

AUGUST 1944 IN CONSTANȚA – THE CASE OF REAR ADMIRAL HORIA MACELLARIU –

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This paper focuses on the role of the Romanian Royal Navy and of the personality of the most capable commander of its maritime forces during the campaign in the East, in the 23 August 1944 decisive moments – Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu. In the context of the country's exit from the alliance with Germany and of the political-military changes, and under the impact of the proclamation issued by King Mihai I, in Constanța, the problem for the commanders of the Royal Navy was very sensitive: the detachment from the Romanian-German mixed command. The situation was characterised by uncertainties, the ships of the Maritime Naval Force being interspersed with many more German ships, which had a superior artillery equipment. Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu, the Commander of the Navy and directly responsible for the fate of the crews, was also under the Commander of the 9th Infantry Division. His orders, from the General Staff and the Naval Staff, to disarm or force the German troops to withdraw Southward, in Bulgaria, required special tact and diplomacy. The excellent working relationship between Rear Admiral Macellariu and German Admiral Helmuth Brinkmann helped to avoid a bloody confrontation, which could prove disastrous for the port and the city of Constanța

After the withdrawal of the Germans, appointed Superior Commander of the Dobruja territory, Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu had the ungrateful task of receiving the Soviet troops, whose generals and admirals considered the Romanian Armed Forces defeated and treated them as such. A series of pressures followed, doubled by insults and hostile attitude on the part of the Soviet occupant, culminating in the forcible takeover of Royal Navy ships on 5 September 1944.

Keywords: Romanian Navy; Second World; 23 August 1944; Macellariu; Brinkmann;

INTRODUCTION

The military events held in Constanța and in Dobruja starting during the evening of 23 August 1944 were, after 1989, the object of a thorough historical research. New sources of information have appeared and been exploited. For example, the memoirs written after his release, in 1964, were published and left to his family: Horia Macellariu, *În plin uragan. Amintirile mele (In the midst of the hurricane. My memories)*¹. We specify to the distinguished reader that the present documentary has as main documentary support the autobiographies written in the communist prisons by the detainee Horia Macellariu, at the disposal of the Special Intelligence Service. The respective documents were printed and published under the title: Valentin Ciorbea (2016). *Contraamiralul Horia Macellariu (1894-1989). Autobiografii din temniță. Miscelaneea (Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu (1894-1989). Autobiographies in Prison. Miscellaneous)*. București: Editura Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România.

On 23 August 1944, at 10:15 PM, the Romanians who owned radio sets were warned that an important communiqué was going to be transmitted soon. They listened with surprise as the timid voice of Mihai I announced the news. It was the first time the Sovereign was addressing his people and also foreigners through the radio, which was the most efficient channel of communication then. The King read his communiqué – a document called “*Proclamația regelui Mihai către Țară*” (*The Proclamation of King Michael I to the Country*). After that the people heard the *Decree concerning the appointment of the new government and the communiqué of the Council of Ministers*. The new government was led by general Constantin Sănătescu (1885-1947), a member of the inner circle of the King. A few hours before that, “*around 5 PM*”, while in audience with the King, Marshal Ion Antonescu

¹ Edited and foreword by Ioana Maria Ionescu (1998). București: Editura Sagittarius. For the military actions of the Romanian Royal Navy starting on 23 August 1944 and the role of Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu, we recommend some titles: cdr. prof.univ.dr. Jipa Rotaru, cdr. Ioan Damaschin (2000). *Glorie și dramă. Marina Regală a României: 1940-1945*. București: Editura “Ion Cristoiu”; Dorin Mara (2000). *Marina Regală a României în cel de-al Doilea Război Mondial*. București: Editura Economică; cdr. (rtg.) Nicolae C. Petrescu (2005). *Contraamiralul Horia Macellariu. Gloria – dulce și amară povară*. Pitești: Editura și Tipografia Europroduct; Marian Moșneagu (2005). *Politică navală postbelică a României 1944-1958*. București: Editura Mica Valahie.

