



## ACTIONS OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> OILFIELD GUARD DETACHMENT TO DEFEND THE PLOIEȘTI AREA BETWEEN 23 AUGUST AND 1 SEPTEMBER 1944

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*When the Second World War broke out, Romania was undergoing in a rather difficult economic, political, military and especially diplomatic situation. Germany's territorial expansion triggered the fall of the system of alliances Bucharest was relying on, given that France signed the armistice in April 1940.*

*That is why the pressures exerted by Germany forced Romania's entry under Berlin's sphere of influence, an actual example being that the German Military Mission was sent into our country, with the clear purpose, among others, to take over oil resources and processing capacities in the Ploiești area.*

*The act of 23 August 1944, through which Romania turned its weapons against Germany, with the clear intention of joining the United Nations, led to a state of confusion among Romanian and German troops deployed in Valea Prahovei. However, the dynamic orders of the Romanian General Staff were to annihilate any German resistance in the area, even by the force of arms, if needed. This mission was assigned to the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, commanded by Brigadier General Grigore Moșteoru. This large unit was subordinated to the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Army Corps, commanded by Major General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu. The conclusion of this study illustrates the effort and heroism of Romanian troops, who annihilated, between 31 August and 1 September 1944, sometimes after heavy battles and human losses, any resistance of the German units who were thus forced to retreat to the North and lose all control over the oil resources in the Ploiești area. These aspects are highlighted from a military, economic and socio-historical perspective, by using the documentation technique.*

*Keywords: 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Army Corps; Major General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu; 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment; 5 Flak Division; Major General Julius Kuderna;*

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Actions of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment to Defend the Ploiești Area  
between 23 August and 1 September 1944



## INTRODUCTION – THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AND THE ECONOMIC-MILITARY RELATIONS BETWEEN ROMANIA AND GERMANY BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In the interwar period, the Great European Powers, especially France, the UK, and, starting from 1938, Germany, fought constantly, through economic and political methods, mostly through the intelligence services, to bring Romania under their sphere of influence. In the first part of this period, the winner seemed to be France, with which Romania concluded a Mutual Assistance Treaty on 10 June 1926, strengthened by the Convention of 22 November of the same year (Monitorul Oficial/Official Gazette no. 14 of 20 January 1927, pp. 471-479).

However, the outbreak of the Second World War, on 1 September 1939, with the attack on Poland by the Wehrmacht, changed the balance of power in Europe. This state of affairs was emphasised by the occupation of France in June 1940, which is why Romania's entire system of alliances, which revolved around France and Great Britain, collapsed. In this context, Germany obviously saw fit to impose a rapprochement of Bucharest with the expansionist interests of Berlin, in the conditions of the annexation of Austria in 1938, and the bilateral agreement signed on 23 August 1939, in Moscow, by Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov by which, practically, they divided their spheres of interests in Europe.

Moreover, the attention of the German decision-makers, Hitler in particular, was held both by the special geostrategic position in the Black Sea basin and at the mouths of the Danube, as well as by the economic resources available to Romania, mainly oil and cereals. That is precisely why the evolution of international relations during this period brought Romania to its most difficult moment, both its territorial integrity and the very existence of the state being threatened.

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*In 1939, the German capital in Romania was insignificant, and Berlin exerted economic, political and military pressure on Romania. A memorandum of the German Army Administration Staff, drawn up in April 1939, is edifying in this respect, stating that “the economic agreement with Romania does not provide an adequate guarantee for actual delivery availability in wartime. Germany’s monopoly position in the Romanian oil economy failed”.*

In this context, Germany increased its interest in attracting Romania under its sphere of power. This materialised through the signing, on 23 May 1939, in Bucharest, of the *Treaty on the promotion of economic relations between the Kingdom of Romania and the German Reich*, published in Monitorul Oficial/Official Gazette no. 125 of 2 June 1939 (pp. 3460-3462).

It is interesting that Article I specifies that *“the economic plan, on the one hand, will take into account the German import requirements, and, on the other, the development possibilities of the Romanian production, the internal Romanian needs and the needs of Romania’s economic exchange with other countries”* (Ibid.). In the same article, the treaty clearly specified the economic fields in which Romanian-German collaboration would take place, namely the development and orientation of Romanian agricultural production, as well as *“the development of existing agricultural industries and the establishment of new agricultural industries and processing facilities”* (Ibid., p. 3461). These provisions of the treaty emphasise Germany’s special interest in Romania’s resources. Thus, special attention was paid to forestry and mining through the establishment of Romanian-German joint companies *“for the opening and exploitation of chalcopryrite in Dobrogea, chrome ores in Banat, manganese ores in Vatra-Dornei – Broșteni area”* (Ibid.). The Germans were also interested in exploiting bauxite deposits, as well as in creating an aluminium industry (Ibid.).

