



## GHEORGHE DABIJA – SOLDIER, DIPLOMAT AND WRITER –

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*Gheorghe Dabija became known in the Romanian military journalism through his studies and works of military pedagogy, where he approached various aspects of the training and education of the troops. Within the period 1910-1913 he was a military attaché in Sofia and Belgrade. He participated in the Reunification War 1916-1919, commanding different military structures, a fact that enabled him, after the finalization of the military operations, to dedicate himself to the military history, drafting an exceptional monography dedicated to the battle actions developed within the period 1916-1918.*

*Keywords: Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija, First World War, Romanian military writer, military attaché.*

## MILITARY ACTIVITY

Gheorghe Dabija was born on 20 September 1872 in Iași, being the son of Alexandru and Natalia, and he died in Bucharest, in 1957. Born within one year after the marriage of his parents, he received a higher, thorough education, in the spirit of the responsibility towards life, devotion to the ancestors and supreme respect due to the country<sup>1</sup>. On 16 July 1891, he was enrolled at the Officer Training School, which he graduated on 16 July 1893 with the military rank of Second Lieutenant. His military ranks were as follows: Second Lieutenant (16 July 1893), Lieutenant 08 April 1896), Captain (28 November 1902), Major (10 May 1910), Lieutenant Colonel (1 April 1916) and Brigadier General (1 September 1917).

In 1893, he graduated the Officer Training School with the military rank of Second Lieutenant and on 16 July he was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Hunter Battalion. He remained in that elite unit until 08 April 1896, when he was transferred to the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment “Ștefan cel Mare”, a unit where he received the rank of Lieutenant. After one stage in this regiment, he returned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Hunter Battalion, from where, on 1 November 1902 he entered, only for a few days, in the structure of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment “Vâlcea”. On 28 November 1902, he was transferred to the 31<sup>st</sup> Regiment “Calafat”, and on that date he was advanced to the rank of Captain.

It must be mentioned the fact that the transfers took place only in documents because, in reality, within the period 18 September 1901 – 1 October 1903, Lieutenant, and since 1902, Captain Gheorghe Dabija was “attached for service in the Austro-Hungarian army”.

On 1 April 1904, he returned, only for one year, to 4<sup>th</sup> Hunter Battalion, and on 1 April 1905 he was transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division which was quartered in Târgoviște. He activated in that large unit

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<sup>1</sup> Delia Bălăican, *Generalul G. A. Dabija – un reprezentant de marcă al generației sale*, in the Scientific Annals of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iași, History, LXI (2015), Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2015, p. 395.



*On 1 April 1916, with only a few months before Romania entered the war together with the powers of the Triple Entente, through the High Decree No. 1024 on 17 March 1916, Lieutenant Colonel Gheorghe Dabija was appointed at the command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment "Mihai Viteazul", being advanced to the rank of Colonel on 10 May 1916, through the High Decree No. 1863 on 3 May.*

for one year and on 1 April 1906, through the High Decree No. 1516/1906, he entered in the structure of the Firing Training School.

The series of the work-related transfers continued one year later when, on 1 April 1907, through the High Decree No. 1789/1907, he was transferred to the 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment "Roman". In his journey through the units he activated in he was appreciated by his commanders, a reason why, on 22 October 1907, through the High Decree No. 3527/1907, he was detached to the Great General Staff. After a one-year stage, on 25 October 1908, through the High Decree No. 2907/1908, he returned to the 14<sup>th</sup> Regiment "Roman", where he filled various staff positions.

On 1 October 1909, through the High Decree No. 2769, he was once again detached to the Great General Staff where, on 10 May 1910, through the High Decree No. 1775/1910, he was advanced to the rank of Major, a very special moment in the military career of the future General.

The activity of Major Gheorghe Dabija in the command structures of the Romanian Armed Forces continued also in the following years. Therefore, on 1 October 1913, through the High Decree No. 5860 on 7 November 1913, he was transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Department within the Ministry of War where he fulfilled various general staff positions with attributions in the reorganisation and coordination of the Infantry branch, under the conditions in which the Romanian general staff began to outline conclusions from the campaign developed on the territory of Bulgaria in July 1913<sup>2</sup>.