(1882-1946), the President of the Council of Ministers and State Leader, and Mihai Antonescu (1904-1946), the Minister for Foreign Affairs, were arrested by a military squad prepared beforehand. This act, done under the orders of the King and of the Marshal of the Palace, General Sănătescu, constituted the “starting point of the coup d`etat” organised by “at least 30 people and personalities”, as the historian Gheorghe Buzatu described it (Buzatu, 1995, pp. 33, 38).

The most important decisions announced that day by radio called for the immediate ceasefire with the Allies, the cessation “of hostilities with the United Nations”, the *de facto* change of sides in the war and the cessation of hostilities with the Soviet Union. Romania’s new allies were assured that the country would continue the war “with and for the allied armies” for the liberation of Transylvania (Ib., p. 38).

THE SITUATION IN DOBRUJA

At first glance, the documents being read on the night of 23 August 1944 were quite clear. Romania was leaving its military alliance with Germany. The Red Army, which had been its enemy for three years, was suddenly a friendly force of a potential ally. From that moment onward Germany’s land, sea and air forces were the new enemy. It was them against Romania would engage in hostile actions or not. The communiqué of the new government assured the people that the Germans would evacuate the country “quietly and they would not suffer any aggression from us with one categorical condition: if no German soldier will show aggression” (Moșneagu, 2005, p. 50).

As the events in Dobruja unfolded, the commanders of the Romanian large units there – the 9th Infantry Division, the Maritime Littoral Command and the Maritime Naval Forces – were put in an impossible position because of the lack of awareness and the lack of communication from the higher commands regarding the order to detach the Romanian from the allied commands with the Germans, to isolate the former allies and to cooperate with the new Soviet allies, under new military circumstances.

During the day of 23 August 1944, Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu, who had been the Commander of the Maritime Naval Forces since April 1943, was busy preparing and executing the orders – to evacuate the Romanian troops, stranded in southern Bessarabia. Those forces were led by General Emanoil Leoveanu (1887-1959) and were isolated from the Romanian front. The Romanian units were in the process of withdrawing towards the coast, near the Jibrieni Bay. Because the Romanian

Navy did not possess shallow draught ships in order to get close to the beaches and embarkation points, Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu called on his allies, the structure “The German Admiral Black Sea”, which was the command structure for all naval forces in the Black Sea area. The German Command approved the deployment of four R-boats for the evacuation mission. Heading to sea from the Sulina Channel, three German ships hit the Romanian mine barrage and were lost, probably a navigation error, or miscommunication. Rear Admiral Macellariu was informed about the incident around the time when on the radio the King was reading his proclamation for the country. We do not know how the Rear Admiral reacted to the news, but later he would describe it in his autobiography, “Viața mea” (“My life”), written during his time in the Gherla Prison. The manuscript start date is 15 May 1964 and it was finished on 23 June the same year (AMNR, ff. 34-35). Twenty years after the events of August 1944, the inmate Horia Macellariu remembered the decision to leave the German alliance and its effect on him during those troubled days: “The situation was very difficult and the days starting on 23 August were the hardest in my life. I heard the radio communiqué like any person in the street. I was not warned. Did those in charge think about us at all? We, on the field ... Did they stop and ponder the situations we would have to face, without warning? How were we to take the best decisions in this way?” (Ciorbea, 2016, p. 140).

The lack of information also influenced the Commander of the 2nd Corps, General Ionașcu. His forces were in the process of withdrawing from Dobruja, still he called Macellariu and asked him “if the Americans had landed at Constanța” (!!!). As a good commander, Macellariu understood that he had to follow only the official direction. That is why he began implementing the decisions called for in the communiqué. Thus, Phase 1 started (23 August 1944, 22:15 – 25 August 1944, 11:30), described by military historians as a period characterised by three major developments: “the end of hostilities with the USSR, the end of the subordination to the Germans; expectancy regarding the German Army” (AMNR, ff. 252-298).

The first measures taken by Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu were aimed at separating his operative command (the Romanian Naval Maritime Forces) from the German Naval Command – “The German Admiral Black Sea”. The German Command was operating from Constanța, at the Carlton Hotel. Meanwhile, the Romanian Command was located in the Coiciu neighbourhood since 1943. The German telephone links were intercepted so that they could not intercept or communicate with the Romanians.

