

82 YEARS SINCE THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

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MOTTO

Nicolae Iorga: *"People who do not know their history are like a child who does not know their parents".*

Abstract: *The "Battle of Stalingrad" was the bloodiest battle of World War II. It was the "battle of battles" on the Eastern Front, considered by some historians to be the "Verdun of the Volga".*

It was probably the engagement whose outcome shaped the history of the European continent for decades to come.

The "Battle of Stalingrad" is a phrase known in historiography as the great military confrontation on the Don and Volga, which took place in the second half of 1942 (from July 17) and the beginning of 1943 (February 2), and which involved the Romanian 3rd Army south of the Don River and implicitly in the Don Bend, the Romanian 4th Army in the Kalmuc Steppe (south of Stalingrad) and several large Romanian units in Stalingrad itself.

In this "battle" Romania had a significant participation in terms of military and material forces but also through the very heavy losses suffered.

Keywords: *Stalingrad, Don Bend, Petre Dumitrescu, light divisions, Operation "Uranus", encirclement, prisoners.*

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INTRODUCTION

November 2024 marks the 82nd anniversary of the Battle of Stalingrad and the Encirclement at the Bend of the Don, significant events during World War II that marked a major turning point in the conflict between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

The Battle of Stalingrad (July 17, 1942 – February 2, 1943) was a decisive confrontation between German and Soviet forces, fought in and around the city of Stalingrad (now Volgograd).

It is considered one of the bloodiest and most important battles of the war. After months of intense fighting, resulting in huge losses on both

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sides, the Red Army managed to encircle and defeat the German army, capturing hundreds of thousands of prisoners. This Soviet victory marked the beginning of a long offensive and was a turning point in the war, as it undermined the Wehrmacht's ability to wage another offensive war on the Eastern Front.

The Encirclement of the Don Bend (November 1942) was another important moment in this period. After the failure of the German offensive at Stalingrad, Soviet forces succeeded in creating an encirclement of German and Allied troops in the Don Bend area, a strategic location on the Don River. The Germans were forced to retreat and regroup, and the losses suffered were heavy, including among the elite divisions of the Wehrmacht.

Both events were of crucial importance in the war, being not only strategic victories for the Soviet Union, but also a major blow to the Nazi war plans, which had ambitions to conquer the entire Soviet Union. The winter of 1942-1943 marked the beginning of a series of Soviet victories that ultimately led to the liberation of the occupied territories and the defeat of Nazi Germany.

The reason for the reader's interest in this topic is the sacrifice of many Romanian families and our entire people for the war effort, during the conflagration but also later for the economic and moral recovery of our people.

The situation that was created then is complicated - first we were allies with the Germans then they became our enemies, first we fought with the Russians then we became allies. In my opinion, neither the "Easterners" nor the "Westerners" have forgotten Romania's position at that time.

1. ROMANIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE "BATTLE OF STALINGRAD"

The great military confrontation on the Don and Volga rivers, known in historiography as the "*Battle of Stalingrad*" was a large-scale and highly complex operation. Its importance was extraordinary and unique in the unfolding and outcome of World War II.

In the history of military art, it is known as the "*Stalingrad Operation*" or the "*Stalingrad Campaign*."

In this battle, Romania had significant participation both in terms of military and material resources and in terms of heavy losses.

The strongest argument for this statement lies in the fact that on November 19, 1942, a force of **231,916** Romanian soldiers participated in the confrontation at Stalingrad, in the Don Bend, and in the Kalmuk Steppe¹. According to other sources², the number is estimated at 230,872.

¹ After the assessment made by Marshal Ion Antonescu, in the memorandum of January 7, 1943, with which he presented himself at the meeting with Hitler on January 10-12 at

Regarding Romanian losses, there are multiple estimates. One version states that the number of dead, wounded, and missing amounted to **156,854**³. Other sources⁴ estimate the number at 158,458.

1.1. The Genesis of the Stalingrad Operation

In this confrontation, the Romanian 3rd Army, led by Corps General Petre Dumitrescu, and the Romanian 4th Army, led by Corps General Constantin Constantinescu-Claps, were engaged.

In the two campaigns, from the east and the west, the Romanian Army participated in a series of large-scale military confrontations, resulting in both victories and defeats. However, among all of these, the "*Battle of Stalingrad*" far exceeded them in terms of duration, troop numbers, seasonal and weather conditions, the scale of defeat (human and material losses), internal and alliance-related consequences, the negative public impact of the disaster on the Volga, the lasting collective memory of the tragedy at the turn of 1942/1943, and the complex historiographical treatment, marked by a long "*silence*" on the subject⁵.

The failure of the German army's campaign and its satellites in 1941, aimed at capturing Moscow and forcing the Soviet Union out of the war, shattered German command's illusions about a "*lightning war*"⁶.

It must also be considered that in early December 1941, the United States entered the war following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, globalizing the conflict.

On January 1, the United Nations Coalition was officially formed, with the Soviet Union adhering to the Atlantic Charter. The war truly became global, and the Axis situation worsened, as Japanese leaders opted for the "*southern plan*", advancing in the Pacific, instead of the "*northern plan*", which would have meant attacking the Soviet Union.