But the most important stake for Germany in this treaty was related to oil resources. Precisely for this reason, the 4<sup>th</sup> point of Article I stipulated the establishment of a Romanian-German joint company *“which will deal with oil exploitation and will carry out a program of crude oil drilling and processing”* (Ibid.). Last but not least, this document paid special attention to military relations, which is why the 7<sup>th</sup> point stipulated that Germany was to deliver weapons and equipment for the Romanian army, navy, aviation, as well as for the weapon industry. All this in the conditions in which, in 1939, the German capital in Romania was insignificant, and Berlin exerted economic, political and military pressure on Romania. A memorandum

of the German Army Administration Staff, drawn up in April 1939, is edifying in this respect, stating that *“the economic agreement with Romania does not provide an adequate guarantee for actual delivery availability in wartime. Germany’s monopoly position in the Romanian oil economy failed. The subordination of Romania by means of foreign policy has not been achieved until now. However, military means are currently the only real guarantee for the possession of Romanian oil fields. Their application must be aimed at maintaining the operational capacity of the Romanian oil industry”*. (Istoria militară a poporului român, 1989, pp. 301-302).

### ORGANISATION OF THE ROMANIAN-GERMAN DEFENCE SYSTEM AROUND THE PLOIEȘTI OIL AREA

Under these conditions, in accordance with General Order no. 877 of 30 October 1940, signed by Army Corps General Ion Antonescu, as Minister of National Defence, a German military commission arrived in Romania with the aim of training the Romanian troops, as follows: *“The German troops, made up of several officers instructors, A.C.A. and planes, as well as a motorised division, were called by the country’s leadership, so they did not come without our consent; they did not come to conquer or occupy, but came with fraternal thoughts. I have called in the German troops to teach you to use the new weapons we will receive from Germany; I called them to teach you their fighting methods, very successful in the last wars”* (AMNR, file 124, p. 138).

On 12 October 1940, the first German troops arrived in Romania, namely the 13<sup>th</sup> Motorised Division and air forces, most of them deployed in the Bucharest area and in the Ploiești oilfield area. That is why the 7<sup>th</sup> Section was created within the Ministry of National Defence, which was assigned with both keeping track of the German troops on Romanian territory and all the goods placed at their disposal, as well as with ensuring the links between the senior leadership of the Romanian Army and the German courts (Ciobanu, Șerban, 2011, p. 112). During this period, 22,430 German soldiers arrived in Romania as part of the German Military Mission, of which 17,561 belonged



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to the Land Forces, and 4,869 to the Air Forces (AMNR, file 1789, p. 217).

The defence system built around Ploiești or *Festung (Fortress)*, as it was called at the time, was formed, in early 1940, by the 6<sup>th</sup> Anti-Aircraft Defense Group, with three AA gun batteries, one searchlight battery and one machine gun section (AMNR, file 1877, p. 9). Towards late 1940, at the insistence of the German side, General Ion Antonescu, as the head of the state, ordered the deployment of the forces of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Division in the Ploiești area, to which an armoured company and seven gendarmes companies were added, the latter being assigned military police missions (Ib., p. 119).

After these measures were taken, important forces were deployed at the beginning of 1941 in the Ploiești area and in the neighbouring towns, whose mission was to ensure the safety of the perimeter where the oil installations were located, namely seven AA batteries, a searchlights battery, ten 13.2 mm calibre machine guns sections, while the airspace was covered by three fighter squadrons (Ib., p. 9).

Obviously, the command of the German Military Mission in Romania was not content with the forces of the Romanian Army deployed in this region, which is why General Alfred Gerstenberg, in his capacity as head of the German Military Mission for the Air Force and commander of the *Luftwaffe* in Romania, aware of the importance of Romanian oil for the German war machine, ordered that German troops were also included in the defence disposition in the Ploiești area. Thus, at the beginning of 1944, the 5<sup>th</sup> Flak Division was stationed here, commanded by Major General Julius Kuderna, which had AA units under its command, in the localities of Ploiești, Păulești, Tătărani, Bărcănești, Strejnicu and Valea Călugărească (Ib., file 23, p. 64).

It should be mentioned that the command point of the German troops deployed in the Ploiești area was in the Misleanca Forest, having a large strength of approximately 6,000 troops. Also, a powerful German AA battery was stationed in the Buda Forest, with 2,000 troops, while the Germans had approximately 1,000 troops in the Băicoi area. Around the town of Câmpina, the German troops occupied the oil



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and sulphuric acid refineries, where more than 1,000 soldiers were stationed. Also, in the area of Strejnicu, Târgșorul Vechi and Târgșorul Nou, around 4,000 German soldiers were deployed in defensive positions. The city of Ploiești was surrounded by AA batteries manned by more than 3,000 Germans, who occupied most of the nearby oil areas, with the possibility to prohibit traffic in the Prahova Valley (Ib.).

Around 23 August 1944, at the height of the Red Army's offensive on Romanian territory, the Ploiești oil zone was defended also by troops of the Royal Romanian Army, more precisely by the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, commanded by Brigadier General Grigore Moșteoru. With about 11,000 soldiers, the Great Unit was subordinated to the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps, commanded by Major General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu (AMMN, p. 1 et seq.), appointed to this position on 16 February 1944.

