

**ARMED CONFLICTS AND CAPTURES OF ROMANIAN  
MILITARY UNITS IN THE MIHĂILENI – DOROHOI AREA  
DURING THE RETREAT OF THE RUSSIAN TROOPS  
FROM THE FRONT (DECEMBER 1917 – JANUARY 1918)**

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**Abstract.** Starting with the beginning of the spring of 1917, the Bolshevik plague infests the Russian troops, affecting their judgement: the soldiery depose, demote, arrest or even kill their own officers, promoting in their place inferior officers or simple soldiers, according to the model of Praporshchik Krylenko, appointed on 9th/22nd November 1917 Generalissimo of the Russian Army, Commander-in-chief of the General Headquarters by the new Soviet power. This phenomenon increases in the autumn and spring of the same year. Anarchy is instituted in the Russian army on the Moldavian front. On their retreat to Russia, isolated individuals and organised gangs openly resort to thefts, plunders and even murders; gangs, squads and units occupy trains without authorization. The civilians live in a state of terror. In order to put an end to these disorders, the Supreme Headquarters stipulates the disarmament of all the Russian troops and their retreat on established routes. Some Russian army corps, instigated by Lenin's and Krylenko's envoys, oppose the disarmament operation. As a result, conflicts occur between the Romanian troops and their former allies near the border of Botoșani and Dorohoi counties. The Russian troops even manage to capture eight Romanian officers and six platoons (215 people) who are taken across the border where the Romanian officers are taunted. A commando is successful in releasing them and bringing them back to Romania.

**Keywords:** *The First World War, 1917-1918, the Moldavian front, Iași, the bolshevization of the Russian troops, the Bolshevik Russian troops oppose the disarmament by force, the counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi, the Russian General Šcerbacev, The Romanian Supreme Headquarters, General Prezan, General Rujinschi, Petrograd, Lenin, Praporshchik Krylenko, Mihăileni, Mamornița, General Stan Poetaș, Colonel Rasoviceanu, Colonel Scărătescu, Colonel Georgescu, the Russian troops capture eight Romanian officers and six platoons*

**I. The disaggregation of the Russian Army on the Romanian front.  
The Supreme Headquarters' measures to maintain order and protect the population**

There had been signs of the disaggregation of the Russian army on the Romanian front as early as the summer of 1917 at Mărăști, Mărășești, Oituz. The frequent abandonments of the Russian troops on the battlefields culminated with the battle of Irești, on 28th August 1917, when the 124th Russian Division

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literally fled from the enemy, as soon as they started to advance. On commenting the event, the Commander-in-chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the 4th Russian Army himself, general Monkevitz, declared that *During the battle of Mărășești I found myself in the proximity of the Romanian troops [..]; hence, I am in a position to say that during those tragic days the Romanian bravery was amazing[..]. In the second half of the month of August this series of battles slowly died out; these were the most fierce battles on the Romanian front in 1917 which gave the Romanians the right to consider themselves victorious. For the Russian troops, however, this was the swan song. Even during the battle, the attitude of some units was downright criminal. Almost an entire division fled at first contact with the enemy*<sup>1</sup>.

The Bolshevik plague infests the Russian troops, affecting their judgment: the soldiery depose, demote, arrest or even kill their own officers, promoting in their place inferior officers or simple soldiers, according to the model of Praporshchik<sup>2</sup> Krylenko, appointed on 9th/22nd November 1917 **Generalissimo of the Russian Army and Commander-in-chief of the General Headquarters**<sup>3</sup> by the new Soviet power.

The Brest-Litovsk truce of 5th December 1917, followed by the one from Focșani (9th December 1917) speeds up the disaggregation of the Russian army on the Romanian front. The Russian officers, deprived of all sort of authority, could not control their own subordinates. On the contrary, they had to obey the Soviets constituted everywhere. Entire units or isolated groups would leave the front, thus expressing their contempt of orders and rules. The process of supplying and maintaining the immense Russian army had been badly affected, so that, on their slow retreat home, accompanied by the convoy made up of thousands of carts, carriages and the horses which pulled the cannons, the soldiers pillaged and plundered the local population, already impoverished by the war and the forced acquisitions. All the roads were unusable due to the endless lines of troops, accompanied by the carriages and horses which were used to carry the war material.

In order to travel faster and more comfortably, the Russian soldiers would often hijack the trains at gunpoint. The country was on the brink of catastrophe. This constant state of uncertainty made the Minister of War address General I. Herescu, Commander of the Military Headquarters in Iași (the capital of the country at the time) on 22nd November/5th December 1917 with the request that *urgent measures be taken to inforce the security of the central equipment*

<sup>1</sup> Constantin Kirilescu, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României. 1916-1919*, vol. II, Editura științifică și enciclopedică, București, 1989, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Rank in the tsar army, the equivalent of a sublieutenant.

<sup>3</sup> P. Constantinescu-Iași, Al. Vianu, N. Copoiu, Gh. Cazan, *Marea Revoluție socialistă din Octombrie. Schiță istorică*, Editura Politică, București, 1967, p. 292.

storehouses<sup>4</sup>. Under these circumstances, the Government, the Romanian and the Russian Headquarters agreed on a set of measures to protect the population from the plunders and even the murders committed by the Russian troops on their retreat to Russia.

On 2nd December 1917 (s. v.), The Supreme Headquarters released the circular no. 5 424, signed by *General Prezan, commander-in-chief of the Supreme Headquarters in charge of the Romanian army* and by *lt.-col. [Ion] Antonescu, commander-in-chief of the Bureau of Operations*. Among the underlying reasons for that, it was stated that *isolated individuals and organised gangs openly resort to thefts, plunders and even murders; that gangs, squads and units occupy trains without authorization, and use violence and threats at gunpoint to force the railway employees to put the trains in motion with no regard for the timetables established by the authorities in question*. Therefore, in order to *put an end to these disorders*, the Supreme Headquarters stipulated that all future movements of the troops on the Romanian Railway would require previous authorization on its part; it was forbidden for the *troops to set camp near the railway, especially between Ungheni and Iași*. It was also forbidden for the *troops to pass through Iași*. A failure to respect these stipulations was to be sanctioned on the spot through armed force by the gendarmes and the troops in charge of maintaining the order in the Romanian territory<sup>5</sup>.

