory of elites. Pareto refers to elites as a category of people who have the highest performance in their work. According to him, society is generally divided into two broad strata: “A lower stratum, *the non-élite*,” and “a higher stratum, *the élite*, which is divided into two: (a) a governing *élite*; (b) a non-governing *élite*.”²

Pareto’s idea regarding the circulation of elites is also very important, as this is a condition for ensuring a high performance in the conduct of public affairs. In general, elites have a number of qualities, abilities, and traits that provide them with a special status in a society or community and they are particularly effective in their work. If the ruling elites try to maintain the control they have exercised for a while, without ensuring the expected efficiency, negative social selection occurs.

Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), who devised the concept of *classe politica*, argued that the fundamental characteristic of an elite is its organizational capacity, a certain way of being and constituting itself as a power structure.

An interesting point of view can be found in the work of Raymond Aron (1905–1983), who identifies four types of elites or “aristocrats”: a spiritual aristocracy, composed of priests and intellectuals; political leaders, including the high administrative hierarchy, army and police chiefs; social work managers (James Burnham’s managers) and the leaders of the masses, who express and guide the demands of the population.³

Regarding the military elite, Morris Janowitz shows that there are four categories of elites: “aristocratic, democratic, totalitarian, and garrison state.”⁴ Regarding the democratic elite, he believes that “leaders can be effectively motivated by professional ethics alone, and this is most difficult.”⁵ For an analysis of Janowitz’s theory, the method of sociologist Luis Garrido Vergara must be considered, according to which

*the concept of elite is used to analyze the groups that either control or are situated at the top of societies. The creation of an élite is also the result of their evolution throughout the history of humanity.*⁶

In this regard, Garrido Vergara considers that for the research of any type of elite it is necessary to use Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social distinction as well as William Domhoff's theory of class domination, which entails identifying the four dimensions that constitute the core of the elite:

The evolution of society: Basically is defined by the local history in which the elites are situated. This dimension allows describing and defining the circumstances and determinants in the creation of an élite.

Institutions, social structure and social capital: This dimension also entails a historical perspective. . . .

Social, political and economic order: From a socio-historic perspective, this is the analysis of the manner in which different types of power can be distributed in a society. . . .

Cultural hegemony: This dimension is defined mainly to the system of social relations and expression of local values, which have been objectified throughout the history. In other words, this is the local construction of reality that determines and defines social interaction (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).⁷

The emergence of a democratic military elite was a long process which began with the French Revolution. Until then, there had been two types of military personnel: mercenaries and the National Guard volunteer corps. As their name suggests, the latter were volunteers, without any previous training, fighting for the defense of the homeland, while the former were professionals, fighting for no cause.⁸ The two categories of the military merged into a single army during the French Revolution, by the famous decree issued on 25 August 1793, which sanctioned the establishment of mixed regiments, consisting of battalions of the National Guard and the professional military of the old regime. The amalgam resulted in the invincible armies of the Revolution. As a debate in the French Parliament a century later showed, the fighters in the 1794–1795 Revolution were “the perfect model of an army and the purest historical expression of the ‘nation under arms.’”⁹

2. The French Model: “La Grande Armée”

IT WAS Napoleon Bonaparte who perfected that model. However, there are divergent opinions about his work. For example, Arpad F. Kovacs believes that Napoleon's goal was to create an elite force devoted only to him. When he organized “La Grande Armée” in the camp of Boulogne (1804), he carefully separated the military from the population, discouraging the republican and egalitarian spirit of the Revolution and cultivating the pride of the professional military. Subsequently, the civic element of the

army, with its ethical spirit and devotion to the country, gradually disappeared, being replaced with veteran professionals from the Ancien Régime. Thus, after 1805, the French army lost its national character, Napoleon using mercenaries and relying on the system of the professional army of that time. It was only after the disastrous withdrawal from Moscow that Napoleon attempted to reintroduce the compulsory military service, but the plan was not supported by the population, as evidenced by the defeat at Waterloo.¹⁰

The compulsory military service, abolished by a decree-law in 1814, nevertheless retained a part of the system inherited from the time of the Directorate and perfected during the Napoleonic period, namely the “lottery project,” which entailed drawing lots, having even or odd numbers, and, depending on the chosen number, the citizen had to enlist in the army. Although no longer as extended as in Napoleon’s time, a third of the soldiers called under arms were chosen by lottery.¹¹

Chris MacNab, however, contradicts Kovacs and claims that Napoleon’s most important “invention” was “La Grande Armée,” with which he won the most important battles. At first, it consisted of six corps under the command of Napoleon’s marshals and senior generals. After the victories in 1805, the army began to acquire a multinational character, reaching a number of one million troops by 1812, when the Russian Campaign began. Beyond its size and multinational character, the Grand Army was also known for its innovative character, tactics, logistics and communications. Unlike the other armies of that period, it operated on a strictly meritocratic basis. From 1805 to 1813, approximately 2.17 million men were recruited for La Grande Armée.¹²

Historian Guy C. Dempsey, Jr. also contradicts Kovacs and points out that, unlike in the Old Regime and other monarchies, promotion in the Grand Army was based on proven skills and not on social status or wealth. It was applied equally to all officers, not just the French ones. Probably it is the aspect in which the saying that “every soldier carried in his knapsack the bâton of a marshal” was rooted. By giving them the opportunity to prove their abilities, the fighters could reach the highest level of command in a few years, while in other armies they had to wait several decades, if such an ascent was possible.¹³ In this regard, Napoleon created various titles by which he rewarded the deeds of merit of his subordinates in order to encourage them and make them fight. The highest rank in the Grande Armée was that of divisional general. The positions higher than it were in fact functions of the same rank, but with separate insignia for the holders of such appointments.¹⁴

The French model, perfected by Napoleon, was later adopted by the Prussian army. Following the defeat in the Napoleonic Wars, the army entered a period of reform. Thus, almost all generals were replaced—out of 143, only 2 remained—while the officer corps was reopened to the middle class in 1808, and promotion to higher ranks was based on education. General Gerhard von Scharnhorst (1755–1813) founded an officer training school in 1809, which later became the Prussian Military Academy in Berlin. General Scharnhorst played an important role in reforming the Prussian army; he ordered the universal military conscription used by France and established the Krümpersystem, through which companies replaced 3–5 fighters a month, allowing up to 60 additional troops to be trained annually for each company.