When the German Command ordered the instalment of guards in the Carlton Hotel, Rear Admiral Macellariu doubled them with Romanian guards as well. The Romanian crews on the ships in Constanța harbour were put on guard, ready for action. The ships on sea were ordered back to base. To avoid the conflicts with the Germans, the German ships were also allowed in port.

Both the first set of orders and the following ones were given considering the force disparity in favour of the Germans. Some historical sources claim that *“The German Admiral Black Sea”* could call on 79 warships in Constanța harbour, along with some auxiliary ones, tankers, tugs, floating docks, launches etc. (Petrescu, 2005, p. 126).

The German ships could muster 319 artillery pieces on board their ships, of different calibres: 20, 37, 76, 88 mm. Meanwhile the Romanians had only four ships: *“N.M.S. Regele Ferdinand”*, *“N.M.S. Regina Maria”*, *“N.M.S. Mărășești”* and *“N.M.S. Mărăști”*. Their technical condition was not the best. Only one ship was operational at any one time. The submarine squadron, composed of the three boats (*“Delfinul”*, *“Marsuinul”*, and *“Rechinul”*) and the tender *“Constanța”* were also out of action. The Romanian Naval Maritime Forces could count on the minelayer *“Amiral Murgescu”*, which was damaged by Soviet air raids, but still operational. The other minelayer, *“Dacia”*, was also damaged and out of action. Of the seven motor torpedo boats, only three were available. The only other ships that could be called into action were five tugs and *“Basarabia”* magnetic minesweeper, which was improvised of a big tug.

The Romanian ships could fight with 119 guns: 13.2 mm, 20 mm, 37 mm, and 120 mm. Therefore, they had 200 guns less than the Germans. The destroyers, which were the main ships for the Romanian Navy, had the biggest guns of any Axis ships in the Black Sea. Their 120 mm artillery, although strong, could not be physically lowered to hit the German ships, because they were so closely anchored near one another. The shells would fly over the German ships in case of a fight. To make matters worse, the Romanian and German ships were so closely mixed in between each other that a fight would be catastrophic for both parties.

South of Constanța, the Germans possessed a strong artillery position – the *“Tirpitz”* battery, which had three 280 mm guns that could hit naval targets up to 34 km. The battery was protected from air raids and land attacks by four 75 mm guns, four 75 A.A. guns and a multitude of 20 and 40 mm small artillery pieces. The Germans had two infantry battalions in the city and harbour of Constanța,

with *“high firepower”* (Ib., p. 132). Other three battalions were quartered at Eforie, Agigea and Mangalia. More forces, about 4-5 battalions strong, from the forces evacuated from Crimea (Rear Admiral Macellariu estimated their number at about 10.000), were also available.

Also available to the German Naval Command were a transport battalion and two auxiliary battalions, for the whole Dobruja area. The German A.A. artillery in Constanța had three batteries (16 pieces of 88 mm), one battery with four 75 mm guns and four batteries with 54 smaller calibre guns. Those considerable forces were a serious threat for the Romanian command in case war broke out between the former allies.

The Romanian ground forces for the defence of Constanța and the Dobruja area were mainly those of the 9th Infantry Division, with 12 battalions, 1 battalion of engineers, 1 reconnaissance battalion, and 12 artillery batteries. More reinforcements were to come, in the form of one artillery battalion with 75 mm guns and another battalion with 122 mm heavy guns.

Around Constanța, the A.A. Regiment had four batteries (16 guns of 88 mm) another 1 with twelve 37 mm guns and four batteries with 48 guns (20 mm). There were also small units armed with machine guns for anti-aircraft protection (Ib.).

