



THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANIAN INFANTRY DEFENCE ACCORDING TO THE LATEST INSTRUCTIONS USED DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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This article discusses the characteristics of the Romanian infantry defence during the last part of the Second World War according to the instructions received from the General Staff or various Higher Commands. It presents aspects relating to the role of the defence that regained its specific mission to hold its position to the last man or bullet. This article presents the tactical rules of an infantry division in a position of resistance, the arrangement of the battalions, the role of the heavy artillery units and the course of action when the enemy started the attack.

At the same time, it also lists the differences between the instructions and directives relating to defence, given under the German influence between 1941-1943 and the last ones during the war. Furthermore, it also defines the concept of fire plan with all the necessary firings to be delivered against an enemy, with the assessment of the role of the cooperation between the aviation and the artillery once the preparatory firing is started or its use against tanks.

Keywords: defence; infantry; division; artillery; fire plan;

INTRODUCTION

On the brink of the Second World War, the military training, infantry regulations and modern technique equipment were inconsistent with the new requirements of the battlefield.

Beginning with 1941, the Romanian infantry training included the battle principles of the German Army (Șuța, p. 210), to the same effect various regulations being tailored to meet the specificity and requirements of the Romanian infantry. Nevertheless, the military failures to follow proved that the German doctrine and strategy had some shortcomings and could not be completely adapted to the Romanian specificity. This included the strategy of entering deep into the enemy lines, without securing the flanks and rear, without the consolidation of conquered alignments and neglecting defence (Romanescu, Tudor, Cucu & Popescu, p. 257).

The lessons learned from the Second World War led to the emergence in 1945 of the *Command and Troops Training Directives, part I (offensive) and part II (defence)*, which represented a collection of instructions given by the General Staff or various Higher Commands which became allies during the war.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this article is to assess the principles of defence during the last part of the Second World War, based on the following assumption: there are differences between the instructions and directives relating to defence given under German influence between 1941 and 1943 and the last ones during the war of 1944-1945. This research was conducted by studying the documents from the national military archives of Pitești, the Command and Troops Training Directives – 1945, the Artillery Regulation – 1941 but also from the analysis of relevant literature published from 1941 to 1985.

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DEFENCE PRINCIPLES

These directives were the last instructions used by the Romanian infantry during the war.

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The defence executed by the infantry during the last part of the war was characterised by achieving static defence without withdrawing the troops, on almost every front, the increase in the defence depth, achieved on the one hand by the increase in the depth of the position of resistance, and on the other hand, by planning other successive positions and strengthening them with very strong works.