Krümpersystem was also the beginning of the short-term compulsory service (3 years) in Prussia, as opposed to long-term recruitment (5–10 years) used before 1700. General Scharnhorst, like Napoleon, promoted the integration of infantry, cavalry, artillery and engineers by means of combined arms, as opposed to the methods previously used. Although he died in 1813, many of the reforms he proposed survived to some extent.¹⁵ They were continued and perfected by Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke (1800–1891), chief of the General Staff between 1857 and 1888, leading to the unification of Germany and the victory against France in 1870.¹⁶

Thus, after the 1789 Revolution, the French army experienced an upward model of professionalism, which was continuously developed and perfected by Napoleon Bonaparte. This model, based on meritocracy and professionalism, was later adopted by the Prussian army, albeit to a more moderate extent, but it contributed to changing for good the way modern armies began to function, underlying their organization.

3. The Development of the Romanian Military Elite between the War of Independence and the First World War

WITH REGARD to the Romanian military elite, it should be mentioned that the reorganization and consolidation of the national military institution were an integral part of the modernization of Romanian society, of the affirmation and maturation of the Romanian nation's struggle for independence and state unity in the 19th century. Organized in politically separate states, threatened by the expansion of powerful neighbors, with parts of the territory—Transylvania, Banat, Bukovina, Bessarabia, Dobruja—annexed by the three surrounding empires (Ottoman, Habsburg, and Russian), the Romanians remained aware of the fact that they belonged to the same people and they proved determined to accomplish, step by step, their dream of national liberation.

After 1821, in numerous memoirs as well as in the internal projects meant to modernize the Romanian countries, the revival of the army occupied an essential place. The first materialization of the mentioned longing was the restoration of the local military forces through the Treaty of Adrianople (2/14 September 1829). Based on its provisions and on the “Military Regulations,” annexes of the Organic Regulations adopted in the years 1831–1832, in both Romanian countries, starting in 1830, the first units of the standing army were established under the name of “militia” or “territorial guard.”

It was a modest beginning, but later the rulers of the two principalities (Mihail Sturdza, Grigore Alexandru Ghica, Barbu Știrbei, Gheorghe Bibescu) adopted measures that led to an increase in military forces, and Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza created a unified military body.

The reforms were continued by King Carol I (1866–1914) so that the Romanian military body was able to get involved in the Russian-Ottoman conflict (1877–1878),

known in national historiography as the “War of Independence.” It was the first participation of the modern Romanian army in a large-scale military conflict, having as allies and adversaries two great powers of the time, a confrontation in which it fully demonstrated its combative strength.

One of the most important dimensions of the reform was the establishment of a military elite, able to ensure the improvement of the military body. The main method of selection and training was military education.¹⁷ It was constantly evolving and diversifying, so that around the outbreak of the Second World War, it was quite diverse, comprising: two schools for military sons (Iași and Craiova), training schools for officers (infantry, cavalry, engineering and artillery), application schools for the main types of branches, and the Superior War School, established in 1889.¹⁸

Another way of training the military elite was to send young people to study abroad, the main destinations being France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Italy, which contributed decisively to shaping the western profile of the Romanian army.¹⁹ At the beginning, France was the country to which young Romanians were sent. At the turn of the century its place was taken by Germany and Austria-Hungary. Such a situation is explained by the system of alliances, Romania being, starting in 1883, part of the Central Powers. The king’s option was not harmonized, however, with the opinions of the command corps, so that failures occurred in the materialization of the royal project, especially considering that some of the Romanian officers had a Francophile and Francophone attitude.²⁰

However, the officers’ education and training abroad had a positive impact on their intellectual level and competence. An informed witness, General Radu R. Rosetti wrote:

*The return to the country of the first series of lieutenants from the German military schools as well as of the lieutenants and captains that were trained in the Austrian army does much for a more thorough training of the army.*²¹

The mentioned situation was also confirmed by General Gheorghe Mihail, chief of the General Staff between 23 August and 12 October 1944, who wrote in his memoirs:

*The officers sent to France and Germany came back with new training methods, especially with regard to the troop and junior officers; the internship of the officers sent abroad brought us a great service.*²²

Some of the first and important elements were the selection and promotion of the cadre corps. At the beginning of the construction of the Romanian army, the principle of social origin was adopted in the promotion of the military elite, namely, the officers came from the aristocracy of the time. However, despite the initial enthusiasm, the political classes showed, with few exceptions, a relatively low interest in the military service. The lack of a military tradition, the relative isolation of the two Romanian principalities, the conservatism of a part of the local nobility, the low appeal of the military status resulted in only a few exponents of the high society choosing a military career.

The principle of social origin was abandoned in the mid-19th century, being counter-productive in terms of efficiency and quality. Moreover, the Crimean War (1853–1856) showed the need to adopt the meritocratic principle in the selection and promotion of the military elite, the high commanders of the two belligerents, selected from high classes, proving completely unprepared.

Consequently, the selection of the officer corps in the Romanian army until the First World War, as well as after it, was made, to a large extent, from the middle class and the peasantry. The aforementioned social categories saw military service as an opportunity to improve their social status, so many young people embraced the military career. Therefore, Pareto's theory of elite circulation was verified in the case of the Romanian army.

