

The Social Consequences of the 1944
Anglo - American Bombing of Ploiești:
A Grassroots Perspective

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Abstract

During World War Two, the oil fields and refineries located around the city of Ploiești in southern Romania represented the most important source of fuel for Nazi Germany. This work will examine the social setup of Ploiești as it was at the beginning of the war, accounting for its demographic, economic and ethnic developments. For the period after Romania entered the war, the thesis will provide a micro-historical, grassroots account of the social impact of the 1942-1944 Anglo-American bombardments on the Ploiești city area.

The thesis will, therefore, explain how, while still a neutral state, Romania became a provider of fuel for Germany and will study the social and political mechanism that caused civil casualties. The evaluation of the Allies' military tactics with its distinct stages will concentrate on the options they had in choosing their bombing strategies. In conjunction with this, the thesis will assess the extent of the destruction inflicted on the city and its inhabitants. Local experience and the perception of the masses, its inertia and importance will constitute a significant part of the present study.

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INTRODUCTION

Starting from the latter half of the 19th century, when the bases for a Romanian oil industry were laid, the Romanian city of Ploiești underwent rapid urbanisation with incoming population consisting of internal migrants from the rural areas in what was an unprecedented demographic boom. The interwar policies aimed at industrial development led to the transformation of the region into a major oil extracting centre which ranked Romania second after the Soviet Union as a European oil producer and the sixth country worldwide with 2.2% of the total production.¹ Contrasting with the agrarian character of its economy, Romania possessed a developed refinery infrastructure composed of a chain of big refineries located in the Ploiești area. In addition to this, the country had a number of transport possibilities to export the oil or the refined products: roads, railways, maritime and fluvial routes (from Constanța, the main Romanian port on the Black Sea Coast and on the Danube).

In the period leading up to the war, the Romanian oil became a contentious issue between the Anglo-French powers, Nazi Germany and Romania. While designing his plans to conquer Europe, Hitler understood that Germany's lack of oil resources (in addition to the country's limited capacity of producing synthetic fuel) demanded the rapid acquisition of a major external source. Since Romania was located relatively close to Germany and in what the Nazi considered to be the hinterland of their country, Germany increased its pressure on the Bucharest authorities in order to obtain a better deal in the trade with Romania's oil products. At the end of the 1930s, Romania's oil industry was gradually monopolized by Germany through a series of economic treaties which ensured

¹ Ion Agrigoroaiei, "Industria extractivă între anii 1933 și 1940. Dezvoltare și modernizare," p.17 în *Festung Ploiești*, vol.1, Prunteuro, Ploiești, 2003

the dominance of German capital in the Romanian economy. These economic agreements were concluded in a delicate internal and international context. Romania was confronted with a double external problem due to the European political and military developments at the end of the 1930s. Nazi Germany expanded its territory and political influence towards Central Europe through the *Anschluss*, and later by destroying the Czechoslovak state, an ally of Romania. All these events happened within the context of the “appeasement” policy of the Anglo-French powers. Due to the external vulnerability caused by these new political and military developments, Romania started to make gradual economic concessions towards Germany.

During this time, England and France were still in the phase of processing the information and, later on, their actions were ineffective and failed to annihilate the growing German influence on Romania’s oil industry. Since part of the refineries were owned by Anglo-French companies, the two countries tried to use them in order to limit the quantity of oil exported by Romania to Germany by controlling the Romanian fuel market (by renting the means of transportation of oil to Germany or by increasing their own import of Romanian oil).² Since all these initiatives were unsuccessful, the problem of Romanian oil became on the eve, and at the beginning, of World War Two a central preoccupation of the British Intelligence services. Their intention was to destroy the refineries and oil exploitation in Ploiești by sabotages or to start a rebellion of the population in Romania that would make the Germans unable to exploit the oil. Another British project was to block the Danube (an important transportation route of the Romanian oil products towards Germany) by sinking a ship loaded with iron in a certain

² Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, Ploiești, 2003, p.65

section of the river.³ The rapid evolution of events and the counter-measures taken by the German and Romanian Intelligence services made the Special Operations Executive unable to put any of these plans into practice. However, Romanian authorities' constant fear of sabotages in the oil area had a major impact on the city of Ploiești, mostly on the Jewish minority, who was erroneously considered a potential danger in this respect and was removed from the area by virtue of state policies.

