

COLLABORATION UNDER THE CANOPY OF THE PARACHUTE WITHIN THE SOCIALIST CAMP

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Abstract: The Soviet Union may be regarded as one of the first countries that seized the new opportunities provided by the use of airborne forces in an armed conflict. Therefore, at the beginning of the Second World War a substantial structure of such forces had already been in readiness. However, the Soviets did not use those forces at full capacity, for tactical and especially for technical reasons (insufficiency of air transport capabilities).

The Romanian paratrooper unit, established by Marshal Ion Antonescu on 10 June 1941, was disbanded by the order of the Allied (Soviet) Control Commission in March 1945, in spite of the fact that it had received special training. After the Second World War, the Romanian Armed Forces were compelled to adopt the organisation principles and the way of action that were proper to the Soviet Armed Forces. The paratrooper unit, re-established on 1 November 1950, was, up to 1980, the only structure of this type in the Romanian Armed Forces, and extensive efforts were made to train and equip it so that it could meet the standards in the armed forces of the other countries in the Soviet sphere of influence.

Key words: Soviet Union, Second World War, Special Operations Aviation Brigade

The Soviet Union was one of the first countries that got aware of the penetrating power of airborne troops, seeking and succeeding in attaching the proper importance to them. Even since 1925, the Soviet envoys had been sent to the USA to get familiar with the Americans' preoccupations in the field. In 1930, in the Moscow military district, near Voronej, three *R-1* aircraft dropped two detachments from a height of 500 and 300 meters, each consisting in 12 paratroopers equipped with machine guns and muskets and having the mission to cause a diversion behind the enemy disposition.

In 1931, in the Leningrad military district that was under the command of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, General Alksnis established an experimental detachment, consisting of one fusilier company, pioneer, communication and light car platoons, a heavy bomber squadron, and an army corps aviation detachment. Later, it was made possible for the light armoured cars to be parachuted from the *TB-1* aircraft. In 1932, the first paratrooper battalions were established near Kiev, Leningrad, Moscow, and in the Far East.

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In 1933, the 3rd Special Operations Aviation Brigade was established. In the same year, at Tushino, near Moscow, a school for paratrooper trainers was established, the USSR paying special attention to skydiving as a base for the recruitment of the future airborne troops.

“*Osoaviakin*” associations had available 1 000 parachute towers in 1935. More than 800 000 young people practiced skydiving, and in 1936, 1 406 000 young people had already joined these associations. Therefore, it is not surprising that, at the beginning of the Second World War, the USSR had 200 times more paratroopers than all the countries in the aggregate.

In 1938, the USSR had already had 6 airborne brigades, and in 1939, one of them was engaged in the fight to counter the Japanese forces in Manchuria and other three brigades were dropped in Finland, behind the “*Mannerheim Line*”, but their action cannot be considered a success.

Otherwise, although at the moment the USSR entered the Second World War it had five airborne assault corps in readiness and other three in the process of being in readiness, their actual use in the theatres of operations was not proportional to the dimension of their development and neither were the results obtained in the confrontations in which they got engaged. Even if I.V. Stalin’s intention was to have ten airborne assault corps ready for the “*great liberating offensive*”, the Soviets did not capitalise on the expected potential of the airborne troops, mainly because of the lack of an air force able to execute and support airborne operations at great distance, as well as because they considered it was more efficient to use groups of well-trained fighters that were parachuted behind the enemy disposition to carry out *commando*-type reconnaissance and diversion missions: to attack and neutralise the vital centres of the large enemy command, the airfields and communications, the oil pipes and installations, and to equip the local partisan elements.

Romania was a “*privileged beneficiary*” of the action of the Soviet airborne troops, especially in the summer of 1940 when, immediately after the *Ultimatum* on 27-28 June, although it was not at war with the USSR, they were used to conquer some important positions to cut the ways used by the Romanian forces to withdraw from the South of Bessarabia. On 28 June 1940, the 201st, 204th and 214th Airborne Brigades were embarked in 170 *TB-3* aircraft belonging to the four heavy bomber regiments, being parachuted next to the cities of Bolgrad, Kahul and Ismail, occupying them without encountering the resistance of the Romanian troops that were withdrawing.

There followed, throughout the period of the war, up to 23 August 1944, multiple actions of the Soviet paratroopers dropped in the Romanian area and having sabotage and diversion missions that caused troubles to the Romanian authorities, although the results did not meet the expectations of those who assigned them to execute such missions.