The operative responsibilities for the Romanian units were laid out by the Great General Staff beforehand. For the Black Sea coastal regions, *“the region further at sea than the range of the guns belonged to the Naval Maritime Forces”*. The moment enemy forces entered the range of the coastal artillery, it was the responsibility of General Costin Ionașcu’s 9th Infantry Division. He was in charge of the coastal defence and also of the security of the naval base. Therefore, it was his responsibility in case the anchored ships would fire on the enemy. The other naval major unit, the Maritime and River Coastal Command, was also under his orders. The idea was to ensure the unity of command for the defence of the coastal regions. Ionașcu’s principal orders were to defend the city and harbour of Constanța (Ciorbea, p. 210).

23 AUGUST – 25 AUGUST IN CONSTANȚA

Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu contacted General Ionașcu that day. General Ionașcu was at his command post in Murfatlar and *“we agreed on the general situation and on the measures we had to take”*, remembered Macellariu. Because the Germans were massing at the *“Tirpitz”* battery, Ionașcu wanted to attack it with his forces during the night. Later that day, he changed his mind.

In order to understand the complex situation in Constanța, we need to analyse the context and results of the call Rear Admiral Macellariu received from his superior, Vice Admiral Ioan Georgescu, the Chief of the Naval Staff. He was recently promoted as Undersecretary of State for the Navy in the new Sănătescu government. On the phone Georgescu seemed surprised with the developments in Constanța and he even said that he did not expect to be called in the government. However, he promised he would be in touch once he received more pieces of information. Around 1 PM, he called back and gave Macellariu four orders: “1. Ceasefire with the Soviets; 2. The demarcation line between the withdrawing Romanian forces and the advancing Soviets columns was set at the Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați-Maritime Danube line, where the Soviets were to stop; 3. No provocation towards the Germans and to allow them to evacuate their forces with all the equipment; 4. Do not allow the Soviets to disarm the Romanian Naval Forces” (Ib., p. 210). Although the orders were clear and seemed to clarify the situation significantly, they would prove to be difficult to implement.

In the morning of 24 August, around 7:00, a convoy entered Constanța harbour, escorted by the torpedo boat “Smeul” and a German S-boat, bringing in troops evacuated from the Jibrieni Bay. During the night the German ships were alerted. The Romanians noticed munitions being loaded on the transport ships “Alba Iulia” and “Ardeal”, loaned by the Germans. Only after Captain Henichen, the Chief of Staff at the Joint Command of the Romanian Naval Maritime Forces, intervened the situation was calmed. The officer had to assure his Romanian colleagues that they had no intention of fighting. (Rotaru, Damaschin, 2005, p. 201).

Meanwhile, the Soviets attacked from the air the harbour and the Romanian anti-aircraft defence was silent. Only the Germans responded and that prompted the reaction of Captain Nicolae Bardescu (1896-1977), the Chief of the Romanian Maritime and Fluvial Command, to ask them to cease fire, otherwise they will be attacked by Romanian troops. That aggravated the tensions between the former allies and the population of the city was panicking.

The German troops in the Joint Command left the Carlton Hotel and withdrew to Eforie Sud (Carmen Sylva). After this hasty action, Vice Admiral Brinkmann ordered them back. At the hotel there was still a small Romanian structure, led by Rear Admiral Macellariu and some subordinates. The Romanian admiral recalled that “we worked with the Romanian and German guards face to face. We wanted to keep them under our observation so that they would realise our resolve”. (Petrescu, p. 141).

In the morning of 24 August, at 07:30, the German Group South from Sofia sent new orders to Brinkmann: “1. At any cost stop the Soviets from occupying Constanța harbour; 2. Take all measures to prevent the Romanians if they try to stop you”. More detailed orders followed. The Admiral attached to the Führer’s headquarters stated that it should be highlighted the “importance of taking over the main Romanian ships, especially the river monitors on the Danube”. (War Diary German Naval Staff Operations Division, 1948, p. 488).

The Germans were clearly preoccupied with the situation on the Danube because they saw that the river would be the main obstacle against the Soviets. Once the river defences were breached, there were no other ones to stop them from advancing into Bulgaria. This could cause serious problems for the Axis forces in Greece and Yugoslavia, especially since the Bulgarians were unreliable (Sichigea, 2017, p. 67).