Romania's delicate geo-political position in Eastern Europe was deeply shaken after the country lost almost ¼ of its territory and millions of ethnic Romanians after the military aggression by the Soviet Union in June 1940. Following the occupation of the Baltic States and the defeat of Finland after an asymmetric war, the USSR attacked Romania, which was still a neutral country in 1940 with borders recognized by international treaties. After June 1940, when France disappeared as a political and military power, and after the Soviet aggression on Romania, the country's co-operation with Nazi Germany escalated. Germany was perceived as being the only European power that could help Romania to retain what was left of its territory after the Soviet military invasion. This process virtually transformed the Romanian oil industry into a war industry catering for the German military needs.

In this context the oil supplies located at Ploiești in southern Romania constituted vital targets for the Allies as they represented the most important source of fuel for the German war machine. The 1943-1944 Anglo-American bombing of Ploiești succeeded in destroying to a large extent the refineries and oil rigs in the region as well as inflicting significant damage on the city of Ploiești and its surroundings. As the thesis will show,

³ Ioan Chiper, "Petrolul românesc în planurile de sabotaj ale Special Operations Executive (Noiembrie 1940 – Ianuarie 1941)" in *Festung Ploiești*, vol. 1, Ploiești, 2003, p. 87.

this was caused by a combination of factors, which included the strength of the German – Romanian system of defences in the region, which made the Allied mission difficult; and the military approach of the Anglo-American forces which used two different tactics. After a failed attempt to damage the Ploiești refineries in 1942, the Allies designed a new plan to destroy them in 1943 by means of low-altitude air attack. Since the impact on the fixed target was rather minimal after the execution of the air raid, the damage caused by bombs was repaired in a few weeks and, due to the loss of about 1/3 of the Anglo-American planes, which participated to the mission, the Allies changed their bombing tactics in 1944. They deployed massive air squadrons, which conducted the attacks from a high altitude, outside the range of a big part of the artillery. This time their strategy paid off and the refineries of the Ploiești area were greatly affected as well as the transportation infrastructure.

The operation of systematic air strikes was instrumental in depriving Germany of an essential prop of its war economy and has so far been approached from the point of view of military and economic history by both Romanian and foreign authors. However, the social dimension of the 1944 air strikes constitutes a blind spot in the existing bibliography on the subject, given that most of it concentrates either on the macrohistorical importance of the bombardment or, at a human level, only on the personal experience of the American pilots who conducted the air raids and that of the Romanian defence pilots. This MA thesis seeks to cover this blind spot by analysing the deep impact of the bombing raids on the city of Ploiești from a social, demographical, ethnic and economic point of view. The massive destruction of the industrial infrastructure of Ploiești was one major consequence. The authorities sought to minimize the economic impact of the raids by an attempt to stop the centrifugal process of

migration of industrial workers back to the rural areas and the concurrent process of rural overpopulation. In enforcing measures to this effect, their treatment of the ethnic groups such as Romanians or Jews was programmatically different.

Most of the literature on the subject, such as the works of James Dugan and Carroll Stewart – both participants in the bombing operations on Ploiești as American pilots - concentrates either on the macrohistorical importance of the bombardment or, at a human level, only on the personal experience of the American pilots who conducted the military air operations. American authors concentrate on the way the missions were prepared and carried out and on the strategic importance of Romanian oil for the war's economy. As was to be expected, their focus was not on the victims on the ground or on the way the city of Ploiești was affected by the Allied bombing strategies, even if some data about these aspects are to be found in their works.

Among the Romanian authors who wrote on the subject, Horia Brestoiu focused on the military implications for the outcome of the war and dwelt on the intricate pattern of interests and influences that shaped the strategy of attack and defence for this particular operation. His book *Impact la Paralela 45 - Incursiune în culisele bătăliei pentru petrolul românesc* (Impact on the 45th Parallel – A foray into the backstage of the battle for Romanian oil), Junimea, Iași, 1986, was one of the first and most notable attempts to tackle the subject for the Romanian public.