Established on 10 June 1941, through the Decree-Law signed by General Ion Antonescu, the Romanian Paratroopers, although they were not used in specific airborne missions, contributed, in the terrible fights in 1944, their supreme sacrifice to defend the Northern part of the capital city (Băneasa – Pipera – Tunari – Otopeni area) and to destroy the German forces in other hot areas. As one of the protagonists in those fights remarked “... *if the handful of determined people, wisely commanded, and those who behaved heroically had not been there, from the beginning to the end, all of them, soldiers, officers and commanders who proved courageous and fearless in front of the enemy superiority as far as number, quality and equipment were concerned, the fate of Bucharest would have certainly been more tragic than the one of Warsaw, after the treatment of the same experts*”¹.

Although they were totally engaged in the anti-Hitler war after 23 August 1944, the Romanian armed forces were subjected to undeserved humiliations by the new allies, as if they had been defeated. After the signature, on 12 September 1944, in Moscow, of the Armistice Agreement between the USSR (on behalf of the United Nations) and Romania, the Allied Control Commission acted “*in the name of the Allied Powers*” but “*under the general directions and orders of the Allied (Soviet) High Command*”².

On 1 March 1945, the Air Staff decided “*in conformity with the Allied Control Commission in Romania address no. 466 on 28 February 1945*”³ the disbandment of the Paratroopers Battalion together with other units in the Romanian Air Force. Thus, it was put an end to the existence of an elite military structure in the Romanian Armed Forces, being considered troublesome by the new ally not only because it was an exceptionally well-prepared structure but also because the paratroopers, as the majority of the Romanian military, did not agree with the Soviet occupation. Many of them would choose the armed fight against the new occupant and the communist regime imposed by it, joining the National Resistance Movement and paying many years of detention and suffering in communist prisons for their “*heresy*”.

However, the need for a paratrooper unit was felt in the new popular army, especially as the echoes of the recently ended war were prolonged and amplified by the tensions generated by the new division of the world in areas of influence and military blocs. Transformed following the Soviet model and “*benefiting*” from the support of the military advisers sent from Moscow, the Romanian armed

¹ Captain Mihail Țanțu, *Dare de seamă asupra acțiunilor Batalionului de Parașutiști în perioada 23-28 august 1944*, Fund Paratroopers Museum, Buzău.

² Lieutenant Colonel Alesandru Duțu, *Comisia Aliată destructurează armata română*, in *Revista de Istorie Militară*, no. 2-5/ 1999.

³ Romanian Military Archives, Fund Statul Major al Aerului, File 62, p. 128.

forces were compelled to adopt the principles of the “*big brother from the East*” as far as their organisation and the way of action were concerned.

On 1 November 1950, the armed forces minister at that time, General Emil Bodnăraş (whose rather controversial biography also contains the version according to which he was parachuted in Romania in 1944, when he was imposed in the command structure of the Romanian communists by the Soviets, after he had deserted the Romanian armed forces and attended the NKVD School)⁴ ordered the establishment of a paratrooper battalion in Tecuci, within the Aviation Training Centre.

In 1951, the Paratrooper Battalion was moved to Buzău. The Soviet spirit was deeply experienced up to the smallest echelons of the Romanian armed forces and, although the unit was stipulated to benefit from the services of a Soviet adviser, its existence was not mentioned in the Historical Records of the unit. However, in 1956, “*on the occasion of the inspections in the spring and autumn made by the 2nd Military Region, the unit was assessed as GOOD and VERY GOOD, and the military adviser (of the 2nd Military Region, AN), Lieutenant General Vasilyev, appreciated, following the tactical applications the unit participated in (with the 37th Mechanised Division) that the Airborne Assault Battalion was well-prepared for the fight and deserved to be praised as well as rewarded.*”²

In 1956, Gheorghe Iancu and Ion Negroiu, two young promising skydivers who were conscripts in the Airborne Assault Battalion in Buzău at that time, took part in the international parachuting competition in Moscow, the first Romanian participation in such a sporting event. A few years later, in 1961, Gheorghe Iancu set the absolute world record in fixed point landing (0.00 m) in Strejnic, near Ploieşti.

In 1958, on 28 February (40 years since the Red Army was established AN), the paratroopers visited the aviation units in Boboc and Ianca, where there still were Soviet troops, and “*Lieutenant Colonel Varzev Ivan delivered a speech to the military in our unit, showing the importance of the day of 28 February 1958, and donated a red flag as a symbol of the friendship between our unit and the Soviet aviation unit in Bobocu*”³.