In order to achieve these objectives, the territory of the country was divided into areas, allocated to some military headquarters, which received the necessary forces for maintaining the security of the respective area (Figure no. 1). It was also recommended that *the Romanian troops should refrain from getting involved in the arguments and possibly the fights that might occur within the Russian units for political reasons*. The order also asked for a *permanent communication* between the fixed surveillance posts (the entrances and exists of towns, river crossings on the Siret and the Prut) and the Romanian military detachments, regarding the movements of the rebel troops, their force and the most likely place of camping for the night. Zero tolerance was to be shown to *isolated murderers or gangs caught red handed who were to be executed*<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The request was put forward on 22nd November/5th December 1917, according to the Centre of Studies and Storage of the Historical Military Archives Pitești/Centrul de Studii și Păstrare a Arhivelor Militare Istorice Pitești (from now on CSPAMI-Pitești), Fund, 4482, *The 9th Mountain Infantry*, File. 31, sheet 80.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, Fund, 2272, *The 9th division*, File 207, sheet 4.

<sup>6</sup> Order no. 5504/5.XII.1917, *ibidem*, sheet 5.

**Figure no. 1, Table with the territorial division into areas and the forces responsible for maintaining security, CSPAMI-Pitesti, Fund 2272, The 9th Division, File 207, Sheet 7**

## **II. The Russian troops leave the Romanian front without the Russian Headquarters' authorization**

The radicalization of the Russian troops was stimulated by the Bolshevik activists sent from Petrograd. The refusal of the Commander of the Russian army

on the Romanian front, General Șcerbacev, to recognise Praporshchik Krylenko's authority infuriated Lenin and Trotki. They send Roșal-Rochal<sup>7</sup>, ex commander of the Kronstadt fortress, to Iași, accompanied by a certain Boga. He is then joined by Reissohn, commissar of the 4th Army, under the command of General Ragoza, as well as by Rech, Herman and others. They recruit other comrades among the maximalists found there. Their mission was to eliminate Șcerbacev, King Ferdinand and to proclaim Romania as a republic of the soviets<sup>8</sup>. Officer Marcel Fontaine, member of the French Mission in Romania, was later acquainted with a part of these objectives. While on the front somewhere near the town of Bacău, he wrote in his diary on 15th December 1917 that *Mrs. Brătescu has just arrived from Iași and brought us some news that she found out from Tache Ionescu; The Russians attempted to assassinate the King on two occasions; they were arrested on his doorstep.*<sup>9</sup>. The information is partially erroneous. The one in danger of being shot was General Șcerbacev, in a failed attempt which resulted indeed in the plotters' arrest *right outside the apartment* of the intended victim on the night of 8th-9th/21st-22nd December 1917<sup>10</sup>.

These events, charged with a lot of political tension, took place over the course of only two days. Firstly, on 8th December, 1917, in order to achieve Roșal's objective, the Bolshevik Russian troops stationed on the Socola field, deploy a battery of cannons near Iași, on Aroneanu hill. The Romanians manage to stop the projectile supply. Warned by the danger, General Șcerbacev himself requests the protection of the Romanian authorities. Colonel Rasoviceanu, commander of the 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment, is sent with an armed team. The pretext for Șcerbacev's elimination was offered by himself when he summoned the supporters of different currents in his troops to his residence, for

<sup>7</sup> During the second General Congress of the Soviets from Russia, on 26th October, 1917, a special appeal addressed to the fronts was adopted, asking them to form provisory revolutionary committees responsible with maintaining the revolutionary order and the stability of the fronts. The army and front commanders have to abide by the dispositions of the Committees. Many delegates present at the Congress became front, army or division commissars: S.T. Kojevnikov, commissar of the First Army; I.P. Vasianin, commissar of the 7th Army; G.I. Ciudnovski, commissar of the Southern-Western Front; S.G. Roșal, in the middle of the Russian soldiers on the Romanian front, according to Petre Constantinescu-Iași, Al. Vianu, Nicolae Copoiu, Gheorghe Cazan, *Marea Revoluție Socialistă din Octombrie*, Editura Politică, București, 1976, p. 290.

<sup>8</sup> Florian Tănăsescu, Dumitru Costea, Ion Iacoș ș.a., *Ideologie și structuri comuniste în România. 1917-1918*, The national Institute for the study of totalitarianism, București, 1995, p. 298.

<sup>9</sup> Marcel Fontaine, *Jurnal de război. Misiune în România. Noiembrie 1916 – Aprilie 1918*. Introduction by Daniel Cain. Translated from French and Postface by Micaela Ghițescu, Humanitas, București, 2016, p. 299.

<sup>10</sup> Related to the events from Iași during those days, see: Ion I. Solcanu, *Un episod dramatic din 8-9 decembrie 1917: încercarea de asasinare a generalului Șcerbacev de către soldații ruși bolșevizați din gara Socola – Iași și dezarmarea acestora*, in „The Scientific Annals of „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași (New series), History”, tome LXIII, 2018.

mediation. We find this information in the Diary of the historian N. Iorga, dated 10 December 1917, who wrote: *on Friday night there was an attempted coup against Șcerbacev. While trying to reconcile the different currents in his own home, Conov, the maximalists' leader, took him to another room and put a revolver to his head. This is when a Kazakh hit his hand and others had enough time to come to the rescue*<sup>11</sup>. The attempted assassination is prevented on time through the intervention of a loyal Ukrainian officer. Rasoviceanu's team arrest Roșal and his group, ensuring the security and protection of the Russian commander for the rest of the night of 8th-9th/21st-22nd December<sup>12</sup>. The armed revolt of the Russian troops on the Socola hill was now imminent for the following day, 9th December. In order to avoid that, the only solution was their disarmament<sup>13</sup>. Summoned in the dead of night, the Council of Ministers had to choose, on the one hand, between preserving the body of state by disarming the Russian troops and, on the other hand, *causing a conflict with the Gouvernement of Petrograd which supported the revolutionary movement and might have used this action as an excuse to legitimise their hostile behaviour towards us*<sup>14</sup>. In the early hours of the morning, despite strong opposition from minister Tache Ionescu, who hands I. C. Brătianu his resignation, the Council decides the disarmament of the Russian troops. The 9th and 10th Mountain Infantry Regiments, as well as two battalions from the 1st Border Regiment take part in this successful mission, led by General St. Ștefănescu on the morning of 9th/22nd December<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> N. Iorga, *Memorii. Însemnări zilnice (mai 1917-mart 1920). Războiul național. Lupta pentru o nouă viață politică*, vol. I, Editura „Națională” S. Ciornei, p. 196-197.