In 1993 the first edition of an important work on the subject was published under the title *Războiul petrolului la Ploiești / The Oil War at Ploiești* by Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, and Iulia Stănescu. In 2001 Gavriil Preda's excellent book *Importanța strategică a petrolului românesc 1939-1947* (The Strategic Importance of Romanian Oil) came into print. These authors were preoccupied, to an equal extent, with the military-

strategic side of the operation and paid special attention to the fate of the Romanian defense forces and the economic effects of the bombings. Their works do touch on some of the general social effects but their studies are mostly on the military side of events. The other smaller scale studies such as the articles published in *Festung Ploiești*, the two-volume collection of studies about the Anglo-American bombing campaign on the Ploiești oilfields and refineries also dealt mostly with the military-strategic aspects and rather marginally with subjects such as society and imagology and the general social effects of these bombardments.

However, their works address. By contrast, the present thesis will offer a systematic account of the social impact of the bombardments.

The impact of these bombing campaigns constitutes one of the focus points of my research: the consequences of these air raids on the city and the social life of Ploiești, that is, the disruption caused by the destruction of a significant part of the buildings and by the measures taken by the Romanian authorities. The Jews of Ploiești were the largest minority of the city and represented an important component of the local middle classes. Their historic destiny and their great sufferance, constitutes another research objective of my thesis.

The thesis will provide a micro-historical, grassroots account of the social impact of the 1944 Anglo-American bombardment of Ploiești. It will employ the available historical literature and personal testimonies and memories corroborated with official input from Gendarmerie and *Prefectura* local reports, as well as studies made in the 1940's by the Romanian military experts or transcripts of the Anglo-American prisoners interrogatories. I will also assess the extent of the damage inflicted on the Ploiești region

on the basis of the reports of the Statistical Department of the General Command in Bucharest addressed to the Foreign Ministry after the war.

I will focus, in particular, on the social experience of the population. One of the ethnic groups singled out is the Jewish community, who played an important role in the economic life of the area and was subjected to a double pressure, that of the rampant anti-Semitism of interwar and war-time Romania, and that of the war itself that caused the partial destruction of their living space.

The thesis will also explore in details the connection between military air operations and the civil casualties. The bombing tactics of the Anglo-American forces was changed as a result of the interaction with the strong German-Romanian defensive system of Ploiești area. This change of military approach coming from the Allied high commandment had disastrous social consequences .

The present study will examine the psychological impact of the bombings on the local population during this period. The pre-existent psychological foundation of the Romanian people regarding their perception of the enemy, the press and the dissemination of manifestos during the air missions of the Allies were all dynamic components of the public morale and mentality. The leaflets dropped by the American pilots in the Ploiești area carried messages formulated in such a way that everyone could understand them. Their main purpose was to instigate the Romanian population to rebel against the Germans. To what extent these actions were successful in changing the behaviour of the population and what was the impact of these psychological actions on the morale of the Romanians? To answer this question, I will examine the reflection of these events in the leading Romanian newspapers of the time, *Universul* and *Timpul*. While these articles contain relevant information as well as the official message conveyed

by the Antonescu regime, the accuracy of such accounts must be taken with a pinch of salt, since the Romanian press was, at that time, subject to censorship. Directly connected with the population's morale is the Romanians' perception of the enemy, of "the Other". This image had been shaped generally long before the war and may explain the paradox underlying the perception of the enemy: the German ally was perceived as being "the bad guy" while the American aggressor was considered "the good guy". As the thesis will discuss, this is to be traced back to the pre-existing imagological perspective in Romanian society.

The management of the crisis generated by the Allied bombardments on the Ploiești area will be another direction of research. The questions that arise in this connection are: to what extent was Romania prepared to cope with a situation of such dimensions and amplitude? What were the measures that were taken by the state's authorities in order to protect the population and the local economy of the Ploiești area? The answer for each of these problems requires the study of the efficiency of the measures introduced by the authorities. Additionally, it is important to analyze the reaction of the local population during the actual events and to measure it against the available defence capabilities.

The structure of the thesis will be as follows:

The introduction section will discuss the historical background which shaped the political and then military status of Romania in the turmoil years from the end of the 1930s and up to 1941. This chapter will moreover study the importance of the Romanian oil fields and refineries of Ploiești in the context of the war. The objectives of the thesis will be presented in a direct correlation with the analyses offered by secondary literature.

Following this introduction into the subject, the first chapter, “The socio-economic configuration of Ploiești before World War Two” will discuss the social setup of Ploiești as it was in the interwar period. The chapter will emphasize the demography of the city, its ethnic structure and economic activities.