The historical records also mention other aspects regarding the Romanian-Soviet *collaboration* in that period. In this respect, many cases of officers and conscripts expelled from the Communist Party and the Young Workers Union on the ground they showed a “*hostile attitude towards the USSR*” are listed. Thus, in 1956, five conscripts were “*unmasked*” for “*hostile attitude towards the popular*

⁴ Adrian Cioroianu, *Atuurile lui Gheroghe Gheorghiu- Dej*, in *Dosarele Istoriei* no. 3(8)/ 1997, p. 2.

² Historical Records of the 60th Paratrooper Regiment “Băneasa-Otopeni” for 1955.

³ *Ibidem*, 1958.

democratic regime and counterrevolutionary activities". The hostile attitude refers to the *attempt* of a group of paratroopers to organise an armed rebellion during the events in Hungary, in November 1956, action *unmasked* by a *vigilant* comrade who was decorated and remunerated, while the five *counterrevolutionaries* received sentences ranging from forced work for all the life to 7 years in prison. They were condemned by the Military Court in Bucharest¹.

Two years later, Lieutenant Ioan Ciliță, a capable officer who had a sense of humour, asked about the Romanian-Soviet economic cooperation, during a political-ideological training session, answered: "*We give them our wheat and they take our oil*", and this "*joke*" cost him more than three years in prison, "*for a hostile attitude towards the USSR*".² The same year, Captain Ioan Popescu was expelled from the party "*because he offended the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party*"³.

In 1960, the political lessons mention "*the importance of launching the three cosmic rockets by the USSR*", as well as "*the undermining of the heads of government meeting in Paris with the U-2 spy aircraft that was thrown down by the Soviet armed forces*"⁴. The historical records also mention the participation of the unit in "*the enhancement of Buzău Grove and of the cemetery of the Soviet and Romanian heroes by 4 000 hours of volunteer work*"⁵.

As a recently established unit, at the beginning of the sixth decade of the last century, the Paratroopers Battalion needed mainly flying assets. Although the problem of parachutes had been somehow solved through the nationalisation, in 1948, of the *IRVIN Parachute Factory* – which had produced, even since the interwar period, parachutes under the American licence –, and its transformation into "*Aurel Vlaicu*" *Parachute Factory*, the equipment with transport aircraft was the most important preoccupation of the military authorities of the time. If in the first years that followed the Second World War there still were *in inventory* some *Junkers-52* aircraft, dating back in the time of the Romanian-German Alliance, the Soviet aircraft started gradually to impose in the service, even though some of them had been in their turn received from the Americans, as it was the case of the famous and docile *DC-3*, refurbished and inscribed in Russian and then sold to the Romanians as *Li-2* aircraft.

In compliance with a Soviet request addressed to the Romanian Government, in November 1952, the popular democratic countries had to procure materials only with the permission of the USSR and in conformity with the Soviet models,

¹ *Ibidem*, 1956.

² *Ibidem*, 1958.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*, 1960.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

in order to “*preserve, in the popular democratic countries, the same type of armament, having identical technical and tactical characteristics in exploitation, irrespective of the country of the Soviet Camp it was ordered from*”¹.

The Warsaw Treaty Organisation was established in 1955 as a riposte to the threat represented by NATO establishment, in April 1949. Romania joined the organisation since its establishment. The Pact required, among others, for all the armed forces of the signatory states to be properly equipped and to concomitantly assure enhanced interoperability. The suggested solution was not difficult to predict, as the Soviet pattern was easy to follow, through the implementation of the Soviet armed forces doctrine and fighting rules as well as through the imposition of the “*necessity*” to buy (at high cost!) the necessary armament and fighting assets from the USSR or other popular democratic states. As it is emphasised by the military historians, “*the efforts meant to the procurement of Soviet fighting assets, especially for the armoured and motor-mechanised units, as well as for the aviation ones, have to be seen as a real progress, in the context in which the Soviet fighting assets proved its effectiveness in the years of the Second World War. [...] Under the supervision of the Council of Ministers, a Special Directorate was established [...] whose main preoccupation was the procurement of armament and fighting assets from the USSR and the popular democratic countries*”².