The main event on 24 August was the first meeting during those days between Macellariu and Brinkmann. Macellariu knew that his German counterpart was back at his HQ, in Eforie Sud. Ionașcu sent the Romanian Rear Admiral to bring his German colleague to Constanța to settle things between the two former allies. Macellariu was the obvious choice for this task, as he had the operational responsibility for the Black Sea and for the protection of the city and harbour of Constanța. Furthermore, Macellariu knew Brinkmann well and they managed to create a working relation during the time they fought the Soviets. Macellariu recalled in his memoirs that Brinkmann treated him with respect and he never showed any sign of superiority or arrogance. The German commander allowed Macellariu a degree of operational independence in his escort missions in 1943-1944. Macellariu contacted Brinkmann and they agreed to meet “halfway between Constanța and Carmen Sylva”. When they met, Macellariu invited Brinkmann in his car and drove straight for the HQ of the 9th Infantry Division. We do not know what the two officers discussed in the car since Macellariu never told anyone.

At the HQ they were joined by Captain Bardescu. The discussions were quite harsh, starting with Ionașcu, who, on a polite tone, asked Brinkmann to evacuate his ships from the harbour and from the Romanian waters. The German admiral replied that he had received no orders to do that. That made Ionașcu bring into the discussion the issue of the alerted German crews. He accused the Germans of mining the port. Coldly, Brinkmann denied the accusation, but admitted to alerting his forces. Macellariu intervened saying that his own crews were watching

the German ships for any sign of aggression. The Romanian guns were trained on the German ships and Macellariu told Brinkmann he would order them to be lowered only if the Germans agreed to stop their preparations. Ionașcu circled back to the issue of the mining, which Brinkmann again denied. General Ionașcu replied that he did not believe him. This clearly offended Brinkmann, who was surprised that his word as a soldier was not respected. Ionașcu was unconvinced and he ordered Macellariu and Bardescu to check the German submarines and the port facilities for mines.

The two Romanian officers quickly agreed that the best man for the job was Captain Constantin-Bibi Costăchescu (1909-1982), a submarine man and at that time the Chief of the Operations Office in the Maritime and River Command. Late in the night Costăchescu reported to Macellariu that Brinkmann was not lying. The German Commander told Macellariu that his order to put his troops on alert was normal and it was caused by Romania's political instability. He agreed to cease the alert on 25 August at 4 AM to avoid any potential problems caused by the dark.

25 August proved to be the decisive day for the German evacuation of Constanța and Dobruja. A new Soviet air raid sunk the tug *"Basarabia"*. The continuous air attacks were an indication that the Soviets would not stop their aggressive actions in Romania. In the Danube Delta, the Russian troops crossed the demarcation line that Vice Admiral Georgescu told Macellariu about. The continuation of the hostilities was, of course, worrying for the Romanians and the military leaders in Constanța understood that the German fleet had to leave at once. Only then could they safeguard the city and the port.

General Ionașcu asked Rear Admiral Macellariu to bring Brinkmann for another conference. Macellariu talked on the phone with the German Admiral and they agreed to meet in Agigea, near the *"Tirpitz"* battery. It was inside one of the buildings of the battery that the two admirals talked *"in person, eye to eye"*. The only details we have on the mentioned conversation are those written in prison a long time after the events took place. Macellariu said that they went over the events of that day and they came to the same conclusion: *"I convinced him to evacuate his forces without a fight or destructions"*. Macellariu went on to say: *"by doing this, the battle of Constanța and of the whole Romanian coast in Dobruja was fought between me and the German Admiral, there, inside the Tirpitz battery"*.

Macellariu's actions saved Constanța along with all of the harbour installations the Soviet would use later on. (Macellariu, 1995, p. 35). After the conversation

the two admirals went to the 9th Infantry Division's HQ. It started what we call *Phase 2* (25 August 1944, 11:30 AM – 6:30 PM). The phase could be characterised by the *"start of hostilities against the German Army, which had attacked Romania and did not follow the conditions of the Romanian government"*. (AMNR, f. 298). The three commanders met before lunch. Before we can go into details about their negotiation, we need to look at the bigger picture. At 10:30, General Mihail Racoviță (1889-1945), the Minister of War, alongside the undersecretaries for the Navy and the Airforce and General Gheorghe Mihail (1887-1982), the Chief of the General Staff, were in conference at Pasărea, near Bucharest. They issued an order for the whole of the Romanian Armed Forces to change its posture against the Germans, which is something Ionașcu was informed about.