The second chapter, “The German-Romanian defence and Allied air strikes on the Ploiești area between 1941 and 1944” will cover the main problems raised by the Allied bombing campaign. It will evaluate the defensive strategies and measures taken by the Romanian authorities, their importance for the social-economic life of the city inhabitants. The other element of the study, the Allied massive air strikes campaign will be discussed in terms of strategy, execution and impact.

The last chapter of the thesis will deal with the mass morale and the image of the enemy in the context of the Allied bombing campaign. In this section I will be analyze the importance of the public morale and perception for the political and military developments in which Romania was engaged and also the main factors that shaped the imagology of the masses regarding their enemies and allies.

The conclusions of the thesis will highlight the main findings and will be followed by the appendices section, which will include copies of several relevant archival documents, graphs, photos, posters and Allied manifestos.

Theoretical framework

For the purposes of the present thesis I intend to employ a comparative framework which will position the Romanian case in a wider European context. To this end and given the unavoidable limitation created by the availability of English language materials for different countries, the comparison will be confined to Nazi Germany. Given the richness of secondary literature about the Allied bombardments on Germany, the thesis will introduce a comparative perspective between the particularities of the Anglo-American operations against the Romanian oil and refinery area of Ploiești and other cases of industrial cities heavily bombarded by the Allied forces in Germany. The main directions of comparison will be the extent of damage inflicted upon the city as a military target, the way the German as well as Romanian authorities undertook defensive measures against the threat and the population's reactions.

The thesis will, moreover, examine the social and economic impact of the bombardments as reflected in the demography of Ploiești, that is, it will assess, on the basis of a comparative reading of contemporary statistics and census data, to what extent there was a population exodus triggered by the bombings and what was its importance regarding the economic role of Ploiești.

The comparative method is lacking in Romanian secondary literature on the subject, which has only occasionally dealt with the German case in the context of the bombing of Romanian targets.

The air war had a huge impact in Nazi Germany, where the damage inflicted on industrial and civilian objects was far greater. Of course, its importance is different in terms of scale and effects. As Alan J. Levine mentioned in his book – “The Strategic

Bombing of Germany”, the Allied bombing campaign on Nazi Germany was one of the most complex, destructive and controversial aspects of the World War Two.⁴ Given the scale of the destruction, several authors argued that when this reached a critical point, transforming whole cities into packs of rubble and inflicting heavy casualties, the accounts of survivors were not longer reliable. Their main point is that the human brain is not able to process a total change of the exterior environment and will therefore misinterpret the destruction of the city or will repress it. According to this theory, the whole “literature of the ruins” is therefore lacking in accuracy because it is founded on individual and collective amnesia triggered by self-censorship as a way of tackling a world that is not presenting itself anymore in acceptable or comprehensible terms.⁵ A similar approach is the sensorial perception theory, which aims to offer an explanation for the same effect not from a psychological perspective but rather from a physical one. According to this theory, the amnesia of many of the victims of air bombardment is caused by the acoustic and pressure shockwaves generated by the explosion of blockbusters. Their physical incidence deeply affected the neural system of the survivors and their psychological condition, dilating time perceived by them. In the case of Ploiești, all these complex psycho-sensorial theories were not confronted up to the present days with the social effects inflicted by the heavy air bombardments on the city and its surroundings. This still remains an open subject for the researchers.

The operative words in Sebald’s analysis are perception and comprehension. Sebald quotes Hans Erich Nossack’s account of the destruction of Hamburg as emblematic of the unreliable character of eye witness accounts: “In the first few days you

⁴ Alan J. Levine, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany*, London, 1992, p.1

⁵ W. G. Sebald, “Air War and Literature (Zurich lectures)” in *On the Natural History of Destruction*, New York, 2003, p.10

could get no definite information. The details of stories were never accurate”.⁶ This approach points out the diverging experiences of survivors and the sensorial and psychological perception of the people caught in the bombed cities.

The psychological shock of losing everyone and everything from your family to your neighborhood is a defensible argument in support of the statement that such survivors would not be able to offer an accurate description of what happened to them and to their communities. However, the question remains how could such a tragic experience shared by a certain number of individuals be extrapolated and generalized to a whole nation?