In this context, Adolf Hitler made, in the near-unanimous opinion of specialists, one of his greatest mistakes by declaring war on the USA on December 11, 1941. Under Berlin's pressure, Italy (December 11),

Wolfsschanze, Source: Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (ANIC), Fond P.C.M., Cabinet Militar, Dosar 447/1943, f. 21-22.

² Adrian Pandea, Ion Pavelescu, Eftimie Ardeleanu, *Romanii la Stalingrad. Viziunea românească asupra tragediei din Cotul Donului și Stepa Calmucă*, Editura Militară, București, 1992, p. 467, apud Arh. M.Ap.N., fond M.St.M.-Secția I dosar nr. 1929, ff. 173-176.

³ Source: Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (ANIC), Fond P.C.M., Cabinet Militar, Dosar 447/1943, f. 21-22.

⁴ Adrian Pandea, Ion Pavelescu, Eftimie Ardeleanu, *op. cit.*, p. 469.

⁵ Petre Otu, *Perspectiva românească a bătăliei de la Stalingrad*, Revista de Istorie Militară 5-6/2022, p. 62.

⁶ Gh. Zaharia, I. Cupșa, Al. Vianu, *Al Doilea Război Mondial. Schiță istorică*, Editura Politică, București, 1975, p. 105.

Romania, Bulgaria (both on December 12, 1941), and Hungary (December 13, 1941) followed suit.

Analyzing the strategic situation of both belligerent sides across the entire Soviet-German front, the German command drew the following conclusions⁷:

- The Soviet defense on the general direction of Moscow had significantly strengthened, and the Soviets continued efforts to consolidate it;
- The war to conquer the Soviet Union had become a prolonged conflict for which Germany was unprepared, particularly regarding raw materials;
- The entry of the United States into the war and the signing of the Soviet-American agreement on June 11, 1942, "*on principles of mutual aid in the war against aggression*"⁸, would supply the Red Army with significant quantities of military resources;
- Since the start of the war against the Soviet Union, the German army had suffered heavy losses.

Considering these factors, the O.K.W. (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht - German High Command) decided that for the 1942 campaign, the primary offensive effort would focus on the southern part of the Soviet-German front with Army Group "South," which included 70 infantry divisions, 10 tank divisions, 9 motorized divisions, 2 cavalry divisions, and 3 independent infantry brigades and one cavalry brigade. This represented approximately 40% of the infantry and cavalry troops and 50% of the tank and motorized units. The forces were deployed as follows (from north to south along the front line): the 2nd German Army, the 1st Hungarian Army, the 1st and 4th Tank Armies, and the 6th and 17th German Armies. In the second line of Army Group depth were the **Romanian 3rd Army** and the Italian 8th Army, while the 11th German Army was stationed in Crimea⁹.

Thus, ***The Stalingrad Operation***, conducted between July 17, 1942, and February 2, 1943, unfolded in two phases: **the first**, from July 17 to November 18, 1942, covering the offensive actions of German forces and their allies towards Stalingrad; and **the second**, from November 19, 1942, to February 2, 1943, covering the Soviet counteroffensive, the encirclement and destruction of the German-Romanian encircled group, along with the westward expansion of the offensive.

⁷ Nicolae CIOBANU, *Operația de la Stalingrad*, Buletinul Arhivelor Militare nr 1/ 2008, pp. 11-17.

⁸ Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945: A History*, Publisher: Skyhorse Publishing, 2017, pp. 411-420.

⁹ Mihail Vasile Ozunu, Petre Otu, *Înfrânți și uitați. Românii în bătălia de la Stalingrad*, Editura „Ion Cristoiu” S.A., București, 1999, p. 82, apud Manfred Kehrigh, *Stalingrad. Analyse und Dokumentation einer Auflage*, Deutsche-Verlag-Anstadt, Stuttgart, 1974, p. 23.

1.2. How the Romanians Reached Stalingrad

Many times, major historical events were due to chance occurrences, but ultimately, the defining factors were the decisions made by leaders under conditions of risk and uncertainty.

1.2.1. Hitler's Letter to Ion Antonescu

On December 29, 1941, Hitler sent a letter to Ion Antonescu, informing him of his intention to continue the offensive in the summer of 1942. He requested that Antonescu send as many troops as possible, as well as oil and gasoline. Hitler committed to equipping the Romanian troops participating in the upcoming campaign with German weaponry. The Führer also wrote that Mussolini had promised to send a larger number of divisions to the Eastern Front to participate in the spring offensive¹⁰.

At the end of the letter, Hitler expressed his conviction *"that our other allies will also understand the significance of this historic mission and will contribute their forces to save Europe once and for all from a threat that would mean the end of our nations, their culture, and civilization"*¹¹.

1.2.2. Marshal Ion Antonescu's Response

Ion Antonescu replied to the Führer on January 5, 1942, promising to increase deliveries of oil and grain, as well as the number of troops to be sent to the front. He emphasized certain conditions that the German side needed to meet, with the priority being the equipping of the Romanian Army with modern weaponry. Antonescu also raised the issue of Northern Transylvania, accusing Hungary of hostile actions against Romania, which threatened to destabilize the alliance and their joint effort¹².