The date of 1 April 1914 represented one of the most important moments in the military career of the future General. Therefore, through the High Decree No. 1148 on 18 March, Major Gheorghe Dabija was advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel receiving, at the same time, the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hunter Battalion "Regina Elisabeta".

On 1 April 1916, with only a few months before Romania entered the war together with the powers of the Triple Entente,

<sup>2</sup> Professor Dr Valeriu Avram, Lucian Drăghici, Gabriel-George Pătrașcu, Dr Ion Rîșnoveanu, *Războiul de Întregire (1916-1919) Comandanți Militari Români*, Editura Centrului Tehnic Editorial al Armatei, București, 2016, p. 48.

through the High Decree No. 1024 on 17 March 1916, Lieutenant Colonel Gheorghe Dabija was appointed at the command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment “Mihai Viteazul”, being advanced to the rank of Colonel on 10 May 1916, through the High Decree No. 1863 on 03 May.

On 17/27 August 1916, this unit was subordinated, from a hierarchic point of view, to the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, under the command of Brigadier General Gheorghe Mărdărescu, the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, under the command of Brigadier General Gheorghe Burghilea, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps, under the command of Divisional General Dumitru Cotescu and, not lastly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Romanian Army, under the command of Divisional General Alexandru Averescu.

Since the first day of war, the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment “Mihai Viteazul” participated actively in the Romanian offensive north of the Southern Carpathians, managing, within a short period of time, to liberate Brasov.

The activity from the first part of the war, more precisely the period 14 August 1916 – 01 February 1917, is presented in a statement by Colonel Gheorghe Dabija, as follows: “*Within the period 14 August 1916 – 01 February 1917, with the rank of Colonel as Deputy Chief of Staff for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army; Chiefs: General Staff Chief – General G. Mărdărescu; Commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army: General M. Aslan; Commanders of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army: General Gr. Crăiniceanu and General A. Averescu*”.

During the campaign in 1917, more precisely during the battle from Mărăști (9/22 July – 24 July/01 August), Colonel Gheorghe Dabija held the command of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, subordinated to the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, under the command of Brigadier General Ioan Pătrașcu, 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps, under the command of Divisional General Artur Văitoianu, the superior echelon being represented by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, under the command of Army Corps General Alexandru Averescu, as it results from the above-mentioned statement: “*Within the period 01 February 1917 – 01 September 1917, with the rank of Colonel, I held the command of the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. On 01 September 1917, I was advanced to the rank of General. Within the period 01 September 1917 – 08 February 1918 – General, Commander of 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Chiefs: Divisional Commander: General I. Pătrașcu; Corps Commander: General Artur Văitoianu*”.



ROMANIAN  
MILITARY  
THINKING

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*After the signing of the Peace Treaty from Bucharest, between Romania and the Central Powers, on 24 April/ 07 May 1918, and also after the demobilisation of a part of the Army, Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija held the command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade or the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hunter Division, large units which participated in the campaign from Transylvania and Hungary against the Soviet power instituted by Béla Kuhn.*

From this statement, it results the fact that, on 01 September 1917, Colonel Gheorghe Dabija was advanced to the rank of Brigadier General, in compliance to the High Decree No. 1405 on 01 December 1917.

The year 1918 represented another important reference point for Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija, to whom it was assigned the command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Therefore, *“Within the period 08 February- 01 June 1918 – Commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division. Chiefs: Corps Commander (meaning 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Corps): General I. Pătrașcu. Within the period 01 June 1918 – 12 November 1918 – Commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. Chiefs: Divisional Commander: General Alex Atanasiu; Corps Commander: General I. Pătrașcu. Within the period 12 November 1918 – Commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hunter Division. Chiefs: within the period 12 November 1918 – 14 April 1919, Divisional General Moșoiu Traian. From 14 April – Divisional General Mărdărescu Gheorghe, Commander of the Troops in Transylvania”*.