<sup>12</sup> *Operațiile și istoricul Regimentului 9 Vânători în răsboiul de întregirea „Neamului Românesc”*. 1916-1919, Editor, introductory study, notes and illustrations by Ion I. Solcanu, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2018, p. 457-459.

<sup>13</sup> According to General Averescu, the disarmament of the Russian troops on the Socola field had been debated by the Council of ministers two days before. General Averescu wrote in his diary on 7th December 1917: *Meeting of the Council of Ministers with four generals: Iancovescu, Prezan, Grigorescu and me in Brătianu's office. The first matter on the agenda was whom our Army should support in the attempt to reestablish order in Russia: the Leninists or the Ukrainians. [...]. Last night, General Prezan, invited by Generalul Șcerbacev and with our government's consent, decided to deploy our troops with a view to attacking and disarming the maximalists on the Socola hill. General Iancovescu intervened and stopped this imprudent measure. A few hours later, Șcerbacev declared that he would give up all fight, relinquish his command over the Headquarters and leave for Russia. What would have happened if the planned attack had been put into practice ! Then we discussed the steps to be taken in order to prevent the damage caused by the decision of the 4th Army (Russian, AN I.S.) to withdraw their troops, Marshal Alexandru Averescu „Notițe zilnice din războiu (1916 -1918), București, Editura Cultura națională, p. 260-264.*

<sup>14</sup> Constantin Kirțescu, *works cited*, p. 206.

<sup>15</sup> The historical sources that recorded the events from Iași and Socola-Iași that led to the disarmament of the Russian troops are as follows: I.G.Duca dedicates a whole chapter, 39th, to these events, entitling it *1917. The night of 9 December. Disarming the Bolsheviks. The dissolution of the Russian front, in: Amintiri politice, Collection „Memorii și mărturii”, Jon Dumitru-Verlag,*

The experience of those days determines the Supreme headquarters to take new measures. Thus, following order 5 504 and, *in order to ensure a better implementation of circular 5 424, the entire territory of the country passes under the authority of the SH* (except the city of Iași). At the same time, the provisions of the aforementioned circular from 2nd December were reiterated, stipulating that *no Russian unit is allowed to leave the front in order to go to Russia without the written authorization of the front commander. Therefore, all the units and convoys heading for the Prut river have to be stopped and searched for a written order regarding their destination and mission.* For that purpose, as previously agreed with Șcerbacev, Romanian officers were attached to the Russian Armies and Divisions to countersign the authorizations. It was also stipulated that *the Russian units that travelled out of their own initiative without a precise order were to be disarmed either by the Russian troops that were still loyal to the SH, or, in their absence, by the Romanian ones*<sup>16</sup>.

All the information *related to the damage caused by the Russians, their plunders and murders* had to be *addressed directly to the area commanders [..], through the gendarmerie* but only after a previous analysis of their veridicity and harmfulness. The local commands passed this on to the SH every morning at 8. The reports had to include the *measures taken against those who disturbed the peace in any way [as well as] the outcome of the operation*<sup>17</sup>.

The Russian command, with a view to restoring their authority in front of the troops, promise *the demobilization of the elderly [..]* but *In order to achieve this, the troops need to be calm and patient to wait for their turn on the railway journey, as there are no provisions along the route to be followed by the military troops and the men might suffer from hunger. All the necessary supplies will be delivered to where the units are stationed.*

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München, 1981, vol.III, p.30-43; *Operațiile și istoricul Regimentului 9 Vânători în războiul de întregirea „Neamului Românesc”*. 1916-1919; C. Argetoianu, *Pentru cei de mâine*, vol. IV, partea a V-a, p. 64 și urm.; N. Iorga, *Memorii. Însemnări zilnice (mai 1917-mart 1920). Războiul național. Lupta pentru o nouă viață politică*, vol. I, Editura „Națională” S. Ciornel, p. 196-197, 199; Maria, Regina României, *Jurnal de război. 1917-1918*, vol. II, Edition cared for by Lucian Boia, Editura Humanitas, București, 2015, p. 311-312.

At the time, the events were recorded by Constantin Kirțescu, *works cited*, p. 205-207. Almost a century later, the same events were explored by the historians Ion Agrigoroaiei (*Opinie publică și stare de spirit în vremea Războiului de Întregire și a Marii Uniri*, Second revised edition, Editura Fundației Academice AXIS, Iași, 2016, p. 120-121) și Ioan Scurtu (*Istoria românilor în timpul celor patru regi (1866-1947)*, vol. II, *Ferdinand I*, Ediția a IV-a, revised and improved, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2011,p. 45-46); Ioan Scurtu, Ionuț Cojocaru, *Ion I.C. Brătianu*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2017, p. 112 and 114.

<sup>16</sup> The Supreme Headquarters, the Bureau of Operations, Order no. 5 644 to the 9th Division, according to CSPAMI-Pitești, *Fund*, 2272, *The 9th Division*, File 206, sheets 1-2, including the holographic signatures of General Prezan and Lt.-col. [ Ion] Antonescu.

<sup>17</sup> The Supreme Headquarters, the Bureau of Operations, Circular no. 5 645/13.XII.1917, *ibidem*, sheet 4.

*All the arms and equipment released according to the demobilisation procedure will not remain in Romania, and once the demobilization is complete, will be sent to Ukraine from the Ukrainian corps and to Moscow from the Velicorussians. Only by staying put can the peace that all the great nationalities of Russia aspire for be achieved, and only then will all the sons of Russia be well fed and returned to their families safely<sup>18</sup>.*

In order to prevent the danger of infesting the Romanian Army with the Bolshevik plague, the Supreme Headquarters gave specific orders which *forbade any relations between the Romanian and the Russian soldiers...especially those in columns or en-route formations, as they are more likely to escape their superiors' supervision.* At the same time, all commanders, especially those in charge of smaller units were requested to explain to their subordinates that *the enemy, after losing hope of winning through arms, sought to sow dissension all over Russia to make it give up the fight*<sup>19</sup>.