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### THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ROMANIAN TROOPS AND THE GERMAN TROOPS DEPLOYED IN THE PLOIEȘTI AREA BETWEEN 23 AUGUST AND 1 SEPTEMBER 1944

The act of 23 August 1944, after which Marshal Ion Antonescu, the head of the State, was arrested, and Romania turned its weapons against Germany, an event that we will not address in detail in this study, found the Romanian and German troops aligned within the same defence disposition. Under these circumstances, General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu, one of the shadow opponents of Marshal Ion Antonescu, ordered the Great Units and units under the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps to take all necessary measures to isolate and push out the German troops stationed in the Ploiești area.



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Starting from this state of facts, in the evening of 23 August 1944, "after the communication made on Radio Romania and Radio Bucharest (...), at 10:30 p.m., by which the alliance with Germany is broken and an armistice is requested of the allies", General Grigore Moșteoru, the commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, alerted all the troops in Prahova County and Dâmbovița County by telephone, "giving orders on how to proceed with the German army" (Ib.).

That is precisely why, immediately after the announcement was made concerning the arrest of the head of state and the return of weapons against Germany, General Moșteoru issued Order no. 1/23 August 1944, which included the missions that the Great Unit under his command had to carry out in the following days, as follows: "In accordance with the telegraphic order of the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps, the following is ordered:

1. Starting from now, all Romanian units in your guard area will be on alert.
2. Order will be maintained in your guard area at public institutions and oil companies.
3. The German army troops are free to move in order.
4. Any attempt by anyone to set fire to or destroy oil installations will be prevented by all means.
5. Acts of aggression against those who will not provoke us will be avoided.
6. Any event will be reported by phone to this Command.
7. Send 2 mounted agents to this Command" (Ib.).

In accordance with the order issued by General Moșteoru, on the night of 23 to 24 August 1944, the soldiers of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment proceeded to intensify the guard at the telephone and telegraph offices, as well as, in particular, at the refineries and oil companies, in order not to be destroyed, as the Detachment had precise data that the Germans had thoroughly studied the destruction of the most important refineries (Ib.). It is interesting that, during this period of time, the German troops deployed in the defence disposition in the Ploiești area "did not take any action, except those of a animated

movement, which was signalled from the first moment of the breaking of the alliance" (Ib., pp. 1-2).

In the morning of 24 August, the Command of the German troops in Romania ordered the Great Units and their subordinate units to carry out a series of missions that were intended to protect both the troops and the occupied positions. First of all, troops from the German Army barricaded the asphalted road in several points, namely Băicoi railway station, Movila Vulpii, Păulești camp, the Câmpina barrier, located in the northern part of Ploiești, as well as the main entrance barrier to Ploiești, located in the southern part of the city (Ib.).

Also, the German units regrouped on defence positions inside the city of Ploiești, on the Târgșor airport, the Buda bridge and train station, the Păulești forest, the Crângul lui Bot forest and the Sângreș hill near the town of Moreni, an area where members of the German Ethnic Group who were operating here were also reorganised (Ib., p. 2).

Under these conditions, General Grigore Moșteoru ordered a series of measures both to disarm the German troops and to take control of the checkpoints held by them. Thus, the 9<sup>th</sup> Călărași Regiment, deployed in Liliești, received the mission "to take under orders the recruits of the 10<sup>th</sup> Roșiori Regiment from Cocorăști Mislii and a battalion from the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dorobanți Regiment from Lipănești, with which to move on the Tintea-Găgeni-Blejoi-Ploiești itinerary in order to open the entry to Ploiești and maintain order in Ploiești in connection with Colonel Oprescu, the Garrison Commander who does not have sufficient troops available" (Ib.). Also, General Moșteoru paid special attention to the guarding of the oilfield areas, which is why he ordered all the units guarding the oilfield area "to form into combat units", to disarm scattered German elements and to carry out attacks on the German units "with the Romanian units" (Ib.).

In the morning of 24 August 1944, the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, under the orders of General Grigore Moșteoru, carried out a series of missions with the role of annihilating the combat force of the German troops, but also to deny their access to the sensitive points of the area of responsibility. Thus, since the early hours of the morning, the German guards who were on guard duty at the refineries



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To de-escalate the situation, Brigadier General Moșteoru got in touch with Major General Julius Kuderna, the Commander of the German 5<sup>th</sup> Flak Division, informing him “that it is in the interest of the German troops to take advantage of the free time they had left to go calmly with weapons and luggage”.

in the Ploiești area were disarmed because they were the provokers and the first to engage in these operations. It is interesting that “the disarmament was carried out without taking prisoners, and they were left free to go to Germany” (Ib.).

