

THE PARTICIPATION OF CONSTANTIN APOSTOL IN THE MILITARY OPERATIONS OF WORLD WAR II

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Abstract

In our paper, we present the military activity of Constantin Apostol during World War II. One of the most prominent representatives of the Romanian military sport of the interwar period, Constantin Apostol participated in numerous international competitions where he received numerous awards. This study highlights the heroic facet of the sportsman, namely his participation in the World War II military operations, on both the Eastern Front and on the Western Front, for which he was appreciated and decorated. After the change of the political regime in Romania, in August 1944, the prestige of Constantin Apostol declined, and he ended by being imprisoned, for the simple reason of having a good material state.

Keywords: *World War II, Eastern front in 1941, Western front in 1944.*

1. Introduction

Constantin Apostol was born in Săgeata commune, Buzău County, in 1903, in a family of wealthy peasants. He attended primary school in his native commune, high school studies in Buzău and continued with military cavalry studies in Târgoviște and Sibiu. Later on, Constantin Apostol chose a military career and was gradually promoted up to the rank of a lieutenant-colonel.

In the inter-war period, Constantin Apostol was remarked particularly due to his participation in horse-riding competitions. He participated in numerous national and international races, where he received several awards, among which we mention: Aachen (Grand Prize – Silver Cup), Belgium - 1937, Berlin - 1936 (The Olympics), Naples - 1933 and 1935, Nice - 1934 and 1938, Poland - 1934 and 1936, Vienna - 1936, etc. [1].

He was also a member of the “International Royal Horse” London Club [2]. Furthermore, the record sheets existing in the military archives contain overwhelming appreciations of his behaviour, attitude, education, military skills, patriotism, dedication and devotion to his horses, army, nation and country. As a result of his performance, the name of Constantin Apostol was quoted several times in the Unit’s Day Order.

During World War II, as presented in the following pages, Constantin Apostol remarked himself through several deeds of heroism.

After the war, as a result of the communist regime coming to power, Constantin Apostol's personality, life and career entered the shadow, for the mere reason that he had a good material state, which was incompatible with the ideology of the new political regime. Marginalized and slumped for a while, he was imprisoned under the pretext of "scheming against the new social order", was dropped from civil rights and all his fortune was confiscated. After being released from prison, Constantin Apostol continued to conduct activities in the field of horse training until his death in 1995 [3]. In 2010, as a modest and, yet, well-deserved consideration, the authorities of the commune he was born in decided to give his name to an important street in Săgeata village [4].

2. Constantin Apostol on the Eastern Front

In the general turmoiled context of the forthcoming Second World War, Constantin Apostol continued to be an excellent and appreciated officer, with flawless conduct and notable results in the field of horse riding.

In 1938, General Florescu, commander of the Cavalry Schools, described him as "an excellent rider who gained a well-deserved renown both in the country and abroad" [5].

His record sheet for the period of November 1, 1938 - September 20, 1939 offers particularly valuable details for the military and human profile of Constantin Apostol. At that time, he was a captain, and was 36 years old. Constantin Apostol proved military skills, was disciplined, and had "the sense of duty out of conviction". His characterization, as presented in these sheets, was a sum of qualities: "dignified, moral, integral, modest, with manners." The domestic skills also impressed his superiors: he was good at maintenance activities, dyed, repaired and took care of the kitchen, bedrooms, sheds, harness, etc. His subordinates were "lively, energetic and well-equipped" and his horses – "beautiful and very clean" [6].

The commander of the 5th Division, whose part the regiment of Constantin Apostol was, considered in 1939 that this officer "has proven in these exceptional times

an energy that we can fully rely on". Due to all his accomplishments, captain Apostol was described as a "reliable officer one could count on in hard times" [7].