The chaotic and voluntary retreat of the Russian troops from the Romanian front was a large scale event. The French officer Marcel Fontaine recorded such events under the rubric *Russian news* almost daily. On 17th/30th December 1917 he wrote that *a battalion of the Division* (the 15th Romanian Division<sup>20</sup>, that the author belonged to, AN I.S.) gives the warning that *two armed Russian Divisions, leaving the front out of their own initiative, are drawing close to our stations. In a nearby village, some Russians beat the priest.* On 19th December 1917/1st January 1918 he was informed that *a brawl took place between the Russians and the Romanians in Botoșani; The Romanians disarmed several Russian regiments* and on 26th December 1917/7th January 1918 he wrote: *The 24th, 30th and 36th Russian corps have decided to leave the front; soldiers from the 4th, the 8th and the 9th Russian army continue to move towards Russia; The Russians complain about the lack of food; six battalions and an artillery group are heading for Roman; in Iași arms destined for some Bolshevik committeees were seized; a brawl took place in the village of Pogănești, where the Russians attacked a food storehouse*<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Circular sent by Șcerbacev on 15/28.12.1917 to the 4th, 6th, 8th and 9th Russian Armies; to the Romanian S.H., to the Romanian Army Supply Service; to the Military Communications Service of the Romanian front, according to CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund, 4482, *The 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment*, File 31, sheet 58. Special thanks go to Mihaela Botnari, a doctoral student, who translated this document from Russian.

<sup>19</sup> The Supreme Headquarters, The Bureau of Operations, Circular no. 5 700/13.XII.1917, *ibidem*, sheet 5.

<sup>20</sup> This statement appears on page 326, with the occasion of his decoration by General Berthelot.

<sup>21</sup> Marcel Fontaine, *works cited*, p. 315, 318-319, 325. The remark made by the French officer on 24 January, while visiting a boyard mansion near Vaslui, is representative for the Romanian peasants' attitude to the Russian allies throughout history: *Yesterday and the day before, on several occasions, the silence was broken all of a sudden, and from the house one could hear the bustle and the screams: "The Russians", "The Russians". And suddenly, as if an ant hill was*

When the Russians failed to respect the established timetable and route or when they resisted the forced disarmament, *brawls* turned into armed fights, and sometimes the artillery was used. The historian Ion Agrigoroaiei inspiredly called such situations *the internal front* of the Romanian army<sup>22</sup>. The events that unfolded in Galați, which lasted between 3rd-8th/16th-21st January 1918, are the most well known, and they culminated with the surrender of the 9th Siberian Division<sup>23</sup>. Other similar episodes, equally grave, took place in Pașcani (12th/25th January 1918) and Spătărești-Fălticeni ( 14th-15th/27th-28th January 1918), and had the same outcome<sup>24</sup>. In all these cases, the Romanian army suffered painful losses with lots of casualties.

The last such episode occurred in the north of Moldavia, somewhere near Mihăileni, in the former county of Dorohoi. As the former counties of Dorohoi and Botoșani had the Prut river as eastern border, with bridges towards Basarabia and northern Bukovina at Bivolari, Ștefănești, Ripiceni, Molnița, Novoselița etc., numerous Russian troops were headed in those directions. Not accidentally, this part of the country constituted ‘Zone I’. Shortly after, it was divided in two sectors, supervised by the 17th Brigade (in the county of Dorohoi) and the 18th Brigade (in the county of Botoșani) of the 9th Division commanded by General Rujinschi A. Dumitru. The 17th Brigade, under General Stan Poetaș’s command, was made up of the 34th and 40th Infantry Regiments, the 18th Heavy Artillery Regiment and a squadron from the 1st Cavalry Regiment; the 18th Brigade, under Colonel Scărătescu’s command, was made up of the 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment, the 35th and 36th Infantry Regiments, the 1st Cavalry Regiment and the 13th Artillery Regiment. On 19th-20th December 1917/1st-2nd January 1918 the 9th Division was fully deployed in the two counties, guarding them along the line Mihăileni – Hăvârna – Săveni – Ripiceni – Ștefănești – Bivolari. The troops were strategically placed in order to surveil and, if need be, move easily to wherever the situation required it (Figure no 2). Reports containing data about the movement of the Russian troops, their force, their direction with or without authorization, as well as the measures taken, were sent on a daily basis by the two

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*stirred, the peasants, men, women and children alike, scurried out to gather the livestock from their yards and the streets. They were in a frenzy to catch them and lock them. [...]. Meanwhile, from my observatory, I could see the long, winding snake of the Russian convoy retreating to Basarabia. And I told myself that this was a sight that had been going on for ages, now and again, in this twice unfortunate country; for being wealthy and also for being on the path of great invasions. The fear of Russians, of their lawlessness, plunders and crimes seems to be one of the most deeply seeded sentiments in the Romanian peasants. And rightly so, unfortunately!, ibidem, p. 333-334.*

<sup>22</sup> Ion Agrigoroaiei, *Armata română pe „frontul intern”*, în Basarabia și în Bucovina (1917-1919) in: *Clio în oglindiri de sine. Academicianului Alexandru Zub, Omagiu*, edited by Gheorghe Cliveti, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2014, p. 617-629.

<sup>23</sup> Constantin Kirițescu, *works cited* p. 208-210.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 210-212.

Brigades to the Division, which in its turn, sent them to the Supreme Headquarters. Whenever the Russian troops were caught without an authorization for travel, they were disarmed, and the material was confiscated based on a receipt and then stored in specially devised locations, usually in the vicinity of railway stations under the watch of *Russian guards, members of the loyal troops*, as stipulated by Order 5 505 of the SH<sup>25</sup>. It was later stated that *the storehouses have to be set up along the railway in order to be collected and transported to Russia easily*. It was a common occurrence, though, for the Russians to resist the forced disarmament or to refuse to continue their journey. A more serious problem was the use of firearms: in Rădăuți, on the Prut river, after the disarmament and confiscation of the war material, which also included 50 large stolen cattle, there was an attempt to recover them by force; a Russian cavalry squadron opened fire, only to quickly scatter when the Romanian troops fought back with determination.