To de-escalate the situation, Brigadier General Moșteoru got in touch with Major General Julius Kuderna, the Commander of the German 5<sup>th</sup> Flak Division, informing him “that it is in the interest of the German troops to take advantage of the free time they had left to go calmly with weapons and luggage”. Also, the Romanian General asked his German counterpart for the release of Colonel Radu Grunau who “was taken prisoner in the morning of 24 August this year at 8 o’clock because he had the courage to go to the German Commander to protest that the German troops were preventing him from marching to Blejoi” (Ib., p. 3).

In the whirlwind of events on the morning of 24 August, the German troops stationed in Ploiești resorted to stopping the population and the Romanian passers-by and to taking their cars, a fact reported to the commander of the German 5<sup>th</sup> Flak Division. The discussion between the two commanders was tough, especially when the German General complained that “the Romanian troops are pressuring the German troops to leave the country immediately or to disarm them and that under these conditions it is beneath the dignity of a German general who bled with his troops for the defence of the country to withdraw and that he awaits orders” (Ib.).

The afternoon of August 24 brought with it a slight escalation of relations between the Romanian troops and the German troops stationed in the Ploiești area, even if there was a strong sense of camaraderie enhanced following the rejection of the air attacks carried out by the allied aviation in 1942 and 1943.

In this context, Major General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu, in his capacity as commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps, issued Order no. 23546, at 1:30 p.m. on 24 August, which was the *Action Plan* of all great units and units under its subordination, in which the following aspects were stipulated:

“I. German units in Jud. Prahova, most of them gathered in the city of Ploiești barring the entrances, and the rest stayed in Păulești Forest.

In conclusion:

The German units grouped at Ploiești probably intend:

1. To regroup and organise in the city thus making themselves safe from the aggressions that could be produced by the Romanian units.

2. Or to organise with the aim of attacking the Romanian units in order to disarm them and destroy the telephone, industrial and oil installations in the area.

II. The 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment is assigned with:

a. Being in a position to deal with enemy attacks from the East towards Prahova Valley in the Aricești Rahtivani-South and Cocorăști Capri-North sectors, including both of them.

b. Attacking, with all available forces, on the Prahova Valley towards the Ploiești-Băicoi-Câmpina road, the German troops who sought to destroy the sensitive points on the road or the Ploiești-Câmpina railway in their retreat.

c. Studying a concentric attack plan with all available forces south of the Câmpina-Văleni line in order to encircle the city of Ploiești in order to destroy or disarm the German forces defending the city” (Ib.).

For this purpose, the sectors of responsibility of all units of the strength of a regiment or battalion subordinated to the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, which were ordered to avoid combat contact with German troops, were established.

Under these circumstances, in accordance with the Order of the General Staff no. 678,563 of 24 August sent with Order of the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps no. 23,540 of the same day, the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment issued Order no. 2 of 24 August 1944, which stipulated:

“1. All Romanian land, air and naval forces cease operations against the Soviet armies on the night of 23/24 August.

2. The subordination of Romanian troops to German troops ceases immediately.

Any conflict with the German troops will be avoided, not causing them any difficulties when leaving the country.





On 25 August 1944, Brigadier General Grigore Moșteoru, commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, issued a series of orders by which the troops under his command received clear missions for the annihilation of the German forces deployed in the Ploiești area.

3. However, all units will counter any attempt to be disarmed and will prevent the occupation of public, civil and military institutions.

4. All German telephone and telegraph wires will be removed from Romanian military and civilian telephone and telegraph exchanges.

5. No German soldier or group of German soldiers or units will be allowed to enter oil refineries or enterprises" (Ib., p. 5).

It is interesting that, after 2:25 p.m., the German troops regrouped in the North Bucharest area, attacking the capital from the direction of Pipera and Băneasa. That is precisely why Major General Gheorghe Mihail, recently appointed to the position of Chief of the General Staff, ordered that no German troops were allowed towards Ploiești and Bucharest. Following this order, the German troops were let to move freely from Bucharest or Mizil to Ploiești-Sinaia-Brașov, being completely prohibited from moving from Sinaia to Ploiești-București (Ib., p. 6).

Romanian-German relations became tenser on the evening of 24 August, as the German commanders refused to retreat to Transylvania and formed fixed battle points in the Ploiești area.

That is precisely why, on the second day, troops of the 9<sup>th</sup> Călărași Regiment and the 10<sup>th</sup> Roșiori Regiment disarmed the German guards at the Vega refinery and the Astra Română refinery, taking, at the same time, approximately 2,000 prisoners from among the Germans (Ib., p. 7).

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"1. Upon receiving this order, the Romanian army is at war with the German army.

2. You will move absolutely all scaffolding guards except for the Refineries, only the guards from army depots, telephones and artwork will be left and reinforced.

3. The rest of the forces will immediately regroup no later than 3 o'clock tonight, in the most suitable place for action against the German troops.

4. Get in touch with all the Romanian troops in your immediate vicinity, with whom you can help if needed; gather and arm all the isolated Romanian soldiers.

5. After regrouping the entire unit, you will immediately proceed to disarm the German troops in your region and those passing by.

For small groups of Germans and small columns, you will proceed to disarm them from now on.

No man under my command will be disarmed.