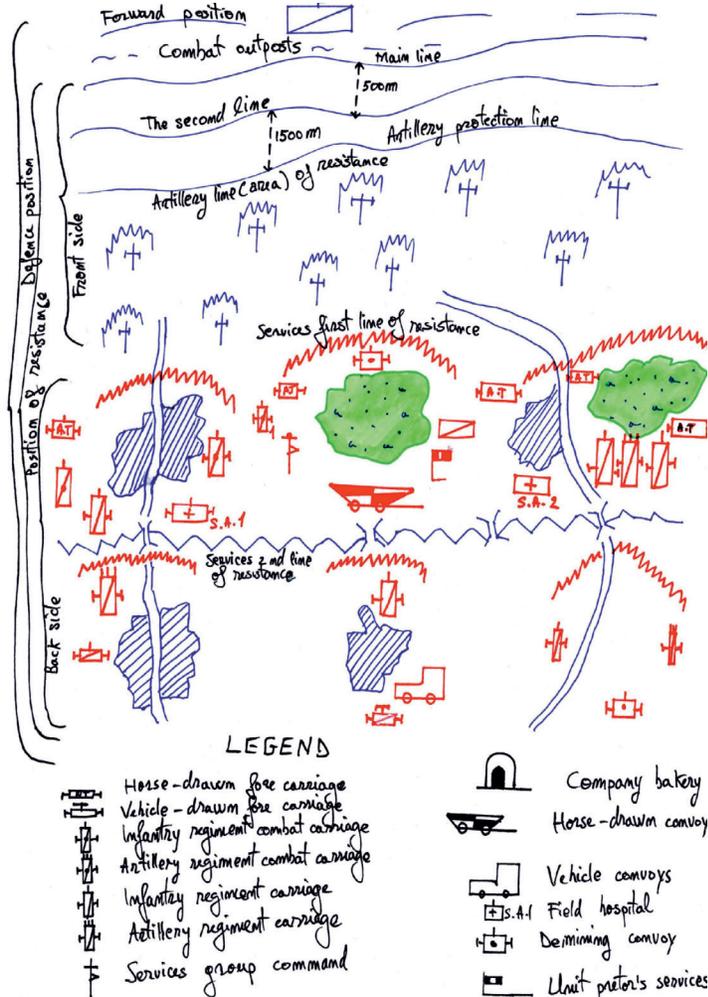


Figure 1: 1945 Defensive plan
Source: Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 149.

of resistance, and on the other hand, by planning other successive positions and strengthening them with very strong works (Șuța, p. 284). Therefore, it was restored the classical concept of defence according to which “defence means to maintain the position of resistance to the last man and last bullet” with no retreat in the face of the battle (Șuța, p. 192), by impeding the offensive in achieving its purpose – the imposition of one’s will – because only the defence could decisively prevent the offensive from acquiring the decision (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II Defence, art. 149). The position of a defence unit – the land on which defends itself contained 3 elements: forward position, combat outposts (located 500-1000 m from the main line) and the position of resistance (Ibid, art. 153).

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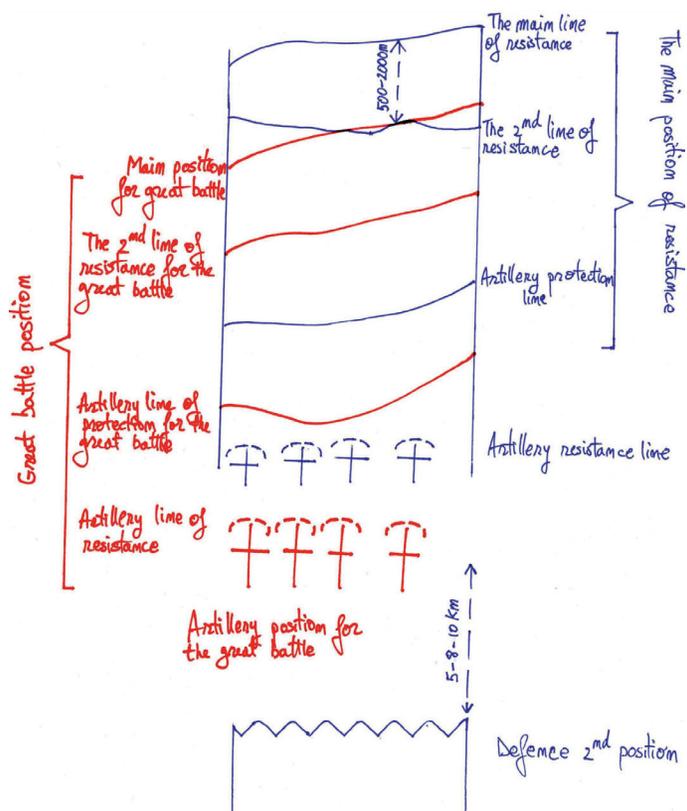


Figure 2: Defensive position (Ib., f. 154)



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of resistance, without the risk of being destroyed separately (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 3). If a forward position could not be achieved, they sought to mask the position of resistance against the enemy ground search.

The position of resistance had gained, due to echeloning, a very deep depth and structure, because it had encapsulated the entire area where the unit was displaced, until its last service formation. The position of resistance contained two successive areas: the internal area of the position of resistance, defended by the division troops, including the artillery and the rear area of this position, defended by the men of the trains and service formations (Ibid, p. 6).

The front area contained the following lines: the main line of resistance, the second line of resistance, the artillery protection line and the artillery line (area) of resistance. The main line of resistance was the very edge situated in front of the position of resistance. The second line of resistance was situated at a variable distance from the main line and which could reach approximately 500 m. It was conditioned by the need that the weapons on this line and the ones in its immediate vicinity to reach in front of the main line of resistance. The artillery protection line was drawn approximately 1,500 m behind the main line, the old stopping line in the Regulation of great units of 1938. The role of this line was to protect its own artillery against the penetration of infantry or tanks (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 158).

