

ANDREI SILVIU AND NICOLAE RAJKOVIČ, DEFENDERS OF THE CITY OF ORADEA, KILLED BY HUNGARIAN HORTYSTS ON 9 OCTOBER 1944

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Abstract. *The battles for the liberation of Oradea and Bihor from the Hortyst-German occupation involved a number of Romanian Army divisions (the 3rd Mountain Brigade and Tudor Vladimirescu Brigade), as well as divisions of the Red Army and were particularly ferocious and long-lasting (5 September - 12 October 1944). Several offensives and counter-offensives of the Hungarian-German and Romanian-Soviet military divisions took place with the purpose of preserving/liberating the city of Oradea, the administrative centre of Bihor County, a critical land and air communications hub for the entire western region (roads, railways, airport).*

In the battles for Oradea, the region experienced several days of power vacuum, with the fascist troops retreating from the city in order to prepare for a counter-offensive, while the Romanian-Soviet troops were regrouping outside the city for a decisive offensive (25 September - 28 September).

At the same time, three citizens of the city, i.e. Andrei Silviu – a Romanian ethnic, a former civil servant with the City Hall and reserve officer of the Romanian Army, who had a local Israeli wife, Nicolae Rajkovič - a Romanian citizen of Serbian origin who was a local barber, and Papp Tibor – a civil servant with the City Hall, a Romanian citizen of Hungarian origin, established a “civil guard” comprising 45 citizens of Oradea with different nationalities, who were armed with rifles from a City Hall warehouse. The role of the guard was to maintain peace in the city and to defend the life and property of the citizens, primarily the workshops and shops in the city against the lumpenproletariat who were prone to looting.

The return of fascist occupiers in the city leads to the arrest of the three guard organisers. They are brought in front of a military court and sentenced to death for organising “partisan troops behind the front”. Andrei and Rajkovič are shot in the Oradea Fortress three days before (9 October) the liberation of the city (12 October), while Papp is saved by his family and sentenced to 15 years in prison, due to the fact that he was a Hungarian ethnic.

Although historians and patriotic local councillors proposed (in 2007, 2013, 2015, and 2020) that the two murdered locals should be honoured as heroes of the city, the political parties or coalitions that held the majority in the Oradea City Council (the Democratic Party (PD) + the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR), the National Liberal Party (PNL) + the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR)) kept rejecting the initiative. This year, several cultural and patriotic organisations will bring up the proposal once again, since the idea behind it still makes a valid point.

Keywords: Andrei, Rajkovič, Oradea, 9 October, 12 October.

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The coup of 23 August 1944 organised by the Royal House, a group of loyal generals, and the political parties opposing the Antonescu regime, removed the country from the alliance with Nazi Germany and its allies, with Romania subsequently joining the anti-fascist coalition. The first military action taken by the newly-installed government led by General Constantin Sănătescu was the withdrawal of the Romanian Army from the German combat unit. Ordinance no. 1 of the Romanian Chief of Defence ordered the immediate implementation of the plan whose aim was to defend Transylvania's temporary border, as imposed on our country by the Second Vienna Dictate.

In this context, the 3rd Mountain Brigade led by General Leonard Mociulschi deployed small military units in the Beiuș area as early as August 24, with the purpose of strengthening the security and defence of the economic and military targets in the region. The entire staff of the brigade which was a part of the *Crișuri* military group would join the defence effort by the evening of 11 September. The objective was to stop the German-Hungarian enemy from advancing into the area between Crișul Negru and Crișul Repede Rivers. Immediate action was all the more necessary since, between 11 and 17 September, the German-Hungarian troops launched their offensive in the Banat and Criș County region.¹

Between 13 and 20 September, the enemy military units, supported by tanks and air forces, in a disproportionate ratio of 7 to 1 compared to the defending Romanian units, would launch a strong offensive in the Beiuș area, advancing towards the Ștei-Vaşcău-Criștiorul de Jos region, after the town was occupied. The strategic objective was to occupy the natural positions that were difficult to access and easy to defend, namely the Vârfurile pass, "before the bulk of the Romanian-Soviet troops crossed the Carpathian arc" in Transylvania.² The enemy advanced into the Beiuș depression with great difficulty, after ferocious battles in which the military units of the Mountain Brigade defended themselves with bravery and loss of human life.³ The Hungarian and German hortyst soldiers were helped first, by the Hungarian ethnics who formed the majority of the population of the Remetea commune, and later on, by those in the Ginta commune. Moreover, armed Hungarian civilians were engaging in the murder of wounded Romanian soldiers, in violation of the fundamental international rules of war. Thus, Captain Balea, a wounded military commander, was killed by a group of Hungarian locals while being evacuated and passing through the Remetea commune.