At the same time, Antonescu requested a meeting to discuss all the issues related to the Romanian Army's participation in the summer campaign of 1942.

During his meeting with his German counterpart at Hitler's headquarters in Rastenburg (February 11–12, 1942), the Romanian leader presented a lengthy memorandum regarding Romania's contribution to the war and reconfirmed his commitment to participate in the summer operations. Ion Antonescu, in return, demanded guarantees from Germany, based on the consideration that the war effort was weakening Romania, which put it in a state of inferiority compared to Hungary.

¹⁰ Petre OTU, *Secvența românească în bătălia de la Stalingrad*, available at <https://historia.ro/sectiune/general/secventa-romaneasca-a-bataliei-de-la-stalingrad-581894.html>, accessed on 09.03.2025.

¹¹ Vasile Arimia, Ion Ardeleanu, Ștefan Lache, (eds.), *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite(1940-1944)*, vol. I, Ed.Cozia, București, 1991, p. 158.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 162-165.

Antonescu also raised other issues of bilateral relations: the withdrawal of German troops from the country; the situation of the legionnaires in Germany (they represented a political reserve at the disposal of the Reich); the clarification of economic relations, etc¹³.

1.2.3. Military-political reactions in the country to Ion Antonescu's decision to commit Romania to the German summer campaign

Ion Antonescu's decision to commit the Romanian army to the upcoming German campaign on the Eastern Front aroused strong reactions at the level of the Romanian Army leadership. General Iosif Iacobici, Chief of the General Staff, protested, demanding, on January 8, 1942, through a memorandum, that the forces to be committed be as small as possible. He was dismissed from office, and General Ilie Șteflea was appointed in his place.

He argued his proposal by *"the unpopularity of this war, far from the country's borders and by the problem of military insecurity towards Hungary"*¹⁴.

General Ilie Șteflea's conception differed in part from that of his predecessor General Iosif Iacobici. He adopted a different strategy to approach the problem, namely, he did not oppose Antonescu's decision, but sought, according to his own confessions on March 15, 1945, *to reduce the number of troops sent to the front*, by forming the so-called *"light divisions"*, an older desire of Ion Antonescu.

General Șteflea *anticipated the Soviet counteroffensive* by informing the Germans about it and made extraordinary efforts to bring the troops to the country for recovery.

Marshal Ion Antonescu encountered not only the resistance of some military circles, the Iacobici and partially Șteflea cases being eloquent, but also the opposition of the main political forces of the country - the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party, formally dissolved. Their leaders, Iuliu Maniu and Constantin I.C. Brătianu, although they did not know the value of the expeditionary corps that was to be sent to the front, requested that the troops be kept in the country¹⁵.

¹³ Vasile Arimia, Ion Ardeleanu, Ștefan Lache, (eds.), *Antonescu-Hitler. Corespondență și întâlniri inedite(1940-1944)*, op. cit, pp. 175-216.

¹⁴ *Șefii Marelui Stat Major Român. 1941-1945. Destine la răscruce*, coordonator general-colonel Dumitru Cioflină, Editura Militară, București, 1995, p. 84; A se vedea și *23 August 1944. Documente, vol. I, 1939-1943*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1984, doc. 359, 270.

¹⁵ C.I.C Brătianu, Carol II, Ion Antonescu, *Amintiri, Documente, Corespondență*, cuvânt înainte, note, îngrijire de ediție, indici de Ion Ardeleanu, Editura Forum – SRL, București, 1992, pp.128-150; *Iuliu Maniu-Ion Antonescu. Opinii și confruntări politice.1940-1944*, Cuvânt înainte, îngrijire de ediție, note și comentarii de Ion Calafeteanu, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1994, pp. 114-116.

Despite these protests, Ion Antonescu kept his promises and, starting in June 1942, sent over 27 divisions to the Eastern Front. Some of them were directed towards Stalingrad, and others to the Caucasus¹⁶.

We cannot ignore the actions of some Bolshevick groups who, in the country, did everything in their power to sabotage the Romanian front. Their actions were reflected on the Romanian troops in the battles in the Don Bend and the Calmuță Steppe through the "*blind projectiles*" prepared in the country and sent to the front to the Romanian troops.

The Romanian fighters, who were blamed by the Germans (and not only) for the defeat at the Don Bend, were in fact also victims of betrayal. The Bolshevicks had agents in the armament factories in Romania who sabotaged the country's war effort directly at the source while the army was fighting the Bolshevicks on the front! How much betrayal could there have been everywhere!!! It is becoming increasingly clear that Antonescu was both betrayed and misinformed¹⁷.

In the work "*The Bend of the Don 1942: Heroism, Sacrifice, Betrayal*"¹⁸, several details are presented that prove that the Romanian Army was betrayed and sabotaged from within by "Romanian Bolshevicks" infiltrated into the armament factories or other key functions. The same acts of betrayal and sabotage are also presented in other works written by contemporary authors¹⁹.