Laudatory appraisals continued in 1940, when Constantin Apostol was described as having a very good physical condition and as being able to bear "any hard condition of a long-lasting campaign". He proved "authority" in applying his orders, was a hard-working person par excellence and possessed rare qualities, which made him "have authority over his subordinates, due to their conviction and trust in his intellectual and spiritual attributes." Moreover, Constantin Apostol was characterized as "very moral", living "a life worth taking as a model", always passionate about horses to whom he gave "a parental care", as well as to his subordinates. The commander of the 5th Division also noted: "Although unmarried, he has a quiet temperament. Disciplined and authoritarian, dignified and modest, with exemplary conduct." [8].

As the moment when Romania was to enter the war was approaching, the unity commanded by Constantin Apostol was sent to Bessarabia where they proved exemplary conduct and discipline in executing the orders, even if these actions were to be executed "in the far distance" [9].

On June, 22 1941, Romania entered the war in order to support Germany against the Soviet Union. It was a fair war for Romania, as this was the only possibility to free and regain the territory of Bessarabia, which had been conquered by the Soviet Union one year before. By the end of July 1941, Bessarabia had been liberated and reintegrated in the Romanian borders.

Constantin Apostol took part in these military operations. General Vlădescu commander of the 5th Division, remarked the squadron of Captain Apostol for their efficiency. In the concentration area, in the period prior to the attack - June 1-21, 1941, "captain Apostol invested a lot of hard work and consciousness [...], in order to accomplish his mission on the battle field".

After June 22, 1941, Constantin Apostol took active part in the front battles. His qualification sheet recorded the following: "He participated in the war against the Soviet Union, in all the battles of the 5th Division from July, 6 to October 16, accomplishing his missions as efficient as possible, and proving, besides military skills, a lot of courage. He captured war material and prisoners, especially during the attack executed in the

North of Javorlâk (Ukraine). Apostol was decorated with Steaua României Order, 5th Class with swords, and a ribbon for Military Virtue” [10].

After this first wave of the Romanian attack on the Eastern front, Constantin Apostol went back to Mizil, where the appraisals he received were equally laudatory. He was in charge with two squadrons, proving talent and “solid experience in training”. During the inspections, Apostol was appreciated for his enthusiasm, “a unified training method”, for his “normal and pleasant physical appearance” and “groomed aspect in front of his squadron”. He could easily orientate in the field and proved “both decency and cold blood”. Furthermore, Apostol was “very hard-working, authoritative and had a lot of prestige”, an “excellent comrade” and “fair to his subordinates” [11].

For a while, Constantin Apostol was in charge with the Mobilization Bureau where he was responsible for preparing the Research Groups and the Sanitary Formations of the 5th Corp. Due to the energy and zeal he deployed in 1942 in June and July, “mobilization could be done under the best conditions” [12]. Referring to the period May, 1 – August, 7 1942, Colonel V.C. Botezat, Commander of Regiment 6th Călărași, highlighted the efforts made by Constantin Apostol to complete the needs in horses of Research Group 55, “travelling to all centers in the county, from which he managed to bring a number of 146 horses.” Because of his efforts, all the mobilized military formations “could go to the front with the people and requisitions necessary almost complete.” Therefore, the Commander of Regiment 6th Călărași proposed him for being promoted „of choice” [13].

For the following stage of the operations, November, 1 1942 - April, 4 1943, the Head of the Major State, 5th Territorial Corp, considered that Constantin Apostol, the Commander of the sedentary part of the Regiment 6th Călărași and head of the Mobilization Bureau, “has done a great job in repairing the Cazarme” transforming it into a “more comfortable, clean and beautiful” place. In addition, he “organized and tracked the training of the recruits trainers” with remarkable results. Captain Apostol fulfilled all his duties “eulogiously” [14].

When Regiment 6th Călărași returned from the front, on April 4 1943, Colonel V. C. Botezatu remarked: “With great gratitude and satisfaction I found that the P.S. commander, with extremely low aids, had a very fruitful activity, first and foremost

completely changing the aspect of this barracks, [...] in perfect order and cleanliness, with very beautiful horses, and clean and orderly men” [15].