Another feature of the evolution of the local military elite until the first world conflagration was the faulty way of promoting people to higher ranks and especially to that of general. Until 1905, the much-coveted promotion to this rank was decided by the government following the proposal of the minister of War. The manner always generated debates, as the beneficiaries were viewed with suspicion, their promotion being most often attributed to the influence of their "political patrons" or to various external influences and less to their own merits.²³

After that date, the method was changed and the responsibility was transferred to the Committee of General Inspectors, headed by the relevant minister. It included 19 people: two sub-inspectors of the army; the chief of the Great General Staff; the commanders of the five army corps; the chief of the Royal Staff; the governor of the "Bucharest Fortress"; the commander of the fortified Focșani–Nămoloasa–Galați region; the general inspectors of artillery, engineering, cavalry, navy, rural gendarmerie and artillery establishments; the commander of the Border Guard Corps; the director of inspectors. Until 1913, the general inspectors of health and that of administration also joined this committee.²⁴

That formula did not generate consensus among high-ranking officers either, the main observation being that the promotion to the rank of colonel and general depended on people who did not know the candidate. As a result, it was suggested to reduce the number of members, but until Romania's entry into the war the situation did not change.

Another aspect concerned the career development of different categories of officers. In the late 19th century and the early 20th century, there was an international principle that officers in so-called technical branches, such as engineering and artillery, had superior scientific training to those from other branches, especially the infantry. The idea was also adopted in the Romanian army, with many ministers of War making it possible for officers from other branches, especially engineering, to join the infantry. The result was the spectacular rise of officers from the two abovementioned branches, which generated dissatisfaction and animosity among the officer corps.

Thus, in 1912, the Romanian army had two engineer regiments, but there were four divisional generals, nine brigadier generals and 14 colonels coming from the engineer corps.²⁵ Relatively similar situations were encountered in artillery and even cavalry, with infantry officers at a disadvantage.

Therefore, the organization and staffing of the Romanian army's top command at the beginning of the world conflagration reflected the sinuous developments, the failures and the insufficiently substantiated measures adopted in peacetime. However, the situation of the Romanian army in terms of structuring the high command was not unique among the European armies. Apart from the German army, which was indeed an instrument of war, the other armies faced almost the same problems. The peacetime hierarchy was structured on principles that were usually refuted by the realities of the battlefield.²⁶

During the two years of neutrality (1914–1916), one of the directions of action, starting from the sad experience of the 1913 campaign, was to increase the number of officers, especially those with lower ranks (lieutenants, lieutenant captains). The statistic below provides arguments in this regard:²⁷

TABLE 1. ACTIVE-DUTY AND RESERVE OFFICERS ON 1 JULY 1914

Officers	Active duty	Reserve	TOTAL
Generals	42	74	116
Senior officers	869	509	1,378
Captains	1,543	780	2,323
Junior officers (lieutenants, second lieutenants)	2,436	4,849	7,285
TOTAL	4,890	6,212	11,102

TABLE 2. ACTIVE-DUTY AND RESERVE OFFICERS ON 1 JULY 1916

Officers	Active duty	Reserve	TOTAL
Generals	55	90	145
Senior officers	999	590	1,589
Captains	1,386	830	2,216
Junior officers (lieutenants, second lieutenants)	4,161	10,630	14,792
TOTAL	6,601	12,141	18,742

Even if the number of officers increased, their quality did not improve significantly as the focus was on quantity. Uninspired measures were also taken, such as the abolition of non-commissioned officer training schools²⁸ and, in particular, the suspension of the Superior War School courses,²⁹ which had a negative effect on the level of training of the military elite, including at the higher level, such as army staffs, army corps and divisions.

As for the general corps, we note that during the two years of neutrality, it was largely renewed. Thus, on 1 July 1916, there were, as mentioned above, 55 active-duty generals in the operational structures. Of them, 11 were divisional generals and 44 were brigadier generals.³⁰ Of the 11 divisional generals, five obtained this rank in 1915 and 1916,³¹ and the other six were promoted before 1914.³² Of the 44 brigadier generals, more than half, namely 23, were promoted after the outbreak of the world conflagration.

4. The Romanian Military Elite's Role in the National Reunification War

FOLLOWING THESE synthetic considerations, we highlight some aspects regarding the military elite in the Romanian sequence of events during the Great War, generically called the National Reunification War.³³

It is well known that generals and colonels represent, for any armed forces, the backbone of the military elite, as they command armies, army corps, divisions, brigades and regiments. Therefore, their behavior on the battlefield is a decisive element resulting in either victory or defeat.

The 1916 campaign showed that only some of those mentioned above met the expectations and demonstrated their qualities on the battlefield. From the list of those who were replaced from the command, some being even tried and convicted, we retain Generals Mihail Aslan, commander of the 3rd Army, Grigore Crăiniceanu, commander of the 2nd Army, Ioan Culcer, commander of the 1st Army, Ioan Basarabescu, commander of the 9th Infantry Division, Constantin Teodorescu, commander of the 17th Infantry Division (the one that disastrously failed in the Battle of Tutrakan), Constantin Petala, commander of the 5th Infantry Division, and Gheorghe Georgescu, commander of the 5th Army Corps, later sent as the Great General Headquarters representative in Great Britain.

4.1. Generals Dumitru Iliescu and Constantin Christescu

AMUCH-DISCUSSED case in historiography is that of General Dumitru Iliescu (1865–1940), secretary general of the Ministry of War (1914–1916), deputy chief of the Great General Headquarters (16 August–25 October 1916) and head of the mentioned structure (25 October–5 December 1916). He was considered one of those responsible for the Romanian armed forces unpreparedness for war as well as for the failures in the autumn of 1916. In fact, on 5 December 1916, he was removed from office, General Constantin Prezan being appointed as leader of the Romanian Great General Headquarters.

The reorganization in the winter of 1917, carried out under very difficult circumstances, entailed the substantial improvement of the equipment, the intensification of training, the restoration of the troops' morale, as well as the massive restructuring of the Romanian Armed Forces High Command Corps.

The Romanian Armed Forces order of battle for the 1917 campaign³⁴ included military personalities that had previously demonstrated their qualities, being successful in the battles of the Mărăști, Mărășești, Oituz fire triangle. Among them we mention Generals Eremia Grigorescu, Gheorghe Văleanu, Aristide Razu, Arthur Văitoianu, Constantin Iancovescu, Nicolae Sinescu, Constantin Scărișoreanu, Henric Cihoski, Iacob Zadik, Traian Moșoiu, Mihail Schina, and Ernest Broșteanu.