From the above-mentioned statement, it clearly results the fact that, also after the signing of the Peace Treaty from Bucharest, between Romania and the Central Powers, on 24 April/07 May 1918, and also after the demobilisation of a part of the Army, Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija held the command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade or the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hunter Division, large units which participated in the campaign from Transylvania and Hungary against the Soviet power instituted by Béla Kuhn<sup>3</sup>.

In the conditions of the demobilisation of the army in the spring of 1920, on 01 July 1920, he resigned and he was removed from active duty according to the High Decree No. 2899 on 10 July 1920, therefore ending a brilliant career in which Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija proved his military and command qualities, and also his bravery and heroism, until the finalisation of the actions in Hungary and the decree of demobilisation.

Along his military career, Gheorghe Dabija enjoyed the appreciation of his direct commanders, a fact that proves once again the human and military quality of the officer. In the Qualifying Sheet for 1916 (within the period 15 August 1916 – 15 February 1917), Brigadier General Gheorghe Mărdărescu, the Chief of Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army,

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

stated: *“Colonel Dabija Gheorghe acted as Deputy Chief of Staff of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armies, until 15 February 1917. Intelligent, well-prepared, with a formidable labour capacity and very thorough in his work, he was a precious collaborator of mine. Colonel Dabija is not only a good staff officer, but he also has a deep insight of Infantry, which makes him an excellent Division Commander. I was very much satisfied with his services – both at the office and also outside it – and he was an example of duty fulfilment for the officers from the Armed Forces Headquarters”.*

In 1917, Brigadier General Ioan Pătrașcu, Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, characterised Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija, in a eulogistic manner, as follows: *“General Dabija was advanced in November. Beginning with that month until now, he continued to command the 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the same good conditions. In that period, he controlled the organisation of his sector in good conditions”.*

One of the most beautiful characterisations in his military career was offered by the Divisional General Traian Moșoiu, the Commander of the troops from Transylvania, who, on 01 April 1919, stated: *“He controls the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hunter Division. Even if the Division was set up at the moment of the mobilisation, General Dabija, through his hard work and special skills, managed, through restricted means, to organise the unit in the best conditions. In the occupation area, assigned to the Division, it was re-established and maintained the order, in a strong manner, and on the Zam – Baia de Cris line, the troops of the Division performed their duty in a great manner. General Dabija had successfully handled the improvement of the unit training, setting up a training centre, organised in excellent conditions, leading to very good results. Considering the fact that we are in the situation of very important military operations, I reserve the right to characterize him after the finalisation of these operations. I propose him for the awarding of the Order “Steaua României” (Romanian Star) with swords to the rank of Commander with a cordon of “Virtutea Militară” (Military Virtue), for his merits in the occupation of Transylvania”<sup>4</sup>.*



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<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50.



*Gheorghe Dabija was the only Romanian military diplomat able to find out, through his own efforts, information about the negotiations between the Balkan states for the establishment of the Balkan League. On 14 April 1912, he presented to King Carol I, the text of the alliance treaty between Bulgaria and Serbia and its secret appendix, both signed at the end of February.*

## DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

Bulgaria was the third state where Romania decided to send a military attaché, after Germany and Austria-Hungary. The first military attaché accredited at Sofia was Captain Nicolae Petală, in 1904, followed by the Captain Gheorghe Dabija, at that moment, the Chief of Cabinet of the Minister of War. Through the quality of his reports, based on the analysis of the information from open sources, the military attaché in Sofia had the possibility to directly influence the policy of the Romanian authorities. His activity was strictly monitored by the Bulgarian Intelligence Service. Sensitive to any information that could affect his statute of military attaché, Gheorghe Dabija rejected any accusations of espionage brought against him<sup>5</sup>.

Irrespective of the nature of his sources, Gheorghe Dabija was the only Romanian military diplomat able to find out, through his own efforts, information about the negotiations between the Balkan states for the establishment of the Balkan League. On 14 April 1912, he presented to King Carol I, the text of the alliance treaty between Bulgaria and Serbia and its secret appendix, both signed at the end of February. Major Gheorghe Dabija developed his activity as military attaché in Sofia, starting on 10 May 1910 until 1913, when he was sent to Belgrade, also as military attaché, fulfilling this position until 1914.