From 22 September, the battles in the Criș area enter a new phase. The 3rd Mountain Brigade, with the support of the 337th Soviet Infantry Division and the *Tudor*

¹ Ioan Marinescu, *Operațiunile militare din toamna anului 1944 întreprinse în Bihor de Diviziile 3 Vânători de munte și Tudor Vladimirescu*, published in *Crisia* (Oradea), year VII, 1977, p. 265-266.

² *Ibidem*, p. 266. See also: Eugen Bantea, Constantin Niculae, Gheorghe Zaharia, *August 1944 – Mai 1945. Scurtă prezentare a contribuției României în războiul antihitlerist*, Ed. Militară, Bucharest, 1969, p. 130-131.

³ Ioan Marinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 266-269.

Vladimirescu Romanian Volunteer Brigade,⁴ all under the command of the 33rd Soviet Army, move on to free the territory between Crișul Negru and Crișul Repede Rivers from the presence of the German-Hungarian troops that were trying to advance to the west. The liberation of Oradia was a significant objective, given its geostrategic position as a land transport hub (roads and railways) and airport, opening the way to Hungary, from Debrecen to Budapest. At the same time, the non-mechanised Soviet army led by General Pliev advanced along the Crișul Repede River, from the east to the west.⁵ The liberating troops would advance towards Chișineu-Criș-Salonta-Oradea-Săcuieni/Valea lui Mihai through difficult battles and great human sacrifice.

The encirclement of Oradia from the north and south-east by the Romanian-Soviet military units and the losses suffered by the German and the Hungarian armies in the battles which took place between 22 and 26 September, would convince the hortyst administration of Oradia to leave the city around 25 September. At the same time, the German and Hungarian military units withdrew from the city and gathered to the west, in preparation of a counter-offensive, by reorganising forces and supplementing them with heavy weapons, armoured fighting vehicles, and aircraft. Under the circumstances, three civilians, all citizens of the city of Oradia, namely Andrei Silviu, Nicolae Rajkovič, and Dr. Papp Tibor, would establish a local “civil guard” in order to maintain public order, taking into consideration the “power vacuum” generated by the resignation of the local administration. Significant for the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the city of Oradia is the fact that the three organisers of the “civil guard” were: a Romanian ethnic, Andrei Silviu, a former civil servant of the Oradea City Hall and reserve officer of the Romanian Army who had a local Israeli wife, Nicolae Rajkovič, a barber who was a Romanian citizen of Serbian origin, and Dr. Papp Tibor, a civil servant with the local City Hall, who was a Romanian citizen of Hungarian origin.⁶ The “civil guard” comprised 45 locals of various ethnicities, armed with World War I rifles that had been stored in the basement of the City Hall. The role of the guard was to maintain public order in the absence of the police and the gendarmes, in order to secure the citizens' property and physical integrity in the face of possible attempts by the lumpenproletariat to loot and destroy the workshops of craftsmen and the merchant shops.⁷

⁴ In a forced march, the Brigade advances from the Transylvanian Plateau through the Arieș Valley, over the Bihor massif; on 23 September, the troops arrive in the Cărpinet-Vaşcău area and on 26-27 September, they continue their march towards the Hidișelu de Jos-Băile Felix-Sânmartin front line, laying only 15 to 20 km southeast of Oradea.

⁵ Ioan Marinescu, *Acțiunile marilor unități române și sovietice pentru eliberarea Țării Crișurilor, în perioada septembrie-octombrie 1944*, published in *Crisia* (Oradea), year III, 1973, *passim*.

⁶ We use the term “Romanian citizen” as it was referred to until August 1940.