The position of resistance for the great battle overlapped the position of resistance, except for the regrouped lines which were situated at a distance ranging from a few hundred meters up to 2 km. changing the centre of gravity of the forces from the position of resistance to the great combat position, was just a change in the effort on the depth of the same position (Ibid, art. 194). Transmissions played an important role and the experience had proven that the various telephone cross-sections must not be installed either on the ridges or in the valley, due to the risk of being attacked by the enemy artillery and launchers. It was preferable that the tranches be installed halfway down because the wires broke often and the transmission personnel was insufficient to repair them. It was also noted the need for liaison officers, trained to repair the broken wires (Romanescu et al., p. 409).

INFANTRY DIVISION TACTICS

The formation of a division into the position of resistance contained: the active units in front of the position, the forward position (Șuța, p. 283), the line units with their combat outposts, the artillery and the reserve (Romanian General Staff, 1945, p. 66). In front of the position of the division, the divisionary search group ensured the search (Cupșa, Tudor, Cucu, Romanescu & Popa, p. 38). The infantry battalions represented the units in the forward position being arranged one by one at 4-5km. Normally, an infantry division generally fought only with the organic artillery, but when it was positioned on the directions most favourable to enter the enemy lines or when it was confirmed that the enemy grouped important forces in its sector, this could receive reinforcement artillery. Direct support groups were proportional to the number of infantry regiments in the line, the strength of each support group also took into account the amount of available artillery (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 285).

According to the experience gained in 1944, in order to increase the efficiency of the combat, the support group also contained heavy artillery units (The Artillery Regulation/1941, art. 86-87). The mission of the direct support groups was: counterpreparatory, stopping, antitank combat or, in certain cases, to participate in counterbattery and distant battlefield. Overall grouping was done in the rest of the organic and reinforcement units, having the mission of counterbattery, distant battlefield, antitank combat and to support the overall counterattack (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 68).

Splitting the artillery division into direct support and general groups did not lead to a definitive specialisation of the various groups, because the units and batteries destined to provide direct support were used for counterbattery and harassment in the back of the enemy line, and the counterbattery units were used to provide direct support to the infantry (The Artillery Regulation, art. 144). Directing firings inside the division had to be made taking into account of the tactical situation, therefore making easier for several artillery units simultaneously to fire. However, in general, defence fire control was more centralised than in the case of an attack (Ibid. art. 169).

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a harassment attack (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 122). Once the enemy infantry started the assault, the stopping firings of the infantry, artillery and antitank guns opened fire in order to destroy the enemy infantry and tanks (Ibid, p. 123). The infantry division could execute a counterattack only when the enemy was “supressed in the field” (Ibid, p. 124), and if no reserves for counter-attack were available, they were trying to stop the enemy by concentrated fire with all the weapons on the place of incursion (Ibid, p. 128).

ARTILLERY POSITION

All batteries had to be able to deliver destruction firings on the enemy bases of departures. In order to deliver harassment firings behind the enemy front, the batteries had to be pushed during firings in forward position, but no more than 4 km from the main line.

The experiences of the year 1944 and the Artillery Regulation indicated that initially the entire artillery of the position of resistance had to be pushed forward so that they can execute preparatory fire or fire on sight on the enemy’s bases of departure in front of the forward position; later on, during the combat, in order to support the units to move in the forward position, the resistance artillery must be with its batteries in front of the main line retreated back, the device having a deep staggering to fire deeper and with its observers forward on the line of combat outposts. As the attack approached the main position, the entire artillery occupies locations much more staggered in the depth of the defence of the position of resistance, the observers holding their position on the main resistance line (The Artillery Regulation, art. 167).

In this regard, there were big differences between the instructions and directives given in 1943 and those of 1944-1945. According to the last directives, the artillery had to be staggered in depth so that it can stop the enemy, especially the tanks entering the position of resistance. All batteries had to be able to deliver destruction firings on the enemy bases of departures. In order to deliver harassment firings behind the enemy front, the batteries had to be pushed during firings in forward position, but no more than 4 km from the main line. Also, the artillery position could not be placed in populated areas, forests (Romanescu et al., p. 414) or in their proximity, these places being usually targeted by enemy airstrikes.