In 1962, at the beginning of September, Colonel Grigore Baştan, the commander of the Paratroopers Battalion in Buzău, was the leader of the Romanian team that participated in the military parachuting competition that took place in Brno, Czechoslovakia. As it did not benefit from proper conditions for training, armament and assets, the Romanian team did not succeed in taking one of the first places. Therefore, Colonel Baştan forwarded a memoir to the commander of the 2nd Army, the Great General Staff and the Intelligence Directorate, requesting that some structural transformations should have been made as far as paratroopers were concerned, so that this branch could be harmonised with the similar ones in the armed forces of countries such as the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.

Thus, he reported to the decision-making factors that “*the military in the team made a great effort, proved to have enthusiasm and determination, but all these were not enough. Without the proper equipment and technical training at the level provided by modern armed forces, we cannot have better results*”³ and suggested that a paratrooper detachment meant to the participation in the applicative-military competitions should be established in the future, one

¹ *Ibidem*.

² Florin Şperlea, *De la armata regală la armata populară. Sovietizarea armatei române (1948-1955)*, Editura Ziua, Bucureşti, 2003, pp. 103-104.

³ A.M.R., *Fund 242, 36th Paratrooper Battalion*, File 1/1962, pp. 44 - 45.

equipped with special armament, radio technique and parachutes, after the fashion of the Soviets and the Czechoslovakians. Preoccupied with the modernisation of the Romanian paratroopers' equipment and training, Colonel Baştan also suggested the equipment of the Paratrooper Assault Battalion with modern aircraft of different types and with a helicopter, after the fashion of the Soviets and the Czechoslovakians. In this context, he suggested that a delegation composed of two paratrooper officers should have visited one of the paratrooper units in the Northern Caucasus, in the Soviet Union, "*where they can see and get accustomed with the most recent issues related to modern parachuting. (This fact was appreciated by the leader of the Soviet delegation that participated in the competition)*"¹.

"I mention, Colonel Baştan showed, that except the Soviet Union, no country or army that participated in the competition that had taken place did not have the same economic and training opportunities as we had, but I consider the essence of the competition was not known, and that was the reason why the proper attention and importance was not attached to it. Moreover, incompetent people were responsible for the organisation of the competition, and it explained why the problems related to the participation in such a competition where our armed forces and the country could affirm were not known.

*I consider that, in the life of a communist and officer, there is no greater challenge to the patriotic feeling and at the same time a more powerful manifestation of grief as the moment when he finds out that the country and the army have (sic!) great possibilities but, in practice, it has been done too little to send a sports team to affirm internationally. We have been through such moments and I have asked myself a lot of questions, but I have not been able to answer them"*².

In relation to the necessity for collaboration and experience exchange with the armed forces in the socialist camp, he mentioned: "*At the moment, I can report the following about the Czechoslovakians and others who participated in the competition:*

-The paratroopers in the Czechoslovakian armed forces train for fight following new principles that are very close to reality. These troops are provided with new fighting equipment and assets. It happens in Poland, too, and especially in the Soviet Union, as well as in Vietnam whose troops are trained with the help of the Socialist Republic of Czechoslovakia.

-The first three states and their armed forces are permanently connected, as well as the Vietnamese armed forces, as they often exchange experience regarding the organisation, equipment and training for fight of the paratroopers, addressing the newest issues with a view to their becoming general ones for all the armed

¹ *Ibidem*

² *Ibidem.*

forces of the socialist countries. We are lagging behind as we do not take part in exchanging experience and we do not put in practice the teachings of 1960. In the above-mentioned armed forces and even in Vietnam, no matter the echelon (the smallest being the paratrooper regiment), there is a section for the training of airborne assault troops in the Training for Fight Directorate within the Ministry of Defence, section that deals with all the problems of the paratroopers and the experience exchange between the armed forces.

-Moreover, currently, in the armed forces of the above-mentioned states, and especially in the armed forces of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Poland, the drop of paratroopers is executed with turbo propelled aircraft that can reach high speed while flying and at the moment of parachuting (up to 500 km per hour), using new parachutes for special armoured fighting assets, missiles etc. Even Vietnam reorganised the paratroopers this summer, having a regiment equipped with modern assets and aircraft, renouncing the LI-2 aircraft we are still using today.