The same report from 4th/17th January 1918 informed that *most troops from the 11th and 13th Corps of the Russian army, after being prevented from crossing to Basarabia by our troops, snuck along the front line and crossed the Prut at the Boian bend, where they even built a bridge*<sup>26</sup>. The chief of Burdujeni station reported that in *the commune of Siminicea, on the night of 15th-16th [28th-29th emphasis added] January [1918]* several Russian soldiers from the 23rd Artillery Regiment opened fire in the village of Fetești, intimidating the population, and robbing the locals Th. Dascălu, Dumitru Neculai Ciobanu, Catrina Victoria Păduraru and Victoria D. Scripcariu<sup>27</sup>.

### III. Four Russian regiments resist the disarmament operation

All these events were a mere prelude to what was to come in the area surrounding Mihăileni. It was obvious that the maximalists were behind every violent act committed by the Russian troops. In their turn, as the following evidence suggests, they were stimulated from Petrograd. The Commander of Zone I, General Rujinschi, informed the Supreme Headquarters that on 30.12.1917 (12.01.1918) *Praporshchik Alexandrovici, Commander of the 3rd Army came to see the 11th Corps's Commander in Herța* (General Stan Poetaș's sub-sector, AN.I.S.), and ordered that the entire Army Corps leave the front within ten days. Moreover, he forced the 12th Ukrainian Division to retreat by threatening to stop the food supplies [and] it was also decided that in case of disarmament, they should fight back<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> According to the stipulations of Order 5 505 of the Supreme Headquarters, as evoked in Order no. 5 644/11.12.1917 (s.v.) to the 9th Division and no. 5 917/17.XII.1917 (s.v.), to the area Commander, according to CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund, 2272, *The 9<sup>th</sup> Division*, File 206, sheets 1 and 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 141.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 271.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 116. Obviously, Sublieutenant Alexandrovici had been promoted as Army Commander by the Bolshevik soldiery. We shall learn more of this character in the events that were to unfold in the Mihăileni area.



Figure no 2, CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund, 4482-The 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment,  
File. 31, sheets 33-34

At the heart of the events that were to come, the 18th and 40th Corps of the 8th Army, which operated in Bukovina (the county of Suceava nowadays, AN I.S.), would play a key role. (As early as 4th/17th January 1918, the 9th Division warned Colonel Scărătescu's 18th Brigade, who subsequently warned the 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment, about the displacement of the 18th Corps of the Russian army and its artillery, and ordered that *all the units and formations from this Corps be granted free passage to Basarabia*<sup>29</sup>. The order also gave information about the number of the echelons on the move, their human and material force, their trajectory and their camping dates until crossing the Prut. Six out of the seven artillery echelons, the 18th and 37th Brigade of the 18th Russian

<sup>29</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> Division, S.H. Service, Order no. 1542/4<sup>th</sup> January 1918, according to CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund, 4482, *The 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment*, File 31, sheet 194 both sides.

Army Corps counted 3,800 people, tens of batteries of cannons and mortars, with a few columns of ammunition drawn by 3,900 horses. As a result of the subsequent information received by General Rujinschi, he ordered Colonel Rasoviceanu to disarm the echelons referred to in Order 1542, which granted 'free passage', thus rendering it nul. Moreover, he was supposed to seize *all the cannons, caissons, and the other carriages, the harnesses and the horses [...] on receipt, in the name of the French government, and the receipt will be signed by a French officer who will come to you. Were the officer to be delayed, the receipts will have to be signed by you, on behalf of the French government*<sup>30</sup>. For this purpose, the Colonel had at his disposal three platoons from Dângeni, an infantry company and a section of machine guns stationed in Trușești as well as two other companies from the 35th Infantry Regiment in Sulița. With all these forces, on 5th and 6th January/18 and 19th January 1918, Rasoviceanu proceeds to disarming the echelons on their passage through Sulița<sup>31</sup>.

Three telegrams, written in French, were dispatched from the commander-in-chief of the Supreme Headquarters of the 9th Russian Army, and informed of the intentions of the 40th and 18th Corps of the Russian Army, thus confirming General Rujinschi's fears. The first two<sup>32</sup> gave news of the displacement on different routes of the 2nd Artillery, the 43rd Artillery Brigade Division, and *a military engineering company from 37th Infantry Division, with 150 men and 100 horses* from Suceava towards Basarabia, starting with 6th/19th January 1918. The third telegram though, was much more important. It was sent on the same day and informed that *General Sytin arrived in Ilișești, Bukovina, sent by the Bolsheviks from Krilenko's Stavka, and brought 100,000 roubles and Krilenko's order for the 18th and 40th Corps, who had to depart for Russia through Novoselița.*

This decision had been made by the Bolsheviks the day before, in a meeting held in the same place, Ilișești. The telegram ended with the warning that *in a few days, the 18th and 40th Army Corps will attempt to cross through the north of*

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 177.

<sup>31</sup> Both disarmament reports date from the days following the events, from 6th and 7th/19th and 20<sup>th</sup> January 1918. The 18<sup>th</sup> Mortar Division and the ammunition convoy of the 37<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade, the 18<sup>th</sup> Russian Corps were disarmed on 5<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> January 1918, in Sulița, and another ammunition convoy from the 37<sup>th</sup> Artillery Brigade, the 18<sup>th</sup> Russian Corps and another Division from the 18<sup>th</sup> Mortar Regiment went through the same disarmament procedure on the next day in Todireni, *ibidem*, sheets 148 and 158.

<sup>32</sup> The first one: *La télégramme du 40 Corps d'armée Russe . 2 division d'artillerie du 43 Brigade d'artillerie nat prendre la marche en Bassarabie 6/I, par Suceava, Liteni, Zăicești, Stăuceni, Trușești, Avrămeni. N.0013, Filipoff.* A doua: *La télégramme du 18 Corps d'armée Russe. La companie de génie (pionniers) 37 Division d'infanterie, 150 hommes et 100 chevaux nat prendre la marche par Uidești, Liteni, Frumușica, Uriteni, Lunca, Hlipiceni, Gromești. 052, Kozlovsky.* Translated by Lt.-col. Axintievsky, from the SH, commander of the Bureau of Operations from the 9th Russian Army", according to *ibidem*, sheet 152.