They had to be placed, preferable, on open field, but in camouflage (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 72).

FIRE PLAN

The fire plan included all the preparatory firings and those foreseen to be delivered against an enemy during the defensive combat. This was intended to be adapted to the enemy's manoeuvres, including the firings delivered during the approach, against preparatory firings as well as the stopping firings and strengthening the firings in the effort zone (Romanescu et al., p. 417).

While the enemy approached, the artillery delivered firings of harassment, interdiction and a stronger concentration on the sight, on various moving or sheltered enemy elements. From their masked or camouflaged positions, the infantry also fired their heavy weaponry (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 304).

Firing against the preparations for the attack aimed at crushing it on its basis of departure, representing a massive set of firings delivered by the artillery towards the enemy infantry, infantry's heavy weaponry and against the aviation. If they started before the artillery is prepared, firings were delivered by massive concentrations of fires "on the sight". After the attack preparation had started, firing against it was done based on a predetermined plan, called "systematic counterpreparation fire plan" (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 85) which included both variants and hypotheses made about the enemy, being executed by the infantry's heavy weaponry (80 mm larger throwers and 75 mm cannons) (Ibid, p. 87).

Also, according to those directives the aviation played an important role, because the planes took off at the same time moment the attack preparation fires started, with the mission to fight the enemy artillery (Cupşa, et al., p. 38). Fighting against the enemy using the aviation had a very short time frame and the aviation had to be the first to know about the moment of initiation of artillery preparatory firings (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II The Defence, art. 311). The aviation was also used against tanks by anti-tank aircrafts, dive-bombing and heavy bombardment. The anti-tank aircraft had a cannon of 75 mm with a long barrel which delivered firings at an altitude of 200-300m with a 1 in 6 chances of hitting the target (Romanian General Staff, 1945, p. 95). For the anti-missile defence, it was used the individual fire of the infantry weaponry on the airplanes



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flying bellow 1000 m, although the results were average. According to one study, the individual fire delivered by each Russian shooter or automatic weapon caused only 20% of the total German airplane losses on the Eastern front (Ibid, p. 110).

The main infantry barrage was meant to destroy the enemy, being unleashed by surprise at a distance of 100-300 m (Ibid, p. 88), so that every weaponry category to deliver efficient firings. Therefore, it allowed a better camouflage of the most of the forces, not allowing to be struck by the enemy artillery for lack of safety area. Artillery stopping firings were delivered as close as possible to the first line of infantry (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 313) in order to ensure strengthening the fire if this was too weak, or in case of overlapping fires by the infantry and artillery. Firing stopped at the signal of the infantry or upon demand of the artillery observers. During stopping firings, the heavy artillery firing strengthened and extended the firings of the light artillery, being placed as close as possible to infantry. These firings being more rigid, they needed to prepare multiple variants and hypotheses about the enemy attack strategy. Stopping firings were delivered when the enemy attacked during the night, in foggy weather, on covered ground or when the dust and smoke form the explosions caused by the preparatory firings delivered by their own artillery impeded the delivery of observed concentrations, but on fronts not bigger than 150 m (The Artillery Regulation, art. 173).

CONCLUSIONS

This article confirms the hypothesis that provided the basis for this research. There are differences between the instructions and directives relating to defence between 1941-1943 and the last ones during the war between 1944-1945. The last instructions were defined by achieving a static defence and without removing the troops to the last drop of blood. The 1944 operations have confirmed the need for a forward position due to the use of modern technique. Also, the position of resistance gained a higher depth, incorporating the entire displaced formation to the last service formation. If initially it was considered that the artillery from the position of resistance had to be as forward as possible in order to be able to deliver preparatory firings, afterwards, the experiences of 1944 have imposed the need

that the resistance artillery has its batteries placed in front main line withdrawn to the back with a staggering in depth in order to fire deeper. At the same time, the last directives strengthened the role of the aviation, which had to take off with the beginning of the attack preparatory firings in order to fight the enemy artillery.

To conclude, the historical turn of the 23 August 1944 and the adoption of some new principles based on the instructions received from the General Staff or Higher Commands led to the opening of a new stage in the Romanian military thinking.



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