As for the groups of larger German forces fixed on the ground, they will be countered with forces in constant units" (Ib., p. 8).

However, towards the end of the day, the situation on the ground deteriorated particularly much, which is why the commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment issued Special Order no. 7, at 7:00 p.m., which stipulated that the units of this Great Unit should act on the attack directions Moreni-Sângerii, Filipești Târg-Nedelea-Brătășanca, Târgșor airport, Buda train station, Mislea-Băicoi-Bordeni, Băicoi-Liliești, Păulești-Mizleanca Forest. An important role was given to the Colonel Oprescu Group, deployed inside the city of Ploiești, composed of the garrison battalion and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Dorobanti Regiment, which had to resist inside the city "until the concentric attack that will take place on the city of Ploiești" (Ib., p. 9).

An important sector within the Ploiești defence zone was represented by the Târgșor airport, completely captured by the German troops, in the evening of 25 August, together with the Romanian guard and its commander, Colonel Tănăsescu.

In these conditions, Colonel Petre Hrisafi, the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment Chief of Staff, drew up a report to the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps Command, in which it was specified that Major Victor Popescu from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fighting Vehicles Regiment received the mission to attack Târgșor airport with a subunit consisting of 2 companies on foot from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fighting Vehicles Regiment, a fighting vehicles platoon, four pieces, the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Battalion, the troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Flotilla escaped from the airport (Ib.). the report further showed that, "from the reconnaissance made by him in the afternoon, finding



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On 26 August, the most important confrontations between the Romanian troops and the German forces deployed in the Ploiești area began. Thus, in the Moreni sub-sector, the Major Prună Group operated under the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion, a company from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, a company from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Motorised Mountain Troops Battalion, to which a company from the Fire Fighters Battalion was added.

*that the Germans are much superior to the Romanian troops that have to attack, he reported to the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps, asking to postpone the attack on Târgșor airport, until a group of forces superior to the Germans will be achieved” (Ib.).*

That is precisely why, in the evening of 25 August, the same colonel Petre Hrisafi issued Order no. 485 to Major Victor Popescu, which stated that *“you are appointed Commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Detachment, composed of your unit and the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Battalion. The mission: To take control of Târgșorul Nou airport where it seems that the German forces are outnumbering the Romanian ones. For this purpose, you will immediately move on the route Filipești-Nedelea-Aricești Rahtivani-Târgșorul Nou, where you will stop the vehicles at a convenient distance from where they cannot discover your intention and you will contact Lt. Colonel Govella who will give you all the clarifications in in order to accomplish the mission. You will immediately report on the status of the execution of the mission to the Army Corps” (Ib., p. 11).*

This order was expected given that, in accordance with Report no. 6 issued on the evening of 25 August, at 10 p.m., by the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment to the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps, it appeared that the German units were regrouping on the roads leading to Ploiești, being deployed in compact detachments with important firepower, in the Ploiești, Târgșorul Nou airport, Păulești-Misleanca Forest, Băicoi and Moreni sectors.

On 26 August, the most important confrontations between the Romanian troops and the German forces deployed in the Ploiești area began. Thus, in the Moreni sub-sector, Major Prună Group operated under the command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion, a company from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment, a company from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Motorised Mountain Troops Battalion, to which a company from the Fire Fighters Battalion was added. Throughout the day of 26 August, following successive attacks, this group conquered, one by one, the Pleașa hill, the Tuicani hill and the Sângerîș hill. In the fighting during this day, Major Prună Group, transformed into Captain Sirca Group, after the wounding and evacuation of the first commander, had among

casualties one dead officer, 4 wounded officers, 4 dead soldiers and 15 wounded soldiers, however taking about 300 German prisoners (Ib. pp. 12-13).

In the Dițesti sub-sector, the German offensive in the direction of Filipești de Pădure, where the Command Point of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment was located, was stopped by the counter-paratroopers platoon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mountain Troops Regiment. By 14.00, this sub-unit was reinforced with two motor-carried companies, supported by two heavy AA guns. This battle formation was commanded directly by Colonel Petre Hrisafi, the Chief of Staff of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment which conquered the entire Sângerîș hill by midnight, making the junction with Major Prună Group (Captain Sirca Group) and Major Andrei Group. Following this mission, the Romanian troops took around 200 German prisoners and destroyed an 88 mm artillery battery, a 20 mm battery, as well as 10 troop transport vehicles (Ib., p. 13).

In the Mislea-Banlok sub-sector and the Câmpina sub-sector, where the 10<sup>th</sup> Roșiori Regiment operated, the Romanian troops opposed the German units that wanted to cross to the North. In the Tintea sub-sector, the 9<sup>th</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion eliminated 5 German AA sections of 20 mm, capturing 143 prisoners and war material (Ib.).