General Constantin Christescu (1866–1923)³⁵ distinguished himself. In the 1916 campaign, he was the chief of Staff of the 2nd Army and then the commander of the

4th (Northern) Army, when General Constantin Prezan took over the command of the Army Group that organized the great operation on the Neajlov-Arges (the Battle of Bucharest). At the beginning of the 1917 campaign, General Christescu was initially appointed interim commander of the 1st Army, a large unit that was to be commanded by Crown Prince Carol. However, following Queen Marie opposition and Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu reluctance, the idea was dropped, General Christescu becoming full commander. During the battle he was removed from office, amid the dispute between the Romanian General and General Alexander Ragoza, commander of the Russian 4th Army, regarding some decisions on the battlefield. Subsequently, General Christescu was appointed chief of the Great General Staff in 1918 and between 1920 and 1923.

4.2. Marshals Alexandru Averescu and Constantin Prezan

THE MOST valuable military leaders were considered to be Alexandru Averescu and Constantin Prezan, promoted to the rank of marshal on 14 June 1930, after Carol II became king of Romania.³⁶ There are both similarities and differences regarding the career of the two leaders. Alexandru Averescu was born in 1859 in a modest family from Babele (today Ozerne, Ukraine), his father being a teacher and his mother a midwife. As for Constantin Prezan (b. 1861), his family was relatively wealthy, his parents owning a property of about 200 ha in Butimanu, Ilfov County.

Constantin Prezan attended the School for the Military Sons in Iași and then the Military Officer Candidate School in Bucharest, being assigned to the engineer troops, where he worked for two decades. Alexandru Averescu graduated from the Non-Commissioned Officer Candidate School in Bistrița, a detail that caused many troubles in his military career. Both of them completed their education and training abroad. Alexandru Averescu graduated from the War School in Turin and Constantin Prezan studied in Paris and Fontainebleau. Averescu got involved in political life, his first important position being that of minister of War (1907–1909) in the liberal governments led by D. A. Sturdza and Ion I. C. Brătianu. He coordinated the military actions against the peasant revolt in 1907, for which he was later criticized. His high competence as well as his connections with conservative leaders propelled him to the position of chief of the Great General Staff between 1911 and 1913. In that capacity he played a major role in the conduct of the Romanian Armed Forces military actions in the 1913 campaign.

When the liberals came to power he resigned and took command of the 1st Army Corps based in Craiova for two years (1914–1916). When Romania entered into war, he was appointed commander of the Romanian 2nd Army, deployed between the Oituz Pass and the Argeș springs. During the first days of the war, the 2nd Army won some victories, the most important one being the liberation of Brașov. However, the defeat at Tutrakan resulted in the re-evaluation of the strategic plans.

“Operation Flămânda,” carried out under the command of General Averescu (18 September/1 October–23 September/6 October 1916), was a failure, despite the ingenuity of the strategic idea (an attack from behind on the Bulgarian-German forces).

After the completion of “Operation Flămânda,” General Averescu was again appointed commander of the 2nd Army and he succeeded in re-establishing discipline and morale, allowing the troops to withstand all the enemy attacks in October and November 1916.

Alexandru Averescu was the commander of the 2nd Army until the beginning of 1918. During that period, he ensured the withdrawal of the large units on the front in the Vrancea Mountains and their recovery for the great battles in the summer of 1917. The 2nd Army was the only Romanian large unit that remained on the front in the winter and spring of 1917. General Averescu commanded the 2nd Army in the Battle of Mărăști (11/24 July–19 July/1 August), which ended in a brilliant victory. It was the battle that coined him in the Romanian military history as “the man of the victory at Mărăști,” which made him extremely popular in the first post-war years.

On 29 January/11 February 1918, General Alexandru Averescu formed a new government, having the mission to negotiate an honorable peace with the enemy, Romania being left alone in the war because of the revolution in Russia. On 20 February/5 March 1918 the preliminary Peace Treaty was signed with the Central Powers, which set difficult conditions for Romania. A few days later, on 5/18 March 1918, the government led by Alexandru Averescu was forced to cede power, being replaced with one led by Alexandru Marghiloman, which favored the Central Powers. Dissatisfied, Alexandru Averescu resigned from the armed forces and formed a new political party called the People’s League (starting in 1920, the name was the People’s Party), whose goal was to reform the Romanian political class and society.

In the 1920s, Alexandru Averescu was twice prime minister (13 March 1920–17 December 1921; 30 March 1926–4 June 1927). However, he did not succeed in accomplishing the promised reforms. He died on the night of 2/3 October 1938 in Bucharest. The authorities organized a state funeral and he was buried in Mărăști, the site of the battle in July 1917, where, through his and his collaborators’ efforts, a mausoleum and other monuments had been built to glorify the heroic deeds of the Romanian troops.

As for General Constantin Prezan, his career path developed within the military. He did not become involved in political life, although he was made enough offers, especially after he left the active service. He was promoted to the rank of brigadier general on 10 May 1907. Four years later he became a division general, being appointed commander of the 4th Army Corps. He commanded it during the neutrality period and in the first months of Romania’s entry into the war. According to the war plan, following the mobilization, it became the 4th (Northern) Army, General Prezan being appointed its commander. The Northern Army was the only one out of the four armies that accomplished most of the assigned missions. General Prezan and his staff did not make major mistakes and the command of the subordinated large units was exercised in a manner that was appropriate for wartime.

His military performance was at the basis of the appointment of General Prezan, on 11/24 November 1916, as the commander of the Army Group that bore his name, in order to organize the great battle for the defense of the capital city, known in historiography as the Battle on the Neajlov-Arges or the Battle of Bucharest. The operation

was a failure, the first one of General Constantin Prezan on the battlefield. On 3/16 December 1916, General Constantin Prezan was appointed chief of the Great General Headquarters, after he had been promoted, three days in advance, to the rank of Army Corps general, the highest rank in the military hierarchy at that time.