From another characterization sheet we find out that one of the tasks of Constantin Apostol, as head of the Mobilization Bureau, was to classify the situation of the officers and soldiers who had taken part in the fighting on the front, to communicate the names of the deceased or of the ones that had disappeared in war, to draw up the documentation and correspondance with the families of the deceased and of the war invalids, so that these could receive financial support as soon as possible.

On May 23, 1943, Captain Apostol was relieved from his position as head of the Mobilization Bureau, and was appointed commander of the Recruiter Training Division. When handing over his prior job and responsibilities, “it was found that there was no irregularity in his charge”. From this moment until June 25, he attended training activities for the position of Division Commandant at the Training Center of the Sibiu Cavalry, thus acquiring the skills to “lead and command a division in very good conditions” [16].

Between July 15 and October 31, 1943, Constantin Apostol became a horseback riding trainer for the senior officers of the Superior School of War, proving “a great interest and conscientiousness,” which made him count “among the cavalry valuable officers” [17]. The same opinion was also reported by General Codreanu, the Commander of this school who remarked that Apostol was “a good cavalry officer and a skilled cavalry instructor” [18].

On September 6, 1943, Constantin Apostol was promoted in rank of a Major, and on June 27 1944, he was mobilized for Regiment 3rd Călărași” [19], where, under new conditions, he took over the command of a division. He was as healthy and resistant as always and “trained and commanded his division efficiently, until the beginning of the operations”.

3. Constantin Apostol on the Western Front

After the political and military change from August 23, 1944, Constantin Apostol engaged again effectively in the operations of the Second World War, this time on the

Western Front, for the liberation of his country and for crushing the enemy, i.e. Germany.

Lieutenant Colonel Pleșoianu, Commander of the 3th Călărași Regiment, noted: “Since the commencement of the operations, he proved a precious collaborator. Thus, during the operations from Ploiești region, and especially in the battles from Transylvania, he proved his skills in commanding with cold blood, calm and courage.

It is also worth mentioning the action in Mureș where he ordered the Division and led the regiment during a temporary absence of mine in exceptionally good conditions. On this occasion, he gave me a brilliant test of his qualities as a brave and skillful commander. Disciplined and a good comrade.

For his deeds of weapons, he was proposed to be decorated with war orders.

I appreciate Major Apostol as a very good cavalry officer to whom we can entrust however heavy missions on the battlefield.”[20]

The Commander of the 3th Călărași Regiment continued to note in the characterization of Constantin Apostol: “Major Apostol was under my command from November 1, 1944 – January 1, 1945”, when he commanded a division “with great seriousness in all the operations that continued in Transylvania; Tisa – Hungary”. He was remarked in various operations. Thus, “on Tisa river, his sector was best organized and defended”. As additional arguments, his superior pointed out that “during the inspection of the allied Russian commander, Apostol was mentioned as an example, for how well his sector was organized”. Furthermore, “in the Tisa crossing operations and the pursuit of the enemy”, the unit commanded by Major Apostol was noted in avant-garde operations, proving tact and courage. His unit, “trapped at the end of two hatchways” took control of a river and rejected the enemy over the water. The actions undertaken under the command of Constantin Apostol in Hungary “were among the most worthy”. His individual actions were also quite remarkable: “Only due to his personal spontaneous and energetic intervention the Squadron I was not removed from the dike they were defending.”

The conclusions of his superior are more than eloquent: “Any mission entrusted to Major Apostol, however tough, was led by him personally and ended with [...] courage and seriousness. Always in the middle of the soldiers, he prefers to command back in

advance, and to experience all situations on the battlefield. In all these operations, he is the only superior officer I have had and who has given me precious support in all the operations that the 3th Călărași Regiment has participated in. He is an extremely good superior officer and a perfect war officer.

His deeds of weapons and his conduct on the battlefield qualify him and I fully appreciate him as a superior, elite officer and an excellent war commander.

As soon as the officer meets the age-old conditions for advancement, the deeds of weapons on the front recommend him "to advance" [21].