Following the discussions, I have come to the conclusion that our paratroopers are among the least developed ones as far organisation, equipment and training are concerned, fact that confirms the results we obtained in the competition we took part in.”¹

Considering that everything was necessary to meet these desiderata was available, Baştan suggested *“the urgent reorganisation of the paratroopers and of the armed forces to reach at least the level of development of the Czechoslovakian and Polish armed forces, if not the one of the Soviet armed forces, although I consider it possible”².*

In the end of this memoir, the leader of the Romanian paratroopers shows that in case what has been reported is not taken into consideration, *“we will risk lagging as far as the paratroopers in our armed forces are concerned, in situations that are more difficult, important and complicated than the military sporting competition we participated in, situations in which we, the paratroopers, will feel low and I think that those who will use us will feel the same”³.*

Between 15 and 18 October 1962, the Paratroopers Battalion Buzău participated in the application organised with troops from Romania, the USSR and Bulgaria, in Dobruja region. Together with a Soviet paratrooper unit, the Romanian paratroopers flew on the route Boboc-Giurgiu-Varna-Cavarna-Topraisar, where they were parachuted. The Romanian paratrooper battalion had, for the first time, a great number of aircraft available (12 Li-2 aircraft). *“On the territory of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, our formation was overtaken by the Soviet one (who had AN-10 and AN-12 aircraft in their formation, while we had*

¹ *Ibidem.*

² *Ibidem*

³ *Ibidem*, f.24-25

only Li-2). The overtaking was executed by the Soviets beneath and above our formation. [...] When the application was completed the unit regrouped in Kogălniceanu village where the paratrooper unit was accommodated. Here, the preparations for the parade and the meetings with the Soviet paratroopers were organised. It was an opportunity for exchanging insignia and experience related to paratroopers' training. After that we marched in Constanța with all the troops that acted here"¹.

Following this application, Colonel Grigore Baștan informed the armed forces superior command about the conclusions and made some suggestions regarding the paratroopers' reorganisation and equipment:

“Out of the conclusions of Marshal Greciko, the Supreme Commander of the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact member states, some problems related to the airborne assault troops resulted, problems that require new measures to be resolved.

1. The main measure I suggest to be taken is the reorganisation of the airborne assault troops in our armed forces so that they can become capable of executing important missions, irrespective of the weather conditions or terrain (especially mountainous terrain). During this application, practice showed, and Marshal Greciko confirmed, that the paratroopers were able to carry out actions in the operational depth for a long time, about three or four days.

With the current organisation in peace and at war, we cannot be an airborne assault force able to meet the goal our armed forces have to achieve in the event of an armed conflict.

2. Another urgent measure to be taken should be the equipment of our airborne assault troops with the appropriate fighting assets such as: aircraft, armament, fighting vehicles, communication assets, launching assets etc., as we have seen at the Soviet paratroopers regiment. Most of these assets are available or can be made in the country, and others, especially the A.N.-12, A.N.-10A aircraft and the special paratrooper auto-cannons, have to be imported from the USSR.

[...]In order to introduce new themes in the training process of the airborne assault troops, and especially following the mentions made by Marshal Greciko in the conclusion of the application related to the renunciation of passive actions as far as both the paratroopers' practical and theoretical training are concerned, Lieutenant General Marghelov said, during the talks we had, that he would propose to the Defence Minister in RPR that I or many paratrooper officers should participate in the meeting that will take place at the Soviet Airborne Assault Troops Command, where problems related to the training, equipment and organisation of the airborne assault troops are to be discussed. I appreciate that

¹ Historical Records of the 60th Paratrooper Regiment "Băneasa-Otopeni", 1962.

the participation in such a meeting would be extremely useful, not only from the perspective of the new ways in organising and carrying out the fighting process but also from the one of a certain unification of the methods and procedures used in carrying out fighting actions, taking into account the possibility of common actions”¹.

Included in the units with which Romania participated in the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, the Paratrooper Regiment was permanently paid the proper attention by the political-military decision factors, at least as far as modern armament and assets were concerned. In the following period, the Ministry of National Defence ordered for some measures to be taken regarding: the equipment of the paratrooper unit with light armament so that it can be totally parachuted in covers and containers, attached to the suspension system or separately; the enhancement of the paratrooper assets (parachutes, containers, platforms etc.), to improve security during jumps, not only for the military but also for the assets; the manufacturing of special equipment for parachuting and carrying out fight; the equipment with transport aircraft that have enhanced capabilities and speed limits, able to parachute larger groups and heavier fighting assets. Thus, the process of approval and equipment begins so that the Romanian Paratroopers could be provided with a new parachute, *B.G.-7*, after the name of one of those who have been involved in its achievement, Colonel Grigore Baştan. The fact that this parachute can open even after a certain period of stabilised fall resulted in the opportunity to drop paratroopers from high-speed aircraft (more than 300 km/h), equipped with a flap door to drop people and materials (the former aircraft could be left using only the lateral door).