Here is a fragment from the book that proves that the Romanian artillery fought the Russians using blind explosive charges: "*I am a party member and through our tricks I was assigned there to the army pyrotechnics and I escaped being sent to the front and there we did not put explosives in the Brandt projectiles so they only have the starting cap and that's it*".

A few years later, after the war, of course, when there was great joy over the victory of the Russian army over the Romanian army, in Scânteia from 1947-1948, it was written about the contribution of the communists in the country, illegally, to the victory of the Soviet army. So, this act of betrayal was also confirmed by the press. Didn't they realize what harm they were doing to their Romanian brothers?

The author of the aforementioned book states: "*...for me it was a moment of unspeakable sadness to realize how stupid or evil people can be.*"

¹⁶ *Participarea României în bătălia de la Stalingrad*, available at <https://www.istorie-pestur.ro/participarea-romaniei-in-batalia-de-la-stalingrad/>, accessed on 10.03.2025.

¹⁷ available at <https://glasul.info/2015/03/23/cotul-donului-1942-inca-o-victorie-a-dusmanului-obtinuta-prin-tradare/>, accessed on 10.03.2025.

¹⁸ Vasile Șoimaru, Iosif Niculescu, *Cotul Donului 1942: eroism, jertfă, trădare*, Vicovia Publishing House, Chișinău, 2013.

¹⁹ Gheorghe BOARU, *ȘI TATA A LUPTAT LA COTUL DONULUI-Documente, analize, memorii*, AOȘR Publishing House, Bucharest, 2024.

*And then I realized that there, at the Don Bend, the Russian victory was not a military victory, strictly speaking, but one obtained through betrayal"*²⁰.

1.3. The decision to go on the offensive in the summer of 1942

At that time, Ion Antonescu, without deeply analyzing the new configuration of the war, through the entry of the USA and Japan into action, considered that the victory would belong to Germany. As such, the increased Romanian contribution to the final Victory would be rewarded by Berlin, by annulling the Vienna Dictate of August 30, 1940 and the regaining of northeastern Transylvania. But Berlin shied away from such a firm promise. Moreover, German diplomacy skillfully maneuvered the adversity between Romania and Hungary on the issue of the Vienna decision, imposing on them an extended participation in the future campaign and very seriously warning the two capitals about the prospect of a conflict between them, also evoked by Bucharest and Budapest²¹.

In discussions with German leaders, Ion Antonescu rejected their suggestion that Romania be compensated for the loss of northeastern Transylvania by taking over territories in the east. He firmly declared that the objective was to annul the decision of the Belvedere Palace in Vienna.

As in other cases, Ion Antonescu did not take into account those opinions that urged him to be moderate, to be cautious towards the military conflict whose end was unpredictable, and he made the decision alone to participate extensively in the 1942 campaign. After all, Romania with its entire military potential did not represent a factor that would tip the balance of victory, and the dividends of massive involvement alongside the Third Reich were completely problematic.

Historical sources show that this decision was not well received by the mass of the military, especially those in Transylvania, who were not very convinced by the official propaganda slogan, according to which the fate of Transylvania was being played out in southern Russia. They wanted to fight for the recovery of the territorial patrimony, torn apart by the Vienna Dictate.

Caught between contradictory German demands, faced with a transportation crisis, with Stalingrad as the priority, lacking, in part, the armament, ammunition and equipment that had to be provided in the area by the Germans, with units whose soldiers wondered what they were doing

²⁰ Vasile Șoimaru, Iosif Niculescu, Gheorghe Pârlea, Roxana Iorgulescu-Bandrăbur, *Cotul Donului 1942: eroism, jertfă, trădare*, Balacron Publishing House, Chișinău, 2003, p. 48.

²¹ Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, Regele Carol și Mareșalul Antonescu. Relațiile germano-române (1938-1940)*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1994, pp. 182-184; Ottmar Trașcă, *Relațiile politice și militare româno-germane (septembrie 1940-august 1944)*, Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2013, pp. 320-324.

deep in Soviet territory, far from the country, the Romanian commands became aware of the hopeless situation of the Romanian troops and sensed the approach of the catastrophe. The question was not whether it would occur, but its date and dimensions²².

Two Romanian armies took part in the great clash on the Volga - the Romanian 3rd Army in the Don Bend and the Romanian 4th Army in the Kalmuc Steppe.

2. THE 3RD ROMANIAN ARMY IN THE DON BEND

The first of them to enter the device was the 3rd Romanian Army, commanded by General Petre Dumitrescu. On August 31, 1942, the commander of the 3rd Army, which was in the Caucasus, received the order of the advanced echelon of **the Great Headquarters, deployed in Rostov**, to take over the defense on the Middle Don from the German and Italian troops. Specifically, the large units of the Romanian Army were to replace two German and five Italian divisions, deployed in „*the Great Don Bend*”.