About the military diplomat mission, Gheorghe Dabija stated as follows: *“I loved my country and everything I did as a military attaché, I did only to its superior interest, according to the instructions received from the Ministry of War, the Great General Staff and, especially, His Highness King Carol I, who honoured me with his trust. My conscience was and remained also today, after 35 years (1910-1945) completely calm and at peace”*<sup>6</sup>.

## SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITY

Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija valued through writing his professional experiences, from the training stage in Austria-Hungary, within the period 1901-1903, until the activity of military diplomat in Bulgaria and Serbia, within the period 1910-1913, or through the

<sup>5</sup> Delia Bălăican, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 402.

effective participation on the battle field during the Reunification War (1916-1919). The military writings marked his life, offering him a maximum freedom of expression, but also causing him the worst prejudices, representing the head of claims of the communist courts, Gheroghe Dabija being imprisoned in Jilava and Văcărești penitentiaries, within the period 08 August 1952 – 18 January 1955.



The books and articles having military thematic, written by general Dabija, came to the fore through the direct reference to the practical aspect of the training of the troops, through concision and the comparative study of the works regarding the instruction of the large armies of the world and universal history, through the understanding capacity of the human resorts which determined the military or political decisions, affecting the future of a country<sup>7</sup>. The specialists within the Romanian Academy Library identified five categories of works of Gheorghe Dabija:

- **Books and articles of history and military diplomacy:**
  - a. Books regarding the Balkan Wars: *“Războiul bulgaro-turc din anul 1912-1913”*, a book that received from King Carol I the medal *“Bene Merenti”* 1<sup>st</sup> class, of gold, in 1914, and the Romanian Academy awarded him the Prize *“Adamache”*, based on the report of Nicolae Iorga. The first book about Southern Dobruja, *“Cadrilaterul Bulgar/Bulgarian Quadrilateral”*, which appeared with only a few weeks before the entry of Romania in the Second Balkan War<sup>8</sup>.
  - b. The topic – First World War – *“Armata Română în Războiul Mondial (1916-1918)”*, written in four volumes, within the period 1928-1937, his most valuable book, a reference work in the bibliography of the First World War<sup>9</sup>. The work *Armata română în războiul mondial 1916 – 1918* has a great documentary value. It contains a rich factual material – starting from the orders of the Great General Headquarters, operative orders of the armies and divisions, to phone calls between the officers from the armed forces staffs – enabling the analysis and understanding of the complex mechanism of the organisation

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 396-397.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 398.



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and command of the military actions of the different echelons, the existing relations between commands and commanders, the used methods and procedures, the manner in which the units and the large units of the Romanian Army fulfilled their battle missions. This work presents fewer aspects with respect to theoretical, strategical and tactical appreciations, regarding the development of the military actions<sup>10</sup>. The work contains both a detailed description, based on archive documents, of the military operations and a severe analysis of the deficiencies and errors resulting in the Romanian troops being defeated in the battlefield<sup>11</sup>.

The author, a direct participant in those events, adopted a critical tone, the value judgements regarding certain commanders being very severe. Therefore, Gheorge Dabija had critical appreciations regarding the operation plan of the Romanian command. The “Z” Hypothesis, because of its less manoeuvre character. The author considered that a strong blow performed together with the Russian Army in Bucovina would have been more indicated, and that would have returned the defence of the enemy from the Transylvanian Plateau and Galicia. Also, the author, in consensus with the opinion of General, future Marshall Alexandru Averescu, minimalised the role and importance of the battle from Mărășești, which was not considered by them to be a proper operation, according to the canons of the military art. On the contrary, the battle from Mărăști was a model of organisation and execution, having a particular success. In that case, Gheorgeh Dabija was unfair and biased, his appreciations being subjective, resulting from his admiration towards Alexandru Averescu and antipathy against General Constantin Prezan<sup>12</sup>.