**Moldavia, towards Novoselița<sup>33</sup>. It was more than obvious that Petrograd coordinated and funded the actions of the Russian troops loyal to the Bolsheviks.**

The human and material force of these Corps was not something to be taken lightly. For example, only one division, the 23rd of the 18th Corps was made up of the 89th, 90th, 91st and 93rd Regiments, which arrived in Siret on the afternoon of 12th/25th January. On the same night, the 171st and 172nd Regiments of the 43rd Division of the 40th Army Corps set camp in Sinăuții de Sus (Unter Sinăuți). Two other regiments – 169th and 170th - from the same division were stationed in Tureatca. That same evening, *the commander of the 43rd Russian Division, the quarters' aid and chief, as well as Paskievici, the head of the revolutionary committee of the Division* were sent to Iași by train. General Rujinschi's report, containing this information, ended by ensuring the Supreme Headquarters that the necessary *measures for disarmament have been taken*<sup>34</sup>. Unfortunately, as shall be seen later, they were utterly insufficient! Four regiments with artillery batteries got away undisarmed and on top of that, they took some Romanian prisoners.

The 169th and 170th Regiments' declaration of war from 12th/25th January stating that *they will resort to arms to make their way, giving as reason the lack of food for men and horses as well as the order given by Krylenko*, and threatening to *plunder and set fire to all the towns and villages on their path*<sup>35</sup> constituted a grave warning. All the more so, as they had at their disposal three artillery batteries and 16 machine guns. In order to carry out the disarmament of the Russian troops, General Stan Poetaș, commander of the 17th Infantry Brigade, forms a detachment in Culiceni, under Colonel Georgescu's command, with the clear order to disarm the two regiments<sup>36</sup>. Suspecting that the Russian troops were

<sup>33</sup> Confirmed les renseignements du 18 Corps à Ilișești est arrivé le général Sytin, qui était envoyé par les bolchevistes à Stavka chez Krylenko ( Généralissim des bolchevistes ). Sytin a apporter 100.000 rubles et l'ordre du Krylenko pour 18 et 40 Corps partir en Russie par Novocelița. Hier, en Ilișești, était la conférence bolcheviste qui a dessidé donner cet ordre. Il faut croire, que quelques jours après, les 18 et 40 Corps d'armée feront la tentative de passer par le nord du Moldavie, pour Novocelița. 6/19.I.1918, communiqué d'après l'ordre du Chef d'Etat major de la 9 Armée, par lt.- colonel Axintevsky, according to CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund, 2272, The 9th Division, File 206, sheet 152.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, sheet 180.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>36</sup> The detachment was made up of a Mountain Infantry Battalion (with three companies and three machine gun sections) stationed in Târnauca; two companies and a machine gun platoon from the 40th Infantry Regiment stationed in Pomârla; one infantry company and 1 machine gun platoon in Tereblești; one battery from the 13th Artillery Regiment in Probotești and a battery of 18 howitzers, in Dorohoi. They were joined by a battalion from the 35th Infantry Regiment under the command of Colonel Constantinescu Arghir, deployed in Mihăileni, according to *The 9th Division, no.1849/25.I.1918 to the Supreme Headquarters, Report on 2 unarmed brigades from the 40th Russian Corps on 13.01.1918*, ibidem, sheet 194.

most likely to follow the route Tureatca – Culiceni – Tarnaauca – Herța on their way to Molnița, on the morning of 12th/25th January the colonel prepares an ambush in the Culiceni Gorges. He then invites the commander of the Russian Brigade for a discussion which lasts until late at night. In the course of the discussion, he asks General Stan Poetaș for new indications and he reiterates the disarmament order. The next day (13th/26th January 1918) the commander of the Russian Brigade, is invited to further discussions and is informed of the disarmament order. The latter refuses and threatens with the use of force, relying on the two infantry regiments, the three artillery batteries and the 16 machine guns. In fact, before departing from Tureatca, the Russians plunder the population and arrest the communal authorities. This information is taken form a note written by the mayor<sup>37</sup>.

Although not clearly stated by the historical documents we consulted, we tend to believe that the Russian troops spent their time in Tureatca gathering information about the routes to Molnița, Colonel Georgescu's forces and, most likely, their positions on the field. This would explain why our former allies chose a different parallel route through Pueni – Mihoreni – Buda Mare – Godinești – Molnița – while the Romanian troops were waiting for them in the Culiceni Gorges (Figure no. 3). When Colonel Georgescu finally realized what was going on, it was already too late, as the Russians had already passed through Mihoreni<sup>38</sup>. They had already made their escape towards Molnița – Noua Suliță and could no longer be stopped. **However, much worse than the failure to disarm them was**

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A report on the dislocation of the 9th Division troops on 13.01.1918 stated the following: **in the Dorohoi sector there were the 17th Infantry Brigade** with the **34th Infantry Regiment** (the 2nd and the 3rd Battalions occupied the front from Mamornița to the north of Văscăuți village, with two reserve companies in Mihoreni, and the 1st Battalion in Pomârla); **the 40th Infantry Regiment** (The 1st Battalion in Dorohoi; the 2nd Battalion, with 3 companies in Săveni and a fourth one in Mitoc; the 3rd Battalion, with 3 companies in the area near Culiceni and Târnauca and one in Dorohoi); **The 35th Infantry Regiment** (The 1st and 3rd Battalion in the area near Mihăileni; the 2nd Battalion, in Bucecea); **The 18th Heavy Artillery Regiment** (one battery, in Dorohoi; another one in the Culiceni-Târnauca area and a battery from the 13th Artillery Regiment in the same area); The 1st Battalion from the 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment in the Culiceni-Târnauca area; one Divisionary Cavalry Squadron in Darabani. In the **Botoșani Sector** there was **the 18th Infantry Brigade**, with the **36th Infantry Regiment** (the 1st Battalion, in Agafton, with a company and a machine gun platoon deployed in Vlădeni and one platoon with a machine gun section in Huțani; the 2nd Battalion in Orășeni din Deal, with a company in Poiana Lungă; The 3rd Battalion in Cucoreni, with a company and a machine gun platoon deployed in Bucecea); **The 9th Mountain Infantry Regiment** (the 2nd Battalion in Bucecea, except one company deployed in Ripiceni and Dângeni); **The 13th Artillery Regiment** in Botoșani ( The 1st Division in Botoșani, with only one battery, and another one in Bucecea, and the 3rd Division in Cristești); **the 1st Cavalry Regiment** (in Botoșani, with three squadrons deployed on the bank of the Prut, in Ripiceni, Ștefănești and Bivolari ), *ibidem*, sheet 283.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 200.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 196.

the capture of six platoons from the 34th Infantry Regiment, with their officers and war material.