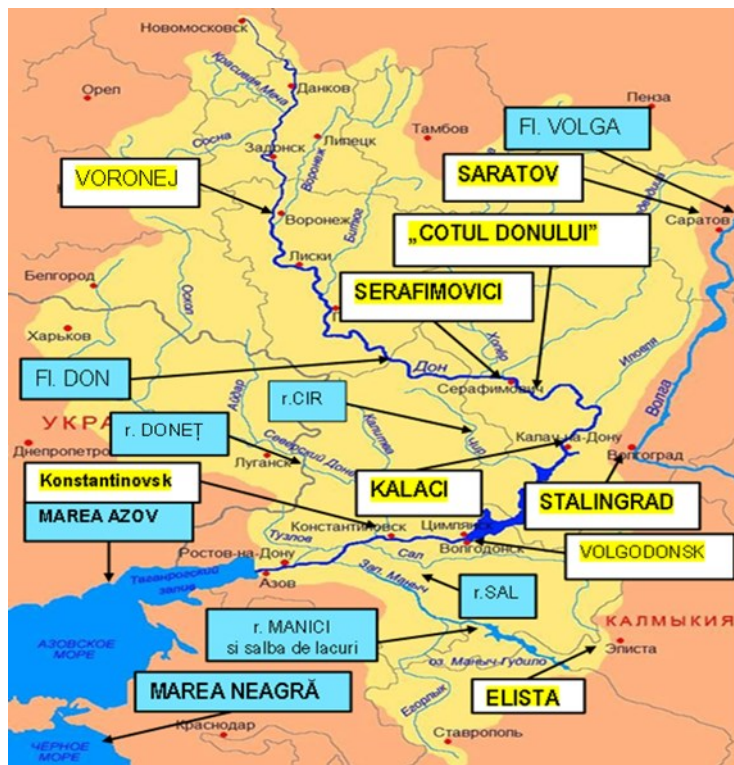
The defense device was established between September 12 and November 1, 1942, with the 3rd Army being subordinate to Army Group “B”.

2.1. Deployment in the Don Bend

The Romanian 3rd Army was deployed in the great bend of the Don in a wide strip of 148 kilometers, 12 km smaller than the one originally set, between Kletskaya (Kletskaya) and Sukhoi Donetsk. The forward limit of the defense was mostly south of the Don, with the exception of the two bridgeheads at Kletskaya and Serafimovichi, held by the Soviets.

Regarding the **geographical delimitation of the Don region**, it is estimated that it includes the region on both sides of the Middle and Lower Don and extends southeast to the line of the Jergeni hills, south to the Manîci depression and southwest to the Don. The Kalmyk Steppe is actually a southeast extension of the Don region, between the Volga and the Caspian Sea, up to Manîci.

²² Petre Otu, *Perspectiva românească a bătăliei de la Stalingrad*, , Revista de Istorie Militară 5-6/ 2022, p. 67.



Hydrographic network and main localities in the Don region ²³

The terrain configuration throughout this area was very varied, as were the climate, population, vegetation, and forms of human settlement. Thus, west of the Don, in its great loop, the terrain was generally hilly, in places the ridges being flat forming plateaus and their height does not exceed 300 m. The watershed in the region between Kazanskaya and Kalach is formed by the heights immediately south of the Don, from where a series of secondary ridges descend towards the Cir Valley.



The Don and its high, limestone banks near the Great Bend²⁴ (Photo Vasile Şoimaru).

²³ available at [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A2ul_Don_\(Rusia\)#/media/Fi%C8%99ier:Donrivermap.png](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A2ul_Don_(Rusia)#/media/Fi%C8%99ier:Donrivermap.png). South of Serafimovichi was the "Don Bend" area where the Romanian 3rd Army was deployed, and north of Elista (and south of Stalingrad) was the *Kalmuk Steppe* where the Romanian 4th Army was deployed.

2.2. The defense device of the Romanian 3rd Army on November 19, 1942²⁵

On the right was the 376th German Infantry Division of the German 6th Army, and on the left the Italian 8th Army. The 3rd Army was composed of four army corps commands (1, 2, 4, 5), eight infantry divisions (5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15), two cavalry (1 and 7), the strength of which amounted to 143,336 soldiers²⁶.

The defense device adopted was made up of (from left to right): 1st Army Corps with D.7 I and D.11 I; 2nd Army Corps with D.9 I and D.14 I (within D.14 I, Ghiță Boaru, the author's father and the protagonist of the work " *AND THE FATHER FIGHTED AT THE DON'S ELBOW. Documents, analyses, memoirs*"²⁷, 5th Army Corps with D.5 I and D.6 I; 4th Army Corps with D.13 I, D.1 Cv.; In reserve were D.15 I and D.7 Cv.

The army command adopted an operational device on an echelon, the reserve being made up of the 15th Infantry Division (which had only five battalions) and the 7th Cavalry Division²⁸.

The large units were given extensive fronts that far exceeded their capabilities, another shortcoming being the lack of anti-tank weapons.