He coordinated the reorganization of the Romanian armed forces in the winter and spring of 1917, collaborating very well with the French Military Mission, led by General Henri Mathias Berthelot, as well as with the Russian Command, headed by Generals Vladimir Sakharov and Dmitry Shcherbachev. He made a decisive contribution to the development of the Romanian armed forces campaign plans for the summer of 1917 and an essential contribution to the great victories at Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz. He managed competently, with responsibility, the particularly difficult situation—both politically and also from a military perspective—generated by the actions that resulted in the disbandment of the Eastern Front, following the events in Russia.

He held the highest military position in the Romanian state until 1/14 April 1918, when he was replaced by the Marghiloman government. He returned to the command of the armed forces in November 1918, with Romania's re-entry into the war. He led the operations of the Romanian armed forces to defend the acts of union from Kishinev, Chernivtsi and Alba Iulia, knowing military glory on the battlefield.

To sketch his moral portrait, also worth mentioning is the episode of his refusal to enter Budapest, on 4 August 1919, as the commander of the Romanian troops that had previously resisted the Hungarian Red Army offensive on the Tisza River (20–30 July 1919). Although he had the greatest merit in obtaining that victory, he left General Gheorghe Mărdărescu in his place. He resigned from the armed forces in March 1920, when his rival, General Averescu, became president of the Council of Ministers for the second time.

In the interwar period, Constantin Prezan refused to get involved in the political life of the country, opting for a discreet activity, as far as possible from the noise of everyday life. In time, the personality of Constantin Prezan³⁷ gained ground in the public opinion, being rightly considered an artisan of the Great Union. The most eloquent proof of the recognition of his special role was his promotion, in June 1930, to the dignity of Marshal by King Carol II, soon after he came to the throne of Romania.

On 27 August 1943, Marshal Constantin Prezan died at his estate in Schinetea, Vaslui, which he had bought at the beginning of the 20th century. A state funeral was organized, his personality being unanimously praised.

Although there were disputes between them, Marshals Averescu and Prezan were, in the years of the National Reunification War, the most valuable commanders, being the leaders of a military elite that, despite some errors, weaknesses and failures, significantly contributed to the achievement and defense of the Great Union in 1918.

4.3. Generals Eremia Grigorescu, Gheorghe Mărdărescu, Ernest Broșteanu and Iacob Zadik

THERE WERE also other generals who, along with the two illustrious commanders, contributed to the victory of the Romanian armed forces in the National Reunification War. Among them we mention Eremia Grigorescu, Gheorghe Mărdărescu, Ernest Broșteanu, and Iacob Zadik.

Undoubtedly, General of the Artillery Eremia Teofil Grigorescu (1863–1919) was one of the great artisans of the Romanian armed forces victories at Oituz and Mărășești. He made his debut in writing the national history resulting in the achievement of the Romanian desideratum, which determined the entry into the First World War, as commander of large units, shortly before the decree of mobilization, in 1916, when he was appointed commander of the 15th Infantry Division. He led that large unit in the battles in Southern Dobruja and then on the front in Moldavia, where, as part of the Oituz Group and under the slogan “access denied,” he stopped the enemy offensive between 11 and 27 October 1916. The determination to resist and the heroism demonstrated by the large unit commanded by General Eremia Grigorescu made the division part of the Romanian emotional consciousness as the “Iron Division.” Moreover, the success of the division made General Grigorescu, who dominated his collaborators with his imperturbable courage and self-control, known as a new leader of the army, a distinguished and great commander. For the remarkable way in which he led the division in the Battle of Oituz, he became the recipient of “Mihai Viteazul” Military Order 3rd class, through the High Decree no. 3055 on 27 October 1916.³⁸ Throughout his entire military career he established itself as an eminent artilleryman and mathematician, as an expert in the acquisition of weapons, ammunition and war material (Krupp model 1904 field guns, Mannlicher model 1893 bolt-action infantry rifle, explosives etc.), as well as in the production of ammunition. General Grigorescu also demonstrated, in the late years of his military career, his exceptional qualities as a fighter, not only as an expert in the technical field.

The full glory was known at Mărășești, where, firmly applying the principle of active defense, he managed to stop the offensive of the Group of Armies commanded by Field Marshal August von Mackensen, thus entering the gallery of outstanding military commanders. The most inspired, synthetic and persuasive characterization of the illustrious general was made by King Ferdinand I, who, when being informed by Grigorescu on the telephone that he had defeated his adversary, replied: “General, you are the embodiment of Glory!” As a token of appreciation for his memorable victory at Mărășești, for his bravery and skills, General Grigorescu became the recipient of “Mihai Viteazul” Military Order 2nd class, by the High Decree no. 227 on 12 February 1918.

On 11 November 1919, in the auditorium of the University of Iași, the Romanian nation paid homage to the brave general, who was handed the sword of honor offered on behalf of the Romanian people everywhere, made by public subscription, following the initiative of the academics Petru Poni, Constantin Climescu, Xenophon C. Gheorghiu, Constantin Thiron, and Alexandru D. Xenopol. At the end of the festivities dedicated to

him, General Grigorescu delivered an emotional speech. About his contribution to the memorable victories mentioned above, he modestly said the following: “All I did was to carry out an order, which I felt was being given by the whole country. I was ordered not to let the enemy pass and I stopped them.”³⁹

General Gheorghe Mărdărescu (1866–1938) was a distinguished staff officer, whose place and role in the campaign of 1916 and 1917, under the command of General Alexandru Averescu, cannot be disputed, as he was the one who planned the operations at Flămânda and ensured the defense of the Carpathians. After the laborious armed forces reorganization in the winter and spring of 1917, he reached the peak of his military career in the spring of 1919. Appointed commander of Transylvanian Troops Command on 11 April 1919, he led the military operations to liberate Transylvania up to the Tisza River, for his activity being awarded “Mihai Viteazul” Order, 3rd class:

*For the courage and energy invested in leading the military operations in April 1919 to liberate the territory of Transylvania that was still under the occupation of the Hungarian armed forces. He quickly shattered any attempt at resistance by the enemy, and in a short time he managed to drive them over the Tisza.*⁴⁰