General Ionașcu *"raised his voice to Brinkmann and asked him and his forces to withdraw from Romania"*. He also talked about his new orders, received via a courier from Cernavodă, but refused to show them to Brinkmann until Macellariu saw them. Brinkmann understood the situation and left, promising to return that afternoon. It never happened and, back at this command post, he issued the orders to retreat from Constanța.

The orders Ionașcu had from the General Staff at around 11:30 AM demanded that the Germans should be *"disarmed or forced to withdraw to Bulgaria"* (Ciorbea, p. 143). The same order was sent to the Naval Maritime Forces, but with a twist: *"disarm them and force them to withdraw"*. Macellariu claimed in his memoirs that the order to *"force the Germans out"*, which gave him the option to convince them to leave peacefully, was approved by Ionașcu and it *"changed the situation at Constanța"* (ib., 145).

In the afternoon of 25 August, starting at 15:30, the German ships *"with the crews on deck, saluting us"*, started the manoeuvres to leave the port, which they completed at around 18:30. At the mouth of the harbour they faced a rough sea, since the Black Sea is quite difficult on its Western Coasts, and the Germans faced serious issues.

Watching from the shore the German ships, Macellariu was surprised to see flashes, mistaking them for gunfire. In reality there were the sun rays reflecting on the windows of the ships but this goes to show the tensions gripping the Romanian commanders. They feared some form of retaliation from the Germans: *"I was concerned for the safety of my own men and that of the civilians"*. Macellariu ordered that any German ships that wished to return to the port had to be disarmed first.

This order was the responsibility of the Maritime and River Command, but still, it was carried out. Macellariu told us that some of the German ships were lost at sea and few of them reached Varna (Ib.). That moment proved to be a decisive one and the merit went exclusively to Macellariu. He proved time again that he was a determined and responsible commander and he averted the danger posed by the returning German ships. Meanwhile, Brinkmann was allowed to leave to the South and destroy the equipment he did not want to leave behind. He intended to board one of ships at Mangalia, but Ionașcu did not agree. The German Admiral crossed the Bulgarian border with his car. During the night of 25 August, more German vehicles crossed into Bulgaria.

The last possible resistance that the Germans could mount, at the “*Tirpitz*” battery, proved to be impossible. The Romanian Command feared that the heavily fortified position could be used against them, but the Germans left in a hurry, after they had destroyed their guns. At 2 AM, they left the position and headed south.

THE RELATION WITH SOVIET “ALLIES”

Between 23 and 28 August, Rear Admiral Macellariu was under the command of General Ionașcu. They reached a good working relation and they respected themselves. More than that, we could say there was a considerable respect between the two admirals. In almost two years of cooperation there was not any major conflict. Thus, Constanța was spared from certain destruction and considerable losses of life and the operational-tactical ratio changed in favour of Romania.

Macellariu was appointed Commander of Dobruja on 26 August 1944, but he took over his new command on 28 August, after the 9th Infantry Division left the region. He wrote years later that he received inherited “*a tough situation!*”. When he learned that the infantry division had to leave across the Danube, the population in Constanța “*was in state of terror and panic, men, women and children. I saw kids running on the streets, terrified, with a small pouch with only their valuables. They hid their other items in their houses. I was stunned to see this dramatic image*”. (Ib., p. 146).

For Rear Admiral Macellariu, it was the beginning of a new stage in his career. It was a short period, but a very dense one, marked by tense moments and with great importance for Romania. Macellariu had the difficult mission to cope with the incoming Soviet forces, both on land and on water. The Soviet forces, acting as an occupying army, offended Macellariu, putting him in many difficult situations.