In July 1966, a Romanian military delegation participated in an experience exchange related to training the airborne assault troops, in the USSR, together with delegations from Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Yugoslavia, Poland and Hungary. General Dobrovicescu and Colonel Bordei were part of the Romanian delegation, as the representatives of the Romanian Armed Forces superior command. Colonel Gheorghe Şoimu – the commander of the unit – , Colonel Gheorghe Tudor – the deputy commander for parachuting – and Captain Costică Bârsan – the chief of the training bureau, participated as representatives of the Paratrooper Regiment in Buzău. The activity lasted for one month and included a visit to the Soviet Airborne Troops Training Centre in Ryazan and to the Airborne Division in Kaunas.

Colonel Gheorghe Tudor (he himself a paratrooper) says: *“In Ryazan, situated 200 km south of Moscow, it was a training centre for the airborne troops to prepare the paratrooper trainers and technical personnel that ensure the containerisation and attachment on special platforms of the heavy armament and*

¹ *Ibidem.*

assets (mine launchers, cannons, tankettes etc.). The participants were presented the equipment for parachuting heavy assets, the aircraft and the special installations within them meant to parachute heavy assets, as well as the installations for the paratroopers' training (parachute towers for beginners, trenajors, installations for water parachute jumping etc.). The hosts made a series of presentations regarding the missions that could be assigned to the airborne assault troops at the battalion, regiment and division echelons. Mention should be made that the trainers and technical personnel in the paratrooper units of the Warsaw Pact member countries except Romania were prepared there."

In relation to the *absence* of the Romanian military from the preparation in the USSR we can appreciate that it was one of the forms of manifestation of the spirit of independence towards Moscow with which Nicolae Ceaușescu started his mandate as the head of Romania, spirit that he tried to impose even within the Warsaw Treaty Organisation. The time when the Romanian military were educated and trained within the Soviet armed forces belonged to the past. As for the Romanian paratroopers, we know none who attended one of the Soviet schools, even if the training system and especially the aviation assets were imported from the USSR. *"In Kaunas, in the former Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, the same interlocutor says, we were presented the airfield specially built for the aircraft that transported airborne assault troops, aircraft that permanently had on board the heavy assets and the necessary armament for a rapid intervention of the paratroopers. The airfield was well concealed in a forested area. At the end of the presentation we saw the parachuting, from 7 high-capacity aircraft IL-62, of a paratrooper battalion with the available fighting assets, within a tactical application with the theme of creating a breach behind the enemy disposition and the achievement of a bridge head on the main direction of attack of an infantry division.*

At the end of the visit in the USSR, each member of the delegation received a photo album containing photographs taken during the main moments of this activity, except the tactical application and the battalion parachuting".

Following this visit, the Romanian paratroopers, convinced that *"the airborne assault troops in the USSR had superior assets and were well-trained"*¹, took the necessary steps so that they could be equipped with a new type of aircraft made in the USSR, *AN-24T*, capable of transporting a greater number of paratroopers and a larger quantity of assets than the aircraft that had been in the inventory up to that moment. Moreover, the *BG-7* parachute, which had entered the inventory of the Romanian Paratroopers not long before, allowed for the parachutists to be dropped through the aircraft flap doors, before or after the heavy assets were parachuted. Consequently, in November 1968, a mixed

¹ *Historical Records of the Paratrooper Unit in Buzău*, vol. 2, 1967-1990.

delegation consisting of Romanian military pilots and paratroopers (Colonel Buhoci – pilot and Colonels Grigore Baștan and Gheorghe Tudor – paratroopers) left for Kiev to check and bring an *AN-24T* aircraft to the country. The aircraft would become part of the military aviation the same year, paratroopers benefiting from its services the following year, when the first jumps from this type of aircraft that was to remain in the inventory of the Romanian Air Force for a long time were executed. Subsequently, other *AN-26* – type aircraft were imported from the USSR (the enhanced version of *AN-24T* having better performance), *AN-2*, as well as *MI-8* helicopters which are still in use and have never created a major premise for any air incidents to endanger the paratroopers' lives.