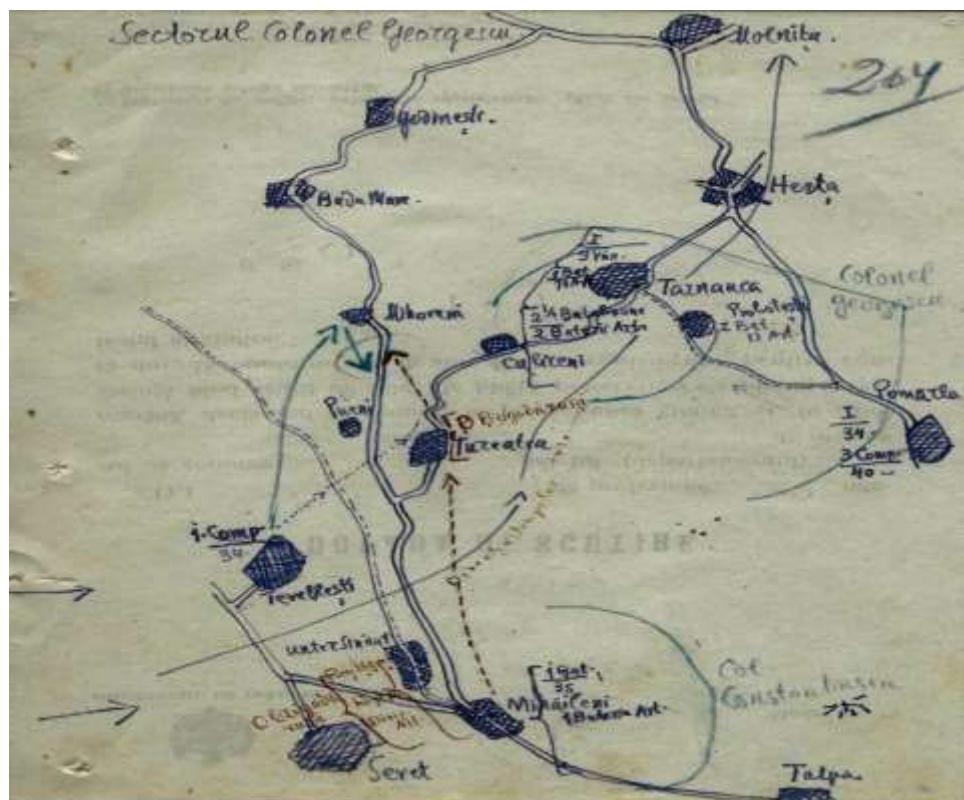


Figure no. 3, CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund: 2272, The 9th Division, File 206, sheet 204.

The 170th and 171st regiments, with three artillery batteries coming from Zamostea, were supposed to be stopped at the bridge crossing the Siret river at Talpa, but due to the series of blunders committed by General Stan Poetaș, commander of the 17th Brigade, Colonel Arghir Constantinescu, commander of the 35th Infantry Regiment and Lt.-col. Costescu, commander of the 3rd Battalion/35th Infantry Regiment, they arrived on the afternoon of 12th/25th January in the three Sinăuți villages (de Sus, de Jos and Sinăuții români). Once here, the 'soldier committees' (the soviets) threaten to refuse the forced disarmament, or else they will resort to armed force on the route Tureatca – Culiceni – Tărnauca – Herța – Molnița. Upon hearing the news, General Stan Poetaș, orders in the morning of 13th /26th January that the Russians be approached in order *to persuade them and to ask them not to advance any further*. Lt.-col. Costescu, commander of the 3rd Battalion/35th Infantry Regiment obeys the order and invites the commanders and soviet representatives for a discussion, which lasts until late in the afternoon but results in the Russians' firm refusal to

accept the disarmament. The lengthy discussions and the lack of constant surveillance of the Russian troops enabled them to leave their camping site (the Sinăuți villages), making their way to Molnița – Noua Suliță on the Pueni route (Figure no. 4). Only at 5pm did the Romanians realize what had happened, and by then it was too late to stop the Russians, the fog and darkness being an additional hindrance. This is how two more Russian regiments – the 171st and the 172nd – made their escape without being disarmed, with three artillery batteries from the 40th Army Corps.



Figure no. 4, CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund: 2272, The 9th Division, File 206, sheet 206

#### IV. The capture of eight officers and six platoons with three machine gun sections by the Russians

Regarding this event, Constantin Kirițescu wrote in his synthesis that crossing over the Mamornița – Tereblecea line, guarded by the the 34th Romanian Regiment, they capture an entire Romanian company with seven officers and 215 soldiers, whose commander was too busy being involved in a lengthy discussion with the Russians<sup>39</sup>. Just this reference, and nothing more! It is

<sup>39</sup> Constantin Kirițescu, *works cited*, p. 212.

understandable that the scope of this synthesis prevented the author from providing a detailed account of this event. However, in the report entitled *The matter of the escape of two brigades from the 40th Russian Army*, submitted by the 9th Division to the Supreme Headquarters<sup>40</sup>, there is an elaborate description of this event. Colonel Georgescu, Commander of the 34th Infantry Regiment, had set up a detachment made up of four platoons, two from the 9th and two from the 10th company respectively, with three machine gun sections, under Captain Mihail Vasile's command. On 11th/24th January, 1918, the detachment was stationed in the village of Tereblecea. As Colonel Georgescu had been informed of the furtive retreat of some Russian troops from the 40th Russian Army Corps through Pueni, he ordered the deployment of the detachment to where the Russian troops were supposed to stop on 12th/25th January, asking them *to maintain a calm attitude and not to open fire without a clear order to do so*. From Pueni, the detachment heads for Mihoreni, with the same mission, where they camp until the next day, 13th/26th January, at 2:30 p.m. En route back to Pueni, without taking any safety measures for the march back, the detachment runs into the 169th and the 170th Regiments from the 40th Russian Army Corps. Instead of getting into fight formation to force the Russian troops to send negotiators, Captain Mihail Vasile recklessly moves towards them. He is also accompanied by Sublieutenant Bodescu. Their good faith costs them, as they end up as prisoners in the hands of our former allies. Seeing that their commander does not return, the other five officers commit the same imprudence. Once the seven officers are taken prisoners, the detachment is surrounded, disarmed and captured in its entirety. With such a capture, the Russian regiments continue their journey to Molnița – Sulița Nouă, through Mihoreni and Buda Mare. Here the Russians find two more platoons<sup>41</sup> from the same 34th Romanian Infantry Regiment, which were about to change. Both platoons are captured and disarmed.