The Russians clearly disregarded his authority as the Commander of the Dobruja region. Macellariu acted under the assumption that Romania had a ceasefire with the USSR. When it became apparent that this was not the case, he still treated the Soviet officers with the respect they deserved. He was the type of officer aware of the responsibility towards the appointment received.

In this study, we will tackle only the most important events that took place in Constanta as the Soviet forces increased their presence there. Macellariu also recounts these events in his memoirs. The meeting with the first Soviet general was a clue. The general was very interested in the former German warehouses. Learning that the civilian population had already emptied them after the Germans left, the general put his watch on the table and told Macellariu: “*You have ten minutes to tell me what happened with the warehouses, or I will shoot you!*” (Ib.). The Soviet HQ was settled at the Carlton Hotel and quickly started to issue demands, more and more outlandish. One of those requirements was to give the Soviets three trainsets, with carts that were not available in Romania. The Soviet also wanted large quantities of equipment: 27.000 pants, 27.000 shirts, 15.000 silk shirts and 7 typewriters with Cyrillic letters.

Macellariu was a good host and he often invited the Russians to official dinners. More often than not, they declined brutally: “*You should realise you are on the losing side*”. To that, he replied promptly and fairly. “*The Romanian Navy was never defeated in battle*” (Ib., p. 151).

Two other requests were the most shocking: the surrender of the Romanian fleet, anchored at Tulcea and Constanta. In the Danube Delta, Admiral Gorshkov insisted on the surrender of the river flotilla. Admiral Oktyabrsky, the Commander in Chief of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet, sent an ultimatum on 29 August 1944. The first paragraph was: “*the whole of the Romanian fleet, along with the auxiliary vessels, will be moved to Sulina and surrendered to the Soviet Sea Command*” (Macellariu, 1995, pp. 80-81). Rear Admiral Macellariu confirmed he received the document and replied that Romanian vessels were considered “*belligerent*” and he was to receive orders from the Commander in Chief of the Soviet fleet.

He also reported the situation to his own superiors in București, but only Lieutenant Commander Corneliu Lung, the Chief of Operations at the Naval Staff, was answering the phone. He was not in the position to help him, since he did not have the authority to issue orders. Macellariu reported the telegram to the Ministry of War and to the General Staff, but they were quiet too. At the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, he received little help. The new Minister, Gheorghe Niculescu-Buzești (1908-1949), told him to relinquish the fleet to save the lives of 14 million Romanians. Niculescu-Buzești even presented the situation in the Cabinet. The decision was the same.

Another Soviet demand was even more despicable for Macellariu, who characterised it as *“the toughest situation”*. The Soviet Command wanted to use the ruble in Romania for its troops. Macellariu warned the government and it sent a delegation from the Ministry of Finance, the National Bank and the Ministry of Economy. They were met by the Soviet Admirals and a Captain. The Romanian delegation declined the Soviet request and offered 350 million lei as currency. The Soviets would have none of it and even went so far as to refuse the official dinner invitation. The chief of the delegation, Rică Georgescu told Macellariu that he could see what a problematic situation the Admiral was facing and promised him to get him out of it. Macellariu accepted and told him: *“all I do and all I did were to preserve the interests of our country and people”* (Ciorbea, p. 146).

In his memoirs, Macellariu went into detail about his relations with the Soviet forces: *“I always felt that we were in a ceasefire and we were allies. This is what my government told me on 23 August. We did not surrender. I took Molotov’s statement as good (Ib.). I was a Romanian officer and commander, in a difficult situation. On my shoulders weighed the prestige and the sovereignty of my people and country. I acted according to protocol and the right of borders (international law). I was courteous, friendly, dignified not servile. For myself, I could have acted as I pleased, but I was an agent of my people and country. I was between the anvil and the hammer. The 23 August 1944 government was informing me differently than the Soviet army”* (Ib., p. 151).

On 30 September 1944, Rear Admiral Macellariu was appointed Chief of the Naval Schools, which was in essence a demotion. In his yearly notation for 1943-1944 (1 November 1943 – 31 October 1944), the Undersecretary of State had the following to say about the reason for his demotion: *“because of a higher decision he was recalled to ease the relations with the Soviets, who clearly mistrusted him”* (AMNR, ff. 56-58).