⁷ Ioan Marinescu, *Documente privind activitatea patrioților orădeni în lunile septembrie-octombrie 1944*, published in *Crisia* (Oradea), year IV, 1974, p. 333-345.

The powerful German-Hungarian offensive of 28 September - 2 October pushed the Romanian-Soviet troops gathered around Oradea 15 to 20 km away from the position established and fortified on 25-26 September. The resistance of the *Tudor Vladimirescu* Brigade remained in the history of Oradia and Bihor due to the sacrifice of the soldiers and officers who were the target of the enemy attack. In Băile Felix, Lt. Col. Ioan Buzoianu, Commander of the 2nd Infantry Division, Second Lieutenants Ioan Bugai and Gheorghe Șova, as well as Lieutenant Nicolae Buzatu all died in battle, while Colonel Iacob Teclu, the Division's Chief of Staff, was seriously wounded.⁸ The battles and sacrifices of the 3rd Mountain Brigade were also significant.⁹ By 3 October, the Romanian-Soviet troops would realign their positions and start a powerful counter-offensive to the west, with the purpose of liberating Oradia, among others.

During the short period when Oradia was again occupied by the Horthyst-Hungarian administration (2-12 October), the founders of the “civil guard” were arrested. Accused of organising “partisan troops behind the front”, an evidence of “lack of loyalty to the Hungarian state”, the three would be sentenced by the Front Court Martial which convened quickly at noon on 9 October to execution by shooting. The justification for the sentence was based on the statements of two false witnesses, Iosif Hincz and Ioan Haldenwang, City Hall officials, who claimed that Andrei Silviu and his men had supported the Romanian Army.

Andrei and Rajkovič were shot to death in the Oradea Fortress¹⁰ on 9 October in the afternoon, immediately after the simulated court trial, and were buried hastily in the ditch of the Fortress.¹¹ As a result of his family’s intervention, dr. Papp Tibor’s sentence would be commuted to 15 years in prison,¹² due to the fact that he was a Hungarian ethnic. The assassination took place only three days before the liberation of Oradia on 12 October. Years later, on 5 June 1950, dr. Papp Tibor stated that, in the days before their execution, the two men who had been sentenced to death were cruelly beaten and tortured in the City Hall jail.¹³

In May 1945, Andrei Silviu was exhumed from the Fortress and buried in the Municipal Cemetery, where a Christian family tomb was established.¹⁴ The Oradea

⁸ Idem, *Operațiuni militare din toamna anului 1944...*, p. 273.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 274.

¹⁰ The archaeologist Marian Trandafir, a graduate of the History and Geography Department of the University of Oradea, currently the holder of a Ph.D. in history awarded by the University of Oradea, discovered the execution site near the inside wall of the Oradea Fortress, towards the Velența gate, in the spring of 2014. Several Mannlicher rifle bullets were lodged in the wall, at a height similar to that of a man’s chest; Mannlicher rifles were used at the time by the hortyst army. See: Dan Simai, *Povestea Bihoreanului*, published in *Bihoreanul* (Oradea), issue no. 1027, 12-18 October 2020, p. 8.

¹¹ Ioan Marinescu, *Documente privind...*, p. 335-336.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 338.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 343.

¹⁴ Discovered by the museographer Mircea Dulca. Chances are that Andrei Silviu’s house will also be identified, in a suburb of the Municipality of Oradea. However, Nicolae Rajkovič’s tomb in the Municipal Cemetery has not been discovered until now.

City Hall would allocated Andrei Silviu's widow the amount of 250,000 Romanian lei, as moral reparation.¹⁵

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Even though in 1974, the historian Ioan Marinescu¹⁶ drew the attention of the public to this tragic event in the history of Oradia, an attempt at the rehabilitation and official commemoration of both Andrei Silviu and Nicolae Rajkovič was not possible because of the mostly non-Romanian demographic and ethnic structure of the population of the city, where the key political and administrative functions were held by Hungarian ethnics who also occupied similar positions throughout the entire Bihor county.¹⁷ The years 1980 of the "Ceașescu epoch" were focused on different priorities, despite the fact that the cultivation of national sentiments was a fashionable topic. However, the national policy which forced the population "to tighten their belts" in order for the country to pay off its international debts also meant no national recognition of the local event.