The eight officers are isolated from their troops and on the way to the border are subjected to insults and, *when they crossed the Prut river, the Russian soldiers attacked the Romanian officers and stole their hats, bags, whips, furs, etc.* When arriving in Noua Suliță *the Romanian officers are placed at the front of the column, and have to face the boos, insults, threats and spitting of the Russian troops and the crowd of civilians, most of whom are Jews*, records the investigation report of the Division<sup>42</sup>. They are taken from Noua Suliță to Lipcani, and the captured Romanian troops follow the same route. The officers' torment ends on the night of 18th-19th January/31st January-1st February 1918, when 15 soldiers from the 40th Infantry Regiment under the command of the Serbian

<sup>40</sup> CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund: 2272, *The 9th Division*, File 206, sheets 198 – 213.

<sup>41</sup> One platoon was commanded by Sublieutenant Chișcan and the other one, which was there for the change, by Sergeant Major Gherase, *ibidem*, sheet 201.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 202

*Lieutenant Durjanscki and of Captain Chițulescu Aurelian from the same regiment, made an incursion into the Russian territory and managed to release the 8 Romanian officers without any incidents<sup>43</sup>.*

The historical register of the 40th Infantry Regiment, Călugăreni, provides us with more detailed information about the release of the Romanian prisoners from the hands of the Russian Bolsheviks. The document which is recorded on 19th January, 1918, reads: *At about 2 o'clock, two platoons from the 2nd Company, under the command of two officers and several devoted Basarabian guides, sneak across the Prut river at Noua Sulită and release the 8 (eight) Romanian officers which had been taken prisoners by the Russians on 13.01.1918<sup>44</sup>.* It was thus that the shame of the Romanian officers' blunders from the aforementioned episode was washed away.

The investigation ordered by the commander of the 9th Division, General Rujinschi, pointed out the errors and deficiencies in the Romanian officers' command and decided on the following measures: Colonel Georgescu, *although a worthy and a good army man, who showed his bravery in the battles of Cosmești, Mărășești, Muncelul, [but who] thought that he needed to use tact and diplomacy towards the Russian troops so as not to give the disarmament operation the appearance of a hostile operation*, receives a disciplinary punishment of 15 days in prison; Captain Mihail Vasile from the 34th Infantry Regiment, *a worthy and valiant officer, receives a disciplinary punishment of 10 days in prison for the errors committed on the day of 13th January*; General Poetaș, commander of the 17th Infantry Brigade *was sent a letter of reprimand for the fact that he should have conducted the disarmament operations personally, as his mere presence in Colonel Georgescu's detachment would have incited a more energetic approach<sup>45</sup>.*

Faced with these failures, General Rujinschi, in the aftermath of the disarmament of the Russian column between Mănăstirea Doamnei and Trușești, deploys the 35th Infantry and the 9th Mountain Infantry Regiments, as well as a battalion from the 34th Infantry Regiment, taken from the Botoșani sector in the Mihăileni – Molnița area, thus managing the disarmament of the entire 18th Army Corps and the 2nd Division of the 40th Russian Corps without any incidents, by 24th January/6th February 1918.

**To conclude**, we can state that, based on the documents of the time and the military reports of the 9th Division units, sent to the Supreme Headquarters, that the Romanian troops' mission to protect the civilians from the plunders and

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, sheet 207.

<sup>44</sup> CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund: RIJO-1 Collection, the 40th Regiment Fund, Călugăreni, File 3520, sheet 56 v.

<sup>45</sup> Idem, Fund: 2272, The 9th Division, File 206, sheets 211-212.

abuses of the Russian troops retreating to Russia, to ease their passage through the former counties of Botoșani and Dorohoi, to maintain security and order, was fulfilled, despite the numerous and tremendous difficulties posed by the huge number of the Russian convoys<sup>46</sup>; by the failure to respect the imposed timetables and routes, the Russians being on a constant search for food for their troops as well as for the tens of thousands of horses; by the plunders committed by day or by night; by the deplorable state of the roads which meant that the deployment of the platoons, companies and regiments with the accompanying war equipment and ammunition had to be done with inhuman effort. The refusal to accept the disarmament operation was mainly due to the Bolshevik propaganda, encouraged directly from Petrograd by Praposhchik Krilenco, appointed Generalissimo by Lenin.

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<sup>46</sup> On 24.12.1917/6.01.1918 141 carriages accompanied by soldiers from the 40th Regiment/the 10th Russian Army Corps, loaded with technical equipment and provisions, drawing caissons, were passing from Bucovina (the current county of Suceava) to Basarabia, en route through Frumușica, Burdujeni, Fântânele și Vlădeni; a column from the 350th Infantry Regiment was stationed in Brehnești (the commune of Costești); the following day, 25.12.1917/7.01.1918, 74 carriages, 300 horses and 250 soldiers from the 9th Russian Army were passing through Poiana from the same direction, and 3 artillery parks made up of 33 carriages each were passing through Popăuți; 142 projectile caissons, 300 horses and 200 soldiers from the 36th Corps. The 40th Regiment reported 12 big cannons and 124 caissons; on 28.12.1917/10.01.1918 the following were crossing Zone I: a column of Finnish subsistence cu 650 soldiers, 550 horses and 250 carriages; 3 caissons with 50 horsemen, 180 carriages with one horse each, 46 carriages with two horses each from the 1st Russian Division; 3 officers and 260 soldiers with 65 carriages from Fălticeni through Frumușica - Bivolari; a sanitary formation with 100 men, 190 horses and 6 carriages was billeted in the village of Cordun. All this data was reported on the following day after these events took place. The examples above are not selected, but are listed in their succession. Reports from other days record much higher figures (CSPAMI-Pitești, Fund: 2272, the 9th Division, File 206, sheets 74, 75, 115).