In the Băicoi-Buda sub-sector, *“a German armoured train appeared, travelling between Băicoi and Buda railway stations. Measures were taken to derail it by removing the line from the bolts, near Băicoi station. A train with heavy AA artillery was brought to the Buda station; also, numerous AA fire guns with the mission of shooting at the Romanian troops in the area” (Ib.).* And, last but not least, in the Plopeni sub-sector, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Călărași Regiment captured 250 prisoners (Ib., p. 31).

On 27 August, the situation became tense, so that direct clashes took place between the two combatant forces. Since the early hours of the morning, the enemy continued to group in the Păulești forest, Buda forest, Crângul lui Bot and south of Ploiești. Also, German formations carried out isolated attack actions on the Romanian troops,



ROMANIAN  
MILITARY  
THINKING

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especially on AA units. Due to the interrupted telephone connections, the situation in Ploiești was unclear, so the Command of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment found out that all the Romanian formations in Ploiești under the orders of Commander Colonel Oprescu Spiridon withdrew to Blejoi to avoid a fight in the city with superior German forces. Also, during the night of 27 to 28 August, a German company, taking advantage of the darkness, *“sneak west of Filipeștii de Pădure and tried to attack the locality three times, but was rejected”* (Ib., p. 14).

Under these circumstances, on 27 August 1944, the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps issued Special Order no. 13, signed by Major General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu, to 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, which stated that the Germans occupied areas in the north and east of the city of Ploiești. Also, in the Păulești forest, but also in the Valea Călugărească sector, the Germans organised motorised columns that were waiting for the order to move in the north direction of Ploiești. Through this document, the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps Command informed the subordinate Grand Unit that the German actions carried out between 24-27 August were aimed at ensuring the freedom of action of the troops on the front.

Special Order no. 13 established that the main mission of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment was to move with all units *“able to occupy a mounted position on the Dobrescu-Călinești restaurant road to block the Ploiești-Câmpina road”* (Ib.).

Major General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu ordered Brigadier General Grigore Moșteoru that the Great Unit under his command should occupy a flank position between canton no. 15-Ploiești-Văleni railway-Km. 25-Cap Roșu. In order to carry out this order, it was necessary to attack and occupy Băicoi railway station, an important strategic point located between Ploiești and the access road to Valea Prahovei.

Next, the order stated that a minimum of forces had to be kept in the first line, with the reserve strong enough to counterattack or manoeuvre in the event they were surrounded. Also, the main forces that were to participate in this mission were set, namely the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Regiment, the 5<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery Regiment and the 1<sup>st</sup> Motor

Artillery Regiment, which were to be withdrawn from the Târgșor area and deployed on the new alignment, while the 28<sup>th</sup> AA Division and the artillery battery from the 5<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery Regiment, respectively 3 pieces of 76.2 mm calibre, were to provide fire support for the action of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment (Ib., p. 15).

In accordance with the order received from the higher echelon, Brigadier General Grigore Moșteoru, in his capacity of Commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, issued an Operations Order that precisely provided the combat missions to be carried out by the subordinate units and subunits, in order to neutralise all the German forces grouped in the city of Ploiești and in the Păulești forest.

The main mission of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment was to intercept the railway and the paved road in the region of Băicoi station and to stop traffic on the railway and the road.

In the first line, the Major Negulescu Group was deployed in its disposition in three distinct sectors. Thus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company of the 6<sup>th</sup> Dorobanți Battalion was stationed in the centre, with the mission of horseback attacking the Băicoi railway station on the Florești-Băicoi railway station road. The right flank was occupied by the 5<sup>th</sup> Motorised Mountain Troops Battalion, which was to attack *“in the direction of elevation 312 km. 20 by railways securing the right side of the entire attack disposition”* (Ib.). On the left flank, the forces of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion were deployed, with the mission to attack in the direction of Florești-Km. 20.

Behind the disposition in the first line, more precisely on the Valea Prahova-Călinești alignment, there were the reserve forces of the 10<sup>th</sup> Roșiori Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mountain Troops Battalion, which had the mission of carrying out a flank counterattack in case of an enemy reaction (Ib.).

Cover and artillery fire support were provided by the 75 mm Battery from the 5<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery Regiment, as well as by the 88 mm Capture Section. Subunits of the 28<sup>th</sup> AA Division also participated in this action, with the mission of attacking the German forces deployed in the Băicoi sector, as well as on the ridge of Dorobanți Hill.



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The particularly strong strategic reserve was composed of Lieutenant-Colonel Pleșoianu Group (forces from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Călărași Regiment, a battalion from the 6<sup>th</sup> Dorobanți Regiment and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Renault Fighting Vehicles Company), the 9<sup>th</sup> Călărași Regiment, the 9<sup>th</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion and Colonel Spiridon Oprescu Group (2 battalions from the 7<sup>th</sup> Dorobanți Regiment, a battalion from the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dorobanți Regiment, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gendarmerie Company commanded by Captain Pricop).