After 1989, the newly-appointed Government members chose to focus on privatisations, in other words, on the enrichment of the new political leaders of the Country, who recklessly dissolved the national industrial sector and sold the land and the forests of the country, including those in Transylvania, to the heirs of rich Hungarian counts and Transylvanian Saxons, i.e. the "absentees" who had been indemnified by the Romanian State between 1921 and 1937.

In the aftermath of the decade of rough democratisation (1990 - 2000), which continued on a more subtle level, with the same devastating consequence of national poverty, the "nationalist" insurgence would start off very quietly and continue to develop even after the dissolution of the political parties which acted as flagships in defence of the national sentiment (Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR) in 2000, and Greater Romania Party (PRM) in 2008).

Against this backdrop, mention should be made of the publication in Oradea of a number of media articles in which journalists and historians remember the deeds and the fate of the heroes Andrei Silviu and Nicolae Rajkovič.¹⁸ Furthermore, during the 2004-2008 term in office of the mayor Petru Filip, PRM councillors

¹⁵ Ioan Marinescu, *Documente privind...*, p. 336.

¹⁶ A museographer with the Criș County Museum before 1989, an expert in the contemporary history of Bihor, who migrated to the Federal Republic of Germany.

¹⁷ See: Mihai D. Drecin, *Considerații asupra evoluției demografice a orașului Oradea pe baza recensămintelor oficiale (1880-2011)*, in the volume *Economie și Istorie. Dialog și interdisciplinaritate. In Honorem prof. univ. dr. Ioan Lumperdean la împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani*, coordinators: Dana Bako, Iosif Marin Balog, Rodolf Gräf, Răzvan V. Mustățã, Ed. Academia Română/Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2015, p. 513-524; Gabriel Moisa, Mihai Drecin, *Iluzia libertății. Evenimentele din 23/24 ianuarie 1972 de la Oradea*, Ed. Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2022, p. 20-22. Romanian ethnics would become the majority only in 1977, while in 1974, Oradia would have its first mayor of Romanian origin.

¹⁸ Mihai D. Drecin, Mircea Dulca, *Octombrie 1944. Un sacrificiu trecut parcă mult sub tăcere. Eroii orădeni lăsați în uitare*, published in *Crișana* (Oradea), issue no. 7486, 12 X 2015, p. 12; Dan Simai, *op. cit.*, *Bihoreanul* (Oradea), issue no. 1027, 12-18 October 2020, p. 8.

brought forward the topic of awarding moral reparation for the sacrifice of the two heroes by installing two commemorative plaques, one on the wall of the City Hall and another inside the Oradea Fortress, near the place where the two had been executed. At present, there is also a proposal for a monument that would be erected in the memory of the two Oradea locals in the central courtyard of the Fortress to replace the planned statue of Saint Ladislaus, the Hungarian King¹⁹ who is said to have allegedly established the City of Oradia, in the absence of any documentary evidence. Between 2004 and 2008, the Oradea City Council comprised a majority of PD and UDMR party members, while between 2008 and 2012, the majority was made up of PNL and UDMR members; today,²⁰ PNL holds 2/3 of the local council, a crushing majority which allows it to vote by itself on any decision. Under these circumstances, a national decision with respect to the commemorative plaques would be desirable. The Bihor County Council is in the same fortunate position, so a decision to place a commemorative landmark inside the Oradea Fortress would be equally easy to make, even more so as the members of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) would be ready to support the proposal. But this will happen only if the PNL-PSD-UDMR brotherhood established at the level of the Government will not stop the initiative²¹.

¹⁹ Szént László (Ladislaus I, later on sanctified under the name “Saint Ladislaus”), King of Hungary between 1077 and 1095, while *Documentul fundațional al Oradiei* (Oradia’s Document of Establishment) is dated 1113 and bears the seal of King Coloman (1095-1116), also a member of the Arpad Dynasty (890-1301).

²⁰ Actually, from around 2012-2016 until today.

²¹ This study will also appear in Romanian in a tribute volume dedicated to the memory of prof. univ. dr. Sever Dumitrașcu from the University of Oradea, at the commemoration of the 85th anniversary of his birth, in the Publishing House of the Țării Crișurilor Cultural Complex Museum and the University of Oradea (in print).