At the beginning of January 1920, King Ferdinand I bestowed the same order, 2nd class, on him,

*For the extraordinary skills demonstrated in conducting the offensive operations in July 1919, which resulted in the complete defeat of the Hungarian troops and the occupation of Budapest.*⁴¹

Immediately after the demobilization of the Romanian armed forces, at the end of March 1920, he worked on writing two important books: *Regina Bătăliilor* (Queen of Battles) (1921) and *Campania pentru desrobirea Ardealului și ocuparea Budapestei (1918–1920)* (Campaign for liberating Transylvania and occupying Budapest, 1918–1920) (1921), the latter being reissued in an anastatic edition in 2009, dedicated to General Constantin Prezan “as a token of respect and great admiration for his high patriotism and his remarkable military competence.”⁴²

After the end of the war, between 1922 and 1926, he served as minister of War, a period during which he had an important place and role in establishing the military component of the collective security system, which included Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, being at the same time the director of *România militară* (Military Romania) journal. The place and role of General Mărdărescu during the National Reunification War and beyond it have been obviously acknowledged by the objective analysts of his activity, which compelled us to include him on the list of the Romanian armed forces elite.

General Ernest Broșteanu (1869–1932), rightfully designated as the liberator of Bessarabia,⁴³ distinguished himself in the first weeks of the National Reunification War when, being sent to Dobruja to command the 53rd Infantry Regiment, covered himself with glory, being called “the hero from Arabagi” and highly publicized. He had a chance

to remain alive and to recover relatively quickly. Due to his heroism, he became the recipient of “Mihai Viteazul” Order, 3rd class

Because, being sent by the division commander to liberate the left flank of the 2nd Division with his regiment, he managed to motivate his troops so that they started the attack singing. He was wounded while being at the head of the regiment, on 3 September 1916, in the battle of Arabagi, Dobruja.⁴⁴

Miraculously recovered, he was appointed as commander of the 11th Infantry Division, which he reorganized and led up to the final phase of the operation in Mărășești, to re-establish order between the Siret and the Prut rivers. He was then sent to Bessarabia and pacified his area of responsibility. He was received in Kishinev as a liberator. There he supported the Council of the Country and the Council of General Directors, and organized, for the first time, the activities on 24 January, the day on which the Romanian Principalities union was celebrated, which was considered the first step towards Bessarabia's union. He was the one who, following that day, managed the situation in the 11th Infantry Division area of responsibility very well, accomplishing missions and tasks assigned by the Government and the Great General Headquarters, his merits being incontestable and acknowledged as such especially by the politicians and intellectuals in Bessarabia. After the 11th Infantry Division was evacuated from Bessarabia, in the context of the peace talks in Buftea, General Ernest Broșteanu's merits were acknowledged in Kishinev and Iași, then in Bucharest. Thus, he was promoted to the rank of division general, he was decorated several times, and he filled important positions, among them the one of commander of the Border Troops Corps.⁴⁵ The role played by General Broșteanu in achieving Bessarabia's union with the Kingdom of Romania cannot be contested, although this merit has been only recently and not fully acknowledged.

Along with General Broșteanu, General Iacob Zadik is the seventh elite officer who contributed to the victory of the Romanian armed forces in the National Reunification War, as well as to the defense of the Great Union. Close to General Prezan, he was the chief of Staff of the Northern Army and of the 1st Army in the campaigns of 1916 and 1917. He was then appointed commander of the 8th Infantry Division and distinguished himself in the military operations in Bukovina and Pokuttia between November 1918 and August 1919. Seen in Chernivtsi as the liberator of Bukovina and in Warsaw as a reliable supporter of the Polish armed forces under the difficult circumstances in the spring of 1919, General Zadik was also involved in the battles in the Khotyn area in January 1919, and then in defending the northern border of Romania until the spring of 1920. Although he was not among the recipients of “Mihai Viteazul” Order, General Zadik was undeniably one of those who performed the most important missions, even if not at large scale and spectacular, proving to be a good negotiator and mediator in the disputes between the Ukrainians and the Poles in Pokuttia, as well as of the conditions for the evacuation of southern Galicia and the establishment of the Romanian-Polish border.

These seven generals were selected based on the criterion that they filled the highest leadership positions in the Romanian armed forces, significantly contributing to the planning and conduct of military operations and to the defense of the Great Union.

5. Final Remarks

THE ROMANIAN Armed Forces underwent broad transformations in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, which entailed recruiting, organizing and educating both the troops and the leaders. The direction given to the transformation process by Carol I, through the armed forces organization laws of 1868 and 1872, led to the increase not only in the strength of the standing army, but also in the level of education of the territorial army (a corps to be rapidly mobilized in the event of a war), while the military elites were educated and trained at famous military schools in Western Europe.

Therefore, in the indicated period, the actions of the Romanian Armed Forces were based on the experience gained both in schools and on the battlefield. The military elite, educated and trained abroad, following the analysis of the lessons learned from personal as well as from the Western experience, significantly contributed to the achievement of the national strategic objectives, especially the Great Union.



Notes

1. See Mihai Milca, *Geneza teoriei elitelor: Provocarea neomachiavellienilor* (Bucharest: Editura Economică, 2001).
2. Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society [Tratato di Sociologia generale]*, edited by Arthur Livingston, translated by Andrew Bongiorno and Arthur Livingston with the advice and active cooperation of James Harvey Rogers, vol. 3, *Theory of Derivations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), 1423–1424.
3. Apud Florea Ioncioaia, “Revolta ierarhiei: O discuție asupra temei elitelor și a proiecției sale istoriografice,” *Xenopoliana* (Iași) 4, 1–4 (1996): 63.
4. Morris Janowitz, “Military Elites and the Study of War,” *Conflict Resolution* 1, 1 (1957): 10.
5. Janowitz, 11.
6. Luis Garrido Vergara, “Elites, Political Elites and Social Change in Modern Societies,” *Revista de Sociología* 28 (2013): 32.
7. Garrido Vergara, 44–45.
8. Arpad E. Kovacs, “French Military Institutions before the Franco-Prussian War,” *The American Historical Review* 51, 2 (1946): 217–218.
9. Kovacs, 218.
10. Kovacs, 219.
11. Kovacs, 220–221.
12. Chris McNab, ed., *Armies of the Napoleonic Wars: An Illustrated History*, foreword by Allan Mallinson (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 28–30.
13. Guy C. Dempsey, Jr., *Napoleon’s Mercenaries: Foreign Units in the French Army Under the Consulate and Empire, 1799 to 1814* (London: Greenhill Books; Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), 19–20.
14. John Robert Elting, *Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon’s Grande Armée* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1997), 127.