The fighting that took place on 28 August 1944 was particularly strong, as it appears from the Intelligence Report no. 29 of 28 August signed by Brigadier General Grigore Moșteoru, commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, and countersigned by Colonel Petre Hrisafi, this Great Unit's Chief of Staff: *"After our troops intercepted the railways and the paved road at the Băicoi railway station, the enemy tried to counterattack at 18:00 on the flank of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion, from the left of the disposition, in the direction of Cap Roșu-Floresti. The enemy counterattack being supported by several German AA batteries, triggered the retreat of the company on the left of the disposition. The situation was restored by the Group Commander, Major Andrei, a fighting platoon and a cavalry squadron"* (Ib.).

It is interesting that General Moșteoru knew the state of mind of the German troops, demoralised by the situation they were in: *"Many Austrians would surrender, but they cannot do this because of the National Socialists and the officers"* (Ib.). They were also afraid of being taken prisoner by the Soviets, as they were known for their harsh treatment of prisoners.

At the end of 28 August, Major Negulescu Detachment managed to take control of the Băicoi railway station and a good part of the oil installations in the area, but the repeated counterattacks of the Germans forced our troops to withdraw and abandon the paved road, as well as Dorobanțu Hill (Ib., p. 19).

Under these conditions, on the morning of 29 August, the fighting was resumed with even greater intensity. That's why the commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Army Corps ordered *"the subordination of all units located*

*in the Valea Teleajenului to the Detachment – at the same time, he also provides 7 old model fighting vehicles to be used along the Blejoi-Lipănești road"* (Ib.).

At the same time, troops from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Călărași Regiment, the 6<sup>th</sup> Dorobanți Battalion and a platoon from the 9<sup>th</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion were placed into disposition with the mission to intercept the paved road and chase away the German troops from the Țigăneasca Forest and the village of Cotoiu.

At 1:00 p.m., following repeated attacks, Lieutenant-Colonel Pleșoianu's Subgroup managed to clear the paved road and, thus, prevent a possible influx of German troops in the direction of Ploiești (Ib., p. 23).

Because the Romanian troops could not free the Târgșor airport and the Crângul lui Bot Forest, due to the heavy fire opened by the German artillery, the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps returned with the Operations Order no. 19, registered with no. 1675 of 29 August 1944, in which it was clearly specified that this Great Unit received the mission *"to destroy the enemy forces initially in the Buda area and later in the Păulești area in order to take control of the Ploiești communication node as quickly as possible. In order to fulfil the above mission, the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps will attack in the morning of 30 August in the general direction Băicoi Station, Movila Mare, Buda Station"* (Ib.).

The point of departure of the Romanian troops was located on the alignment Liziera Est Nedelea-elevation 270 Movila lui Dobre-Movila Mare 288 at km 75-Liziera Sud Băicoi-Liliești-Tintea-Găgeni-Liziera Sud Boldești. In this sense, three groups of forces were created, with well-established structure and missions. Thus, the General Moșteoru Group, with its subordinate units located southeast of the Ploiești-Câmpina road, between km. 83 and 75, was to attack on horseback on the railway in the general direction of Buda (Ib.).

Colonel Turtureanu's group, formed by the 6<sup>th</sup> Dorobanți Battalion, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Călărași Regiment, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion, the 9<sup>th</sup> Călărași Regiment and the 9<sup>th</sup> AA Regiment, was ordered to attack in the general direction of Băicoi-Tufanii lui Berca-Mizileanca



*The point of departure of the Romanian troops was located on the alignment Liziera Est Nedelea-elevation 270 Movila lui Dobre-Movila Mare 288 at km 75-Liziera Sud Băicoi-Liliești-Tintea-Găgeni-Liziera Sud Boldești. In this sense, three groups of forces were created, with well-established structure and missions.*

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*In the evening of 29 August, the General Moșteoru Group, in fact the 18th Oilfield Guard Detachment, issued the Operations Order no. 39, in which it was specified that this Great Unit would attack, in the morning of 30 August, in the general direction of Filipeștii de Târg-Buda-Ploiești, in order to capture and destroy the German forces deployed in the Filipești Forest and in the sector Buda.*

Forest-North-West elevation 215. Last but not least, the Colonel Batcu Group, formed by the units of the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, had the mission to attack in the Boldești-Blejoi-Ploiești direction (Ib., pp. 23-25).

Under these conditions, in the evening of 29 August, General Moșteoru Group, in fact the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, issued the Operations Order no. 39, in which it was specified that this Great Unit would attack, in the morning of 30 August, in the general direction of Filipeștii de Târg-Buda-Ploiești, in order to capture and destroy the German forces deployed in the Filipești Forest and in the sector Buda.

To initiate this combat action, General Grigore Moșteoru ordered the formation of three subgroups. Thus, Major Andrei's Subgroup, with the main objective of eliminating the German troops from the Buda Forest, had in the first line the troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division from the 10<sup>th</sup> Roșiori Regiment and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion, while in the second line there were the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company from the 6<sup>th</sup> Dorobanți Battalion. Artillery support was provided by AA batteries from the area, as well as from a battery from the Division commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Teodorescu located in the West Nedelea region.