Several elements of military analysis are worth highlighting:

- The Romanian 3rd Army received a very wide strip of defense (148 km), which far exceeded its capabilities;
- the operational device of all major units was on an echelon, therefore lacking any possibility of counterattack or counterstrike;
- serious shortcomings in terms of equipping with heavy weapons and anti-tank weapons;
- The Romanian 3rd Army suffered from an acute lack of reserves of any kind (ammunition, winter equipment, food for people and animals, ...).

3. THE ROMANIAN 4TH ARMY IN THE KALMUK STEPPE

The situation of the Romanian 4th Army (commander – General of the Army Corps Constantin Constantinescu-Claps) was even more dramatic than that of the 3rd Army because the army command, mobilized at the beginning of September 1942, did not have, until November 21, 1942 (one day after the start of the Soviet offensive), command of the troops, its task being only the material provision of the large Romanian units.

²⁴ available at <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=169246855547732&set=pcb.-1388295385015179>, accessed on 10.03.2025.

²⁵ Mihail Vasile Ozunu, Petre Otu, *op. cit.*, Harta nr.7, p. 308; Petre Otu, *Perspectiva românească a bătăliei de la Stalingrad*, Revista de Istorie Militară 5-6/ 2022 p. 71;

²⁶ Petre Otu, *Secvența românească în bătălia de la Stalingrad*, *op.cit.*

²⁷ Gheorghe Boaru, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Petre Otu, *Perspectiva românească a bătăliei de la Stalingrad*, *op.cit.* p. 67.

The mission entrusted by the German command (the Romanian 4th Army was subordinate to the German 4th Panzer Army) was the defense "*without thought of retreat*" of a strip of about 230 kilometers south of Stalingrad, between Kegulta and Beketovka.

The preparation of the defense device could not be carried out because by mid-October the large Romanian units had not yet reached the Kalmuc Steppe. The 18th Infantry Division, which came from the country and had the largest number of troops, was on the move, as were the 5th and 8th Cavalry Divisions that were moving from the Caucasus.

Additional controversies arose between the German and Romanian command regarding how the large Romanian units were to be used.

The material and moral situation was worse than in the 3rd Army.

As a conclusion of the situation of the Romanian 4th Army: in the conditions of a weak (almost linear) combat device, the absence of reserves, the lack of anti-tank defense, the cumbersome material supply, the fatigue of the troops, it is clearly seen that the mission of this army was disproportionate in relation to the real combat capacity at that time.

4. CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE ROMANIAN FORCES PARTICIPATING IN THE BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

In addition to the deployment of the 3rd Army in the Don Bend and the 4th Army in the Kalmuc Steppe, the Romanian army also had troops engaged in Stalingrad itself, subordinate to the German 6th Army commanded by Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus (December 30, 1941 - February 3, 1943).

The Romanian Royal Air Force also participated in these operations.

The Romanian forces participating in the Battle of Stalingrad were:

Echelon	Effectives	Remarks
Romanian 3rd Army	143,336	In the Don Bend
1st Armored Division	12,196	In reserve Gr. A. "B"
TOTAL 3rd Army	155,532	
Romanian 4th Army	63,958	In the Kalmuc Steppe
20th Infantry Division	11,292	In Stalingrad
TOTAL 4th Army	75,250	
Total Romanian effectives	230,782	

In terms of education, the Romanian soldiers participating in the battles of the Don Bend, Stalingrad and the Calmuță Steppe had the following stages of training²⁹:

- illiterate 26%;
- primary school 56%;
- secondary school 16%;
- university studies 2%.

Also, 70% of them came from peasants.

In conclusion, on the eve of the Soviet counteroffensive, there were **230,782 Romanian soldiers**³⁰ in the Stalingrad region, forming part of the two armies, in the Don Bend and the Calmuță Steppe, as well as the units operating under German command (in Stalingrad).

5. SOVIET COUNTEROFFENSIVE PLAN IN THE STALINGRAD AREA - OPERATION "URANUS"

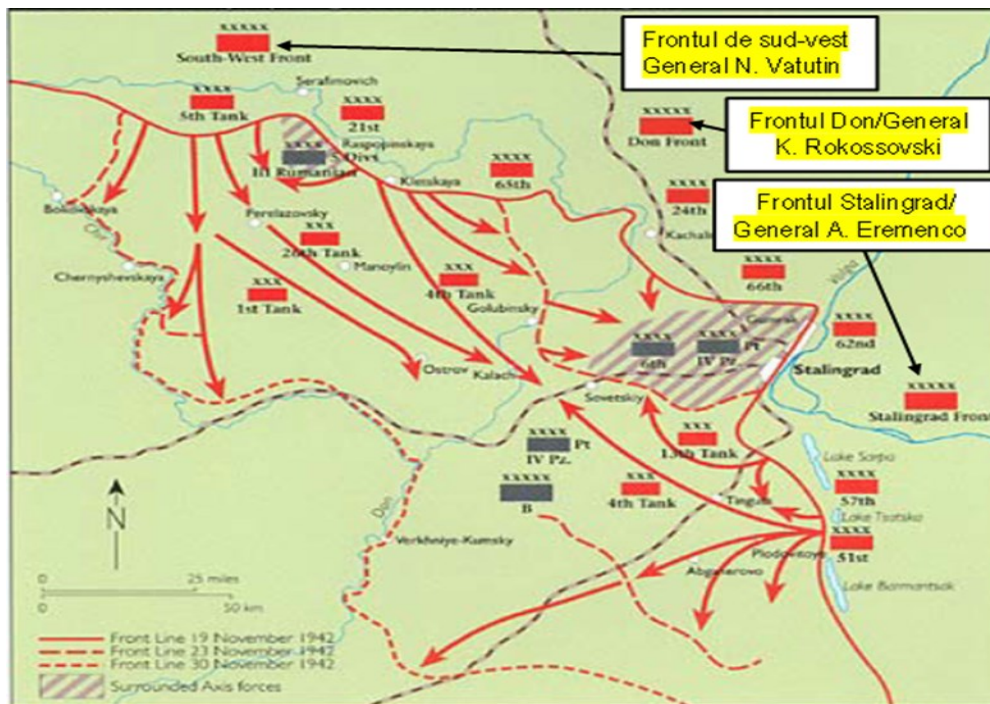
The Soviet counteroffensive plan in the Stalingrad area, also known as Operation "*Uranus*", was established in September 1942 by the Soviet High Command (Stavka) and approved by Stalin³¹.