15. H. W. Koch, *A History of Prussia* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1978) 186–189.
16. Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army 1640–1945* (London–Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).
17. Dumitru Atanasiu et al., *Contribuții la istoria învățământului militar din România*, vol. 1, *Perioada 1830–1900* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1972); vol. 2, *Perioada 1901–1947* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1978); Constantin Oprea, Dumitru Atanasiu, and Victor Atanasiu, *Învățământul militar românesc: Tradiții și actualitate* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1986).
18. Related to the history of the institution see *Istoricul Școlii Superioare de Războiu 1889–1939* (Bucharest: Tipografia Școlii Superioare de Războiu, 1939); Mircea Agapie et al., *De la Școala Superioară de Război la Academia de Înalte Studii Militare: Comandanți, profesori, absolvenți, 1889–1995* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, 1995).
19. Maria Georgescu, *Cadeți români la Saint-Cyr/Cadets roumains à Saint Cyr*, French translation by Anne-Marie Hillerin Codrescu (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2002); Petre Otu, “Pregătirea ofițerilor de stat major în străinătate (1878–1940),” *Gândirea militară românească* (Bucharest), new ser., 26, 1 (2015): 26–36.
20. Alin Ciupală, Rudolf Dinu, and Antal Lukács, *Documente diplomatice române, seria I, volumul 11, 1883*, foreword by Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, introduction by Rudolf Dinu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2006). See also Gheorghe Nicolae Căzan and Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, *România și Tripla Alianță 1878–1914* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979).
21. General Radu R. Rosetti, *Mărturisiri*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Convorbiri Literare, 1940), 144.
22. Neculai Moghior, Ion Dănilă, and Leonida Moise, *General Gheorghe Mihail: Cuvânt pentru viitorime*, foreword by Mihail Popescu (Bucharest: Paideia, 2004), 58.
23. See, for example, General de divizie N. Mihăiescu, *Amintiri și învățăminte din războiul de întregire a neamului 1916–1919* (Bucharest: Universul, 1936), 205–211.
24. General Alexandru Iarca, *Memorialul meu* (Buzău: Ion Călinescu, 1922), 179.
25. Iarca, 193–194.
26. See André Corvisier, ed., *Histoire Militaire de la France, 3. De 1871 à 1940*, edited by Guy Pedroncini (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992), 13–161.
27. *România în Războiul Mondial 1916–1919*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial și Imprimeriile Statului, Imprimeria Națională, 1936), Annex no. 4.
28. General Radu R. Rosetti, *Mărturisiri (1914–1919)*, edited with foreword and notes by Maria Georgescu (Bucharest: Modelism, 1997), 57.
29. *Istoricul Școlii Superioare de Războiu*, 226–227.
30. *Anuarul Armatei Române pe anul 1916* (Bucharest: Tipografia “Universala” Iancu Ionescu, 1916), 429–433.
31. In the same situation there were the following Brigadier Generals: Ioan Rașcu (commander Foșani–Nămolosa–Galați region; 10 May 1915); Gheorghe Georgescu (commander 5th Army Corps; 10 May 1915); Constantin Tănăsescu (engineer’s troops general inspector; 10 May 1915); Constantin Costescu (commander 6th Infantry Division; 1 April 1916); Ioan Popovici (1 April 1916).

32. Generals Constantin Coandă, deputy inspector of the 1st Sub-Inspectorate, Leon Mavrocordat, chief of the Royal Military House, Alexandru Averescu, Dumitru Cotescu, Constantin Prezan, Mihail Aslan, commanders 1st, 2nd, 4th and 3rd Army Corps.
33. The issue is discussed in more detail in Petre Otu, ed., *Reforma militară și societatea în România (1878–2008)* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2009), 9–94; Dumitru-Dan Crășmaru, *Elita militară românească în timpul lui Carol I (1866–1914)* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2017).
34. *Războiul de întregire (1916–1919): Comandanți militari români* (Bucharest: Editura Centrului Tehnic-Editorial al Armatei, 2016), 252–272.
35. See Adrian Stroea and Marin Ghinoiu, *Generalul Constantin Christescu, seniorul artileriei române* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2016). In this regard, in relation to General Constantin Christescu, the military historian Adrian Stroea mentions: Among the distinguished minds of the Romanian Army who had an important contribution to the development of the Great War and to the accomplishment of Greater Romania is also General of the Artillery Constantin Christescu. Unfortunately, the Romanian state acknowledged his exceptional merits in the accomplishment of the desideratum of national integration only partially and tardily. The general was treated unfairly not only in the last years of his life but also after he passed away. He was unfairly replaced at the command of the 1st Army during the battle of Mărășești, he was not promoted to the rank of marshal, like Generals Prezan and Averescu, he was buried in a modest grave in Bellu cemetery and not in the crypt that was destined for him in the Mausoleum of Mărășești, he was not awarded the highest Romanian medal of war, “Mihai Viteazul” Military Order. General Christescu, the remarkable military commander and professor, should be praised for his exceptional merits as the founder of the Staff School in Romania, the educator and trainer of most command and staff officers who graduated from the War School and participated in the First World War as commanders of units and large units. He was justly considered one of the most competent generals of Romania, an authority figure in the field of tactics and strategy—see Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), “an iron fist and a skilled head”—see Constantin Argetoianu, *Memorii pentru cei de mâine: Amintiri din vremea celor de ieri*, vols. 3–5, 5th Part, 1916–1918, edition, rev. and enl. by Stelian Neagoe (Bucharest: Machiavelli, 2008, 50), being responsible, as a deputy chief of the General Staff, for “the activity of the Operations Section within the Great General Staff. The ‘Z’ Hypothesis—the Romanian Armed Forces Campaign Plan for 1916, was devised under his command”—see Rosetti, *Mărturisiri (1914–1916)*, 52. The mentioned plan was “not to be ignored, being the expression of General Constantin Christescu’s staff thinking”—see Teofil Oroianu and Gheorghe Nicolescu, eds., *Șefii Statului Major Român 1859–2000* (Bucharest: Europa Nova, 2001), 92—ingeniously developed on the basis of “strategic surprise and the capitalization on the Romanian superiority, in terms of forces and assets, compared to those of the Austro-Hungarian 1st Army in Transylvania, and especially on the basis of timely and effectively cooperation with the allies” (ibid). The strategic deployment and the distribution of forces were judiciously planned, in full accordance with the missions established for the armies on both fronts and in each direction of action. Moreover, the use of offensive cover troops to cross the passages