Major Victor Popescu's subgroup, also with the general objective of clearing the Buda Forest, had the first line formed by subunits of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Guard Mountain Troops Battalion deployed in the 279 elevation sector of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Battalion, which covered the sector located between the paved road in the South and Nedelea in the East, as well as the fighting vehicles platoon.

The second line was provided by two companies on foot from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fighting Vehicles Regiment, the artillery support belonging to the Division commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Teodorescu.

Lieutenant-Colonel Dorin's sub-unit consisted of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Company, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Motorised Mountain Troops Company and one company from the 5<sup>th</sup> AA Brigade and the Aviation Flotilla. The reserve troops of this sub-grouping consisted of troops of the Land Forces Company from the Heavy Artillery Regiment deployed in the Filipeștii de Târg sector. This subgroup was ordered to attack in the general

direction Zalhanaua-Târgșorul Nou-Crângul lui Bot to occupy Târgșor airport (Ib., pp. 25-26).

During the night of 29 to 30 August 1944, the Buda-Băicoi railway was destroyed at Km. 15, for the immobilisation of the armoured train, by the 5<sup>th</sup> Pioneer Regiment and a subunit from the Air Pioneer Regiment commanded by Second Lieutenant Cosma.

According to the reports issued by General Grigore Moșteoru, the commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, who had under his command all the Romanian units deployed in this area heavy battles took place from the early hours of 30 August to drive out the German troops: *"The fight is hard. A deadly fire is coming from the trees, barracks and buildings in the forest. In the first line on the main axis Nedelea-Buda Station, the Detachment Commander, General Moșteoru, accompanied by Major Brăileanu, leads and drives the soldiers who do not stop despite all the deadly fire. The Germans are captured one by one, being taken out with grenade and bayonet from trenches, buildings, etc."* (Ib.).

At 18.00, the Buda forest and railway station were conquered by the Romanians, on which occasion 400 German prisoners were taken. This victory was paid dearly by the Romanians who had 3 officers dead and 4 wounded, 2 non-commissioned officers dead and 3 wounded, as well as 35 soldiers dead and 105 wounded (Ib., pp. 27-28).

However, at around 8:00 p.m., an unexpected incident took place, an artillery bombardment being launched on the Major Popescu Group Command Post, preceded *"by live fire from a rifle, a machine gun, which responded with fire in the sector of the 4<sup>th</sup> Motorised Mountain Troops Battalion. The sounds being different from the German ones, suspecting that they are either Romanian or probably Russian, they start shouting from the lines of the Battalion that here are Romanians as well, both in Romanian and in Russian. After about 20 minutes, the fire stops. Russian soldiers appear from the front"* (Ib., p. 28).

By the evening of 31 August, following some stray exchanges of fire, the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment managed to defeat the German resistance and take control of the oil zone, capturing prisoners and materials (Ib.). The 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment managed to fulfil



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The almost 10 days of clashes between the Romanian troops and the German forces resulted in dead and wounded on both sides also due to the refusal of the German commanders, justified up to a certain point, to surrender to the Romanian Army.

the orders of the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps, which is why, on 1 September 1944, the commander of this Great Unit, Major General Constantin Vasiliu-Rășcanu, issued Order of the Day no. 480, which stated: *“The operations that took place between 23 August and 1 September 1944 on the territory of the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps ended with absolute success, resulting in disarming all the German units located in the oil zone, capturing a lot of artillery material, automatic weapons and approx. 9,000 prisoners. I bow before the graves of the fallen, who are an example of heroism for us and for future generations. I wish the injured a speedy recovery. I extend my warmest thanks to the officers, non-commissioned officers and to the troops from the units that fought under my orders, and, to reward the high military virtues, proven in battles:*

**I HEREBY ORDER**

*The Commendation by Order of the Day of Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and the troops from all the units that fought between 23 August and 1 September 1944, under the orders of the 5<sup>th</sup> Territorial Corps, for the brilliant way in which they carried out the assigned mission”.* (Ib., pp. 30-31).

### CONCLUSIONS

The act of 23 August 1944 led to a paradoxical situation, namely allies suddenly becoming enemies after 10:30 p.m. Under these conditions, in accordance with the orders given by the Romanian General Staff, the Romanian troops deployed in the defence system in the Ploiești oilfield area had to turn their weapons against those with which they countered the allied air attacks against Valea Prahovei refineries and oil wells, with great human sacrifices, in 1942, 1943 and 1944.

The almost 10 days of clashes between the Romanian troops and the German forces resulted in dead and wounded on both sides also due to the refusal of the German commanders, justified up to a certain point, to surrender to the Romanian Army.

1 September meant the annihilation of all German resistance points located in the Ploiești oilfield area and, implicitly, the acknowledgement of the merits of all the units that were part

of the 18<sup>th</sup> Oilfield Guard Detachment, great unit commanded by Brigadier General Grigore Moșteoru, one of the most pragmatic and efficient Romanian commanders who acted in direct contact with German troops on Romanian territory.

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