The plan called for the execution of two powerful blows in sectors located at a great distance from each other and the encirclement of the German 6th Army through a large-scale double enveloping maneuver. This mission was entrusted to a group composed of three fronts: "*South-West*" - commanded by Vatutin, "*Don*" - commanded by Rokossovsky" and "*Stalingrad*" - commanded by Yeremenko. The action was to be launched on November 13, but Stalin decided to start it on November 19 and 20, 1942, (see Map).

²⁹ Asociația Memoriei „Cotul Donului” 1942, available at <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=457653285966309&set=a.137037628027878>. Text source: Text "*collected*" from the Romanian Military Archives.

³⁰ Adrian Pandeia, Ion Pavelescu, Eftimie Ardeleanu, *op. cit.*, p. 467, apud Arh. M.Ap.N., fond M.St.M.-Secția 1, dosar nr. 1929, f. 173-176.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 212.



The Red Army makes preliminary reorganization for the "Battle of Stalingrad" ³²

The basic plan was to execute an encirclement operation, with the armies of all three fronts converging west of Stalingrad at Kalachi.

5.1. The Soviet Counteroffensive and the Romanian Defense in the Don Bend, the Kalmuk Steppe, and Stalingrad

The actions that took place in Stalingrad, the Don Bend, and the Kalmyk Steppe, although they were carried out separately, must be analyzed in close correlation because they were part of the same operational plan.

The counteroffensive began with an artillery barrage fired by 3,500 guns and mortars. The main attack north of Stalingrad was led by the 21st Army and the 5th Tank Army of Vatutin's Southwestern Front. South of the city, the Soviets attacked with Eremenko's 51st and 57th Armies. This double thrust was supported by Rokossovsky's Don Front.

The plan was for Vatutin's forces to advance southeast towards Kalachi and for Yeremenko's forces to strike from the northwest towards the same objective. At the same time an outer defensive line would be established along the Cir and Krivaya.

³² Geoffrey Jukes, *The Second World War: The Eastern Front 1941-1945*, Series: Essential Histories, Publisher: Routledge, Year: 2003, p. 42.

An ambitious double encirclement of both the 6th and 4th Panzer Armies at Stalingrad and the enemy forces was envisaged at the Don Bend - (See Map).

The counteroffensive was prepared in the greatest secrecy and a series of maskirovka (deception and disinformation) measures were taken. These measures contributed to Uranus' stunning success in achieving complete operational surprise. By 23 November, the encirclement of Paulus' forces at Stalingrad was complete. The Stavka had expected to trap around 100,000 enemy troops. In this case, they captured three times that number, and Operation Uranus became the Red Army's first successful major encirclement maneuver.

Among the enemy forces routed during the operation were the armies of Germany's Axis allies, whose task was to secure Paulus' flanks.

Stalingrad was the beginning of the end for Hitler's Axis alliance.

The first country to defect from the Axis was Italy, which Mussolini surrendered in July 1943, followed a year later by Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Finland.

Just a week after the Germans' last all-out attempt to drive the Russians from the remaining bridgeheads at Stalingrad, the great counteroffensive began, with Russian troops from the Don and Northwestern Fronts advancing from the north and those of the Stalingrad Front from the south, and the two closing the ring at Kalachi, at the eastern end of the Don Bend, just four days later³³.

The fighting that preceded the launch of the counteroffensive on 19 November was numerous and difficult, causing the troops (already tired after marching hundreds of kilometres on foot from the train stations) to become exhausted. The 14th Infantry Division alone was counterattacked 17 times between October 6 and November 18, suffering considerable losses, from soldiers to unit and subunit commanders.

On the main attack directions, the Soviet troops quickly broke through the combat formation of the large Romanian units, the tanks trampling everything under their tracks and pulverizing the combat positions of the units that retreated, in small fractions, in many places in panic.