and conquer the bridgeheads over the mountains, so as to ensure the concentration of the main forces in the intra-mountain valleys highlights “the originality of the adopted solutions. General Constantin Christescu fully demonstrated his professional qualities as a fighter on the battlefields of the Great War.” Unfortunately for him, on 30 July/12 August 1917, after fierce fighting, he was replaced at the command of the 1st Army. Analyzing lucidly and pertinently the mentioned replacement, General Dabija concluded that it was an unfair measure, because General Constantin Christescu had conducted the operations well, had shown great operational skills, had given judicious orders, and had taken appropriate measures, considering the reality. The cause of General Christescu’s replacement from the command of the 1st Army was, in his opinion, an error of the Romanian armed forces leadership that did not know how to manage the divergences between General Christescu and Russian General Alexander Ragoza, the two having different actional and behavioral mentalities. The solution of “sacrificing” the Romanian general to end the “command crisis” was an unfair professional insult to the eminent general, who did not consider himself fully rehabilitated, not even in April 1918, when he was appointed chief of the Great General Staff. Mention should be made of the fact that, once he accepted the appointment, he did all his best, with responsibility and professionalism, to maintain, reorganize and prepare the armed forces for remobilization so that they could defend Greater Romania.

36. For further details see Petre Otu, *Mareșalul Alexandru Averescu: Militarul, omul politic, legenda*, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2009); id., *Mareșalul Constantin Prezan: Vocația datoriei* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2008).
37. Army and army group commander in 1916, then chief of the Romanian Armed Forces General Staff, between December 1916 and 1 April 1918, and then, between November 1918 and March 1920, delegated by King Ferdinand I to command the armed forces for the period November 1917–March 1918, Army Corps General Constantin Prezan is, decidedly, in our opinion, the military personality who, being also promoted in 1930 to the rank of Marshal of Romania—for further details see Corneliu Andone et al., *Mareșalii ai României* (Bucharest: RAO, 2013), 239–271—, remained the focus of attention of the country’s leadership until his death in 1943. He was the recipient of three classes of the “Mihai Viteazul” Order, the highest class on 5 February 1920, “For the competence demonstrated in providing guidelines—even on the battlefield—in the capacity of Chief of Staff of the High Command, which resulted in totally defeating the Hungarians as well as in occupying Budapest in 1919”—see Eugen Stănescu et al., *Cavalerii ai Ordinului militar de război “Mihai Viteazul”* (Sibiu: Salgo, 2012), 38. The Romanian Academy acknowledged his merits in 1923, when he, along with Alexandru Averescu, became honorary members of the institution, because: “By assuming difficult responsibilities, by their skills, by their work, by their patriotism, they greatly contributed to the achievement of our national desideratum”—see Nicolae Ciobanu, “Mareșalul Prezan (personalitatea și activitatea militară),” in *Mareșalii României: Sesiune de comunicări științifice Brașila 15–16 iunie 1999*, edited by Nicu Apostu and Didi Miler (Bucharest: Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, 1999), 35. The document signed by King Carol II, received by General Constantin Prezan together with the specific insignia of dignity, stated: “As Chief of the Romanian Armed Forces General Staff and first advisor to my glorious father, through your skills and determination, it was possible to master and overcome the tragic circumstances of 1916 and the spring of 1917, and among the tried Romanian

armed forces arose that wonderful army that won the victories at Mărăști, the memorable one at Mărășești, and then completed the epic tale of the nation through the victory on the Tisza”—apud Grigore Stamate and Mihai Hodorogea, *Viața mareșalului Prezan: Profesia de a fi român* (Bucharest: Axioma Print, 2015), 11.

38. Adrian Stroea, *Între prestigiul numelui și nedreptatea istoriei: Generalul Traian Grigorescu, fiul eroului de la Mărășești* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2021), 18.
39. Nicolae Ionescu, *Generalul Eremia Grigorescu* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1967), 117.
40. Stănescu et al., 70.
41. Stănescu et al., 38.
42. Generalul G. D. Mărdărescu, *Campania pentru desrobirea Ardealului și ocuparea Budapestei (1918–1920)* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1921), 3.
43. For further details see Ion Giurcă, *Generalul Ernest Broșteanu: Eliberator al Basarabiei* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2020).
44. Giurcă, 265–276.
45. Giurcă, 281–292.

Abstract

The Romanian Military Elite in the National Reunification War
(15/28 August 1916–20 March 1920)

The present article is intended to emphasize the role played by the Romanian military elite in the development of the armed forces, especially during the period between the War of Independence and the First World War. Since there is an evident causal relationship between the performance of an organization and its leaders, I consider it useful to analyze the role played by the Romanian Armed Forces high command (the elite) in the military success or failure during the mentioned period, the First World War included. In this context, mention should be made that the Romanian military thought in the late 19th century and the early 20th century was related to the lessons learned from the French Military School, the emerging Prussian Military School, led by Clausewitz, as well as from the experience gained in the War of Independence and the Balkan Wars.

Keywords

military elite, military leaders, National Reunification War, First World War