The foreword of the work was signed by Marshall Alexandru Averescu, former commander of the author, who stated: *“General Dabija, with the pen in his hand, was the officer who participated in the war and his thinking manner reflected*

<sup>10</sup> \*\*\* *Istoria Gândirii Militare Românești*, Editura Militară, București, 1974, p. 252.

<sup>11</sup> Professor Dr Valeriu Avram, *op.cit*, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> Dr Petre Otu (coordinator), *Personalități ale Gândirii Militare Românești*, Editura Academiei de Înalte Studii Militare, București, 1997, pp. 138-139.



*in his writings was different from the thinking manner during the war only through the fading caused by the passage of time, meaning the period of time from the operations and their description. Therefore, in the valuable work of General Dabija, additionally to the material gathered with an exemplary diligence, we could also find the interpretation of the various events occurred before his eyes or around him, observed in the light of the cruel reality, with the undefeated dreams of the officer willing to serve his country”<sup>13</sup>.*

- c. Military Chronicles of the Second World War appeared in the newspaper “*Curentul*” (25 June 1943 – 23 August 1944).
- **Military writings about the instruction of the Infantry troops.** 11 works are part of this category, some of them being re-edited, the most appreciated one being “*Instrucția practică a companiei de infanterie*” (1904), to which we may add the articles edited in “*Revista Infanteriei*” and “*Revista Armatei*”.
  - **Works based on which it was set up and operated the National Staff School** [Superior War School – n.n.]. The most conclusive example is represented by “*Regulamentul de manevră de luptă al infanteriei*” (1910), based on which the Romanian Armed Forces were upgraded to the standards of the modern armies of the world.
  - **The motivational writings** through which he directly pleaded the unfading principles and values, like: truth, dignity, patriotism. We can mention here the work: “*Dresaj sau educațiune?*” and the articles from “*Revista Infanteriei*”: “*Patriotismul nostru, Tactica aplicată – marș, staționare, luptă*”, to which we may add his memoirs.
  - **The memoirs** represented by the innovative work, “*Amintiri din cariera militară (1893-1920)*”, “*Oameni, tipuri, obiceiuri, năravuri*” and “*Sisteme de altădată*” (1945), in the patrimony of the Library of the Romanian Academy. The about 700 pages help us to discover the contemporary period of the author, the personality and career of General Gheorghe Dabija.

<sup>13</sup> General G. A. Dabija, *Armata Română în Războiul Mondial (1916 – 1918), 1<sup>st</sup> Volume*, Editura IG. HERTZ, București, 1937, pp. 10-11.



The volume published in 1936 is added to this work – “*Amintirile unui atașat militar român în Bulgaria 1910-1913*”<sup>14</sup>.

The analysis performed by the author regarding the German-Polish War in September 1939 is also useful. Presenting the mutations of the military organisation and technique, Gheorghe Dabija considers that the total war, materialised by the German army in the case of Poland, was envisaged in all countries and it shall form the army conflict in the future<sup>15</sup>.

### CONCLUSIONS

Brigadier General in reserve, Gheorghe Dabija is one of the most important Romanian military thinkers. He had the chance of a career that can hardly be equalled or outperformed even in the present days. He was a career soldier and he commanded military structures up to division level, participating with them in battle actions. He pursued a career in the military diplomacy field, as a military attaché and he excelled in the military journalism field. Unfortunately for the Romanian historiography, the work dedicated to the participation in the campaign from 1919, when he was at the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hunter Division, and participated in the battles against the Hungarian army, was not published. Through his entire theoretical activity, Brigadier General Gheorghe Dabija, was an original thinker, who refused to follow the easy way of taking-over certain ideas and solutions, already prepared, seeking to promote modern methods and modalities of instruction and of analysis of the military phenomenon<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Delia Bălăican, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Petre Otu (coordinator), *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup> *ibidem*, p. 142.

4. Delia Bălăican, *Generalul G.A. Dabija – un reprezentant de marcă al generației sale*, in *Scientific Annals of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iasi*.
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