On the morning of 30 August 1944, at 2:40 AM, five Soviet motor gunboats were guided in Constanța harbour by Romanian ships. Before 5 September, the Soviets seized the harbour installations. During that day (at 05:00), Soviet soldiers took over the Romanian ships and captured the crews on board.

Many people claimed afterwards that the Soviet occupying forces had no real intention to cooperate with the Romanian Royal Navy. The Soviet Admiral Bogdenko, from the Allied Control Commission in Romania, stated that *“the Romanian Navy was a black page in our history. This is why we captured it and presented it to the Russian people as a trophy”* (Ciorbea, p. 152).

Not long after, Macellariu was retired unjustly because of his alleged guilt for the events of 23 August 1944 in Constanța. The Communist Party was preparing a huge file *“against me”*, with maps and explications with the intention of jailing him (Ib., p. 164).

Macellariu had to appeal to the Prime Minister, General Nicolae Rădescu (6 December 1944 – 28 February 1945) asking for an inquiry on the events of 23 August 1944 in Constanța. The commission was made up by General Nicolae Pătlăgeanu and Admiral Alexandru Gheorghiu. They went over the documents and concluded that Macellariu was not guilty.

Still, because of political pressure Macellariu was on the war criminal list. There were many denouncers attacking him. General Susaikov (1903-1962), the President of the Allied Commission, asked Petru Groza, the Romanian Prime Minister, to enforce article 11 of the Armistice Convention and put Macellariu to trial.

He was investigated by the People’s Tribunal in București. The result was he could not be blamed (Moșneagu, 2010, pp. 71-77). The Allied Commission was not satisfied and insisted that Macellariu was guilty of allowing the Germans to leave Constanța without a fight. The Ministry of Defence ordered a new commission, led by Generals Mihail Lascăr, George Nicolau and Ioan Popescu. They did extensive investigations, interviewing officers but concluded that the departure of the German fleet was after the King’s proclamation. Contrary to the political orders, they found that *“the Romanian commands proved a dignified and strong response, not provoking the Germans but forcing them to obey the armistice and the wishes of the Romanian government”*. The document concluded, *“the evacuation of the German fleet was a command act done under careful military, tactical and strategic consideration”*. Other interpretations, calling into question the loyalty of the Romanian officers, were out of the question (AMNR, ff. 293-294).

The mentioned report ended all attempts by the Soviets through the Allied Commission to blame Macellariu by misinterpreting the events of 23 August 1944. The charges were dismissed and he proved his honour and his worth as an officer.

The separation of the two fleets, Romanian and German, was a necessary order and it was done to enforce the new political situation in Romania. The Romanian naval commands, led by Macellariu, acted with intelligence, diplomacy and energy to achieve the success. In the end, the Germans were forced to leave the Romanian waters without a fight, which proved to be a win for both sides.

CONCLUSIONS

The events in Dobruja after the historical act of 23 August 1944 saw the Romanian commanders being put in impossible situations. The relations with the Germans were already tense and no training could have prepared them for what happened next. Nobody anticipated the possibility of Romania breaking out of the Axis alliance, after fighting together for three years in the East against the USSR. Admiral Horia Macellariu and General Costin Ionașcu had conflicting orders and their forces were mixed with those of former allies. Separation without creating a volatile situation was almost impossible. Still, the two Romanian leaders managed to get the maximum result of it and avoided unnecessary losses in materials and men.

The cooperation with the Russians in Dobruja and Constanța was also difficult. The Soviet commanders did not trust their new allies and acted as an occupying force. They offended their counterparts and dismissed their value as fellow combatants.

The Romanian side was always ready to cooperate with the Soviets on the believe that there was an armistice. However, the Soviet Armed Forces acted as if the Romanian Armed Forces had been enemy forces. The sources of that time and the memoirs of Macellariu prove that he acted in the best interests of Romania and he fought to preserve the Romanian fleet.

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