Through these two actions, **the Romanian 3rd Army's formation was split in two**, the penetration achieved on the first day having a width of 15-18 km and a depth of 15 km. The other large units of the 3rd Army did not suffer much, as they were outside the breaking sectors.

Referring to the causes of the enemy's success, General Petre Dumitrescu considered that *"the determining factor was the mass use of*

³³ Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945: A History*, Publisher: Skyhorse Publishing, 2017, p. 501.

heavy tanks against troops lacking effective and sufficiently numerous anti-tank defense. Relevant in this sense is the fact that where the enemy infantry was not accompanied by tanks, it was easily repelled, suffering heavy losses"³⁴.

The second day (November 20) of the Soviet offensive clearly revealed the strategic objectives aimed at by the Soviet command: *"Instead of exploiting the success to the southwest, the main enemy forces headed southeast (towards Kalaci) to encircle the German 6th Army, which was fighting at Stalingrad, from the northwest"*³⁵.

From that moment on, the command of the soldiers remaining in the encirclement was taken over by General Traian Stănescu, commander of the 6th Infantry Division. Attacked from all directions (November 23), they retreated in the evening to the Raspopinskaya, Baskovski, Isbunskenski sectors, exhausting their resistance possibilities the next day.

Left without food and ammunition, with no possibility of retreat, the *"General Stănescu"* Group was forced to capitulate, on condition that the enemy would ensure the lives of the Romanian soldiers³⁶.

Five of the 10 divisions of the Romanian 3rd Army surrendered on November 21.

5.2. What happened to Romanian prisoners and not only, after the Battle of Stalingrad (Don Bend - Stalingrad - Kalmuc Steppe)

The Romanian prisoners were gathered in columns, but before being taken to the camps, many - perhaps even hundreds - were shot down by Red Army soldiers on their own initiative.

The slaughter of Romanians was on an infinite level, those who fell in battle, dead or wounded were stripped naked, and mistreated to an unimaginable level.

On 04.02.1943 the NKVK informed comrade Stalin about the prisoners captured after the battle. Among other things, an *"interesting"* phrase appears in the report: *"...It is worth mentioning that, many times, during the escort of prisoners of war, the soldiers in the escort indulged in arbitrary actions. Thus, for example, on the Stalingrad, Voronezh and Southwestern Fronts, when the Red Army units successfully advanced, the front line moved daily, and prisoners of war were escorted on foot, over distances of 150-200 km to the point of reception, without any food being organized for them. In addition, before being taken prisoner - according to their testimonies - they did not receive food for 4-7 days, and, as a result,*

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Dr. Alesandru Duțu, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

³⁶ Dr. Alesandru Duțu, *Armata română de la Prut la Stalingrad și înapoi la Prut (1941-1944)*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

*being exhausted, they fell on the road, and later, as a rule, the soldiers of the escort shot them*³⁷.



*Romanian prisoners and not only, after the "Battle of Stalingrad" (Don Bend - Stalingrad -Kalmuc Steppe)*³⁸.

6. CONCLUSIONS

I believe that the most informed opinions about the events that took place in the "Battle of Stalingrad" - the sequence in the Don Bend, are those of those who planned and led the operations that took place in that area as well as those who fought there.

From the documents presented by the leadership of the echelons participating in the "Battle of Stalingrad", several very important elements emerged very clearly regarding: *The conditions in which this battle was fought; The difference in concepts and interests regarding the conduct of operations; The allocation to the Romanian divisions of sectors that were not in accordance with their operational capabilities; The implementation of the defense device.*

In the memorandum of January 7, 1943, presented by Marshal Ion Antonescu to Hitler, on January 10-12, 1943, the number of losses of **156,854 people** (dead, wounded, missing) is specified³⁹;

³⁷ *Prizonieri de război în URSS. 1939-1955*, Documentul nr. 6, Memorandumul conducerii NKVD-ului URSS către președintele statului, Comitetul de Apărare către I.V. Stalin.

³⁸ Ionuț-Mihăiță Ocoleanu, available at <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=201922018946882&set=g.555358214975571>, accessed on 11.03.2025.

In that memoir of Marshal Ion Antonescu, on page 21, it was stated: *"On November 19, when the first Bolshevik offensive began, the 2 Romanian Armies had a strength of officers, non-commissioned officers and troops of 231,916 men. Currently, there are 75,062 remaining, so 156,854 were lost.*

What is left represents 31% of what existed on November 19 and is equivalent to the personnel that make up the services, combat trains, regimental trains, police bodies and fighters from the 20th Infantry and 1st Cavalry divisions surrounded at Stalingrad. So far, we have lost all the fighters, along with all the material"⁴⁰.

Regarding **the situation of losses**, the figures published by various sources are controversial and that is why I am of the opinion that those in the national archives and officially advanced for publication.

Many of us may not understand many aspects of this clash, as we probably cannot even imagine how those battles unfolded. We have all read books about the battle, seen films or even listened to the stories of some participants, but the cruel truth was known only by those who were there.



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³⁹ Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (ANIC), Fond P.C.M., Cabinet Militar, Dosar 447/1943, f. 21-22.

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