The commander of the 8th Cavalry Division agreed with the eloquent note of the Regiment's commander on the activity of Major Apostol. Moreover, he regretted his "departure from the front", which occurred when the officer lost some of his brothers on the battlefield. The commander proposed Apostol to be promoted to lieutenant colonel "at choice" [22].

On January 1, 1945, Constantin Apostol returned from the front with the approval of the Major State. He resumed his activity as a horseriding instructor, as well as the courses of the Superior War School. At the same time, he was head of the S. S. R. and an Information Officer.

The Administrative Manager of the Superior War School depicted an eloquent characterization of Constantin Apostol for the period from January 1 to June 1, 1945: "when administrating the building damaged by air bombardment, he managed to renovate it and make it liveable again in minimum time, through a well-thought-out effort", and "as an informant, the officer remarked by informing me of everything that was happening in time and precisely, which enabled us to take combat measures in time." In addition, "the activity in the office was in perfect order". His entire activity was eulogistically appreciated, Major Apostol being one of the elite officers, that fully deserved to be advanced to grade [23].

In late 1945, Constantin Apostol was transferred to the Territorial Circle I from Buzău, where the fact that Major Apostol had participated in military operations was well-known: "He took part as a division commander in the battles against the Germans and Hungarians, when he proved a qualified commander and military fighter." His internship on the front had lasted for eight months, during which he had successfully

“fulfilled the assignments”, deeds for which he had been “eulogiously noted by his superiors in battles” and proposed to be promoted to Lieutenant Colonel” [24].

His hierarchs, Generals Codreanu and Mihail, commanders of the Superior War School, and General Băldescu, Commander of the 5th Territorial Corp, agreed with these characterizations and reached the same conclusion: Major Apostol was fully worthy to be advanced in rank [25].

To sum up, during the Second World War, Constantin Apostol actually participated in two military campaigns. The first lasted for almost six months, June 22 - November 3, 1941, on the Eastern Front up to Odessa, within the 5th Research Group, where he was the Group Comnadant. In the worksheet it was noted that “he did not take part in the battles against the partisans and the civilian population” [26]. The second campaign took place from August, 23 1944 to December, 28 1944, when Apostol fought in Ploiesti and on the Western Front, in Transylvania and Hungary, to the border of Czechoslovakia, within the 3rd Regiment Călărași Regiment, as a division commander. He was decorated with Victoria medal by the Soviet Union government [27].

On February 15, 1946, Constantin Apostol became a Lieutenant Colonel [28].

4. Conclusions

A military athlete, Constantin Apostol took active part in the military operations of the Second World War. He participated in two military campaigns, on the Eastern front and on the Western front respectively, during which he was appreciated and decorated. Between the two military campaigns he was responsible with administrative and horseriding training activities. Absolutely all his qualifying sheets were eulogistic, both in peacetime and in time of war. On the front, he behaved bravely, proved initiative, ability to find ingenious solutions on the spot, to get victories, and to give a personal example. After the political change of August 23, 1944, these deeds of weapons and merits on the Eastern front were overlooked, somewhat masked, or “cosmetized” in the new political context, as there was a risk for Apostol to be accused of having fought against the final and victorious ally, the Soviet Union. (It is a well-known fact that after August 23, 1944, the Soviet Union occupied the country, and became its actual master). This new situation was reflected in his qualifying sheets as well, as the superiors in charge

with writing characterizations, did not emphasize his deeds of bravery on the Eastern front in order to protect him.

During the war, Constantin Apostol became a major, and immediately after - a lieutenant colonel. The end of the transitional period from the parliamentary democratic regime to the totalitarian socialist one (1944-1947) also meant the end of the normal evolution of Constantin Apostol's career. Starting with 1948, his work was less and less appreciated, he was left in reserve, pursued and finally condemned. Even if, after his release from prison, he was partially and tacitly rehabilitated by his integration into sports horseriding activities, the career and glory of Constantin Apostol were destroyed and tainted in the final years of his life.

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