Another issue debated after the war was the way the destruction of the city became part of national consciousness. For pre-1989 Romanian historiography, the Allied bombardments on Romania and especially on the Ploiești area were scarcely covered by the historical literature. However, the few works dedicated to the subject, which appeared mostly in the seventies and eighties, covered mostly the macro-historical dimension dominated by the interests of the main actors of the war. The social consequences remained generally in the shadow since they represented an effect of Romania’s engagement in an “unwanted” aggression war with the “great neighbor and friend”, the Soviet Union.

The main purpose of these works published under Communism was to examine the impact of these raids on the economy of the area and the intricate pattern of the diplomatic and military relations of the Great Powers concerning the oil issue with Romania constantly playing the role of the victim.

⁶ Hans Erich Nossack, *The End: Hamburg 1943*, Chicago, 2004, p. 213.

After the fall of communism, Eugen Stanescu, Gavriil Preda and a few other authors published several books about Allied operations in the Romanian oil and refinery region. The main novelty brought by this new historical literature to the old Romanian historiographical view of the subject is the strong emphasis on the military dimension and the technical/logistical means employed by all sides, including the Romanian army, offering a comprehensive view of the military operations in a systematic manner. Thus, in these works, what was considered before 1989 as the war of the great powers became now the war of the Romanians with the great military powers involved in World War Two.

Compared to its German counterpart, Romanian historiography tackled the massive destruction caused by the Allied air raids to a much smaller degree. Therefore in Romania there were no theoretical debates regarding the research methods employed in studying this subject or the relevancy of the personal testimonies or various sources. A common theme, however, between German and Romanian historiography on the bombardments, and also the common source of the inherent reluctance to deal with the subject in the first place, remained the question of how the bombing campaign could be strategically or morally justified. For reasons different from those in Federal Germany, in Romania this issue was not the subject of an open debate either. For the Romanians this had to do mostly with a political attitude as the whole national history was rewritten from above while for the Germans the reticence to discuss the subject publicly was caused by conflicting sentiments, interests and memories. Another reason for the relative literary silence of the Germans on the subject is that German writers, and others also, may have had the impression that this destruction was an instance of divine punishment, a tacit belief which formed the basis for a Freudian process of repression. Sebald points out that

German society “developed an almost perfectly functioning mechanism of repression”⁷, which blocked the legitimacy of the German claim for victim status. He suggests that the failure of the war generation to respond by literary means to the actions of the Allies may have been an implicit acceptance of their own guilt, thus seeing their own destruction as “just punishment” in retribution for the crimes perpetrated by the Germans under Hitler’s reign of terror.

After the war, Germany’s urban centers were inhabited by a traumatized population deeply shaken by the recent events. As victims mingled with perpetrators and as locals mixed with refugees, conflicting emotions – ranging from anger and denial to shame and ambivalence – collided amidst the rubble and ruins of the postwar cities. For German post-war society, this was what George Simmel calls “the psychological foundation” upon which the metropolitan individuality was erected, due to the intensification of the emotional life based on the internal and external stimuli.⁸ By extrapolating this analysis to the Romanian case, the question to be raised is: was the “psychological foundation” for the Romanian cities affected by the heavy bombardments? In the third chapter of this thesis which will discuss about the mass morale and the image of the enemy, I will give an answer to this question.

The German-Romanian comparison is extremely useful from an imagological perspective, not just in terms of statistics, damage inflicted, success or failure. The perspective of the enemy, of the “Other”, varied considerably from the German to the Romanian case. The American soldiers, who had the mission to erase with bombs the refineries of Ploiești were viewed in a positive light both at the time by many of the the

⁷ Sebald, p. 12

⁸ Georg Simmel, “Metropolis and Mental Life”, in Donald Levine (ed.) *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago, 1971, p.325

survivors and later on in the Romanian studies about the bombardments. Contemporary accounts and later historic contributions stressed in particular their courage in approaching a city which was better defended than Berlin, hence the name of “Festung Ploiesti” given to it by the Germans. Such sympathy toward the air-war aggressors is non-existent in German literature. On the contrary, authors like Jörg Friedrich in *The Fire* conveyed the idea that the air war pursued by Anglo-American forces failed to trigger a German rebellion and thus to overthrow the Nazi regime, instead they made the Germans homeless, starved and humiliated them, which rendered them more dependent than ever on the Nazi regime.

Neither was the Antonescu regime removed from power by a revolution but that was owing to a different background, as reflected in historical works such as Dinu C. Giurescu’s *Romania in World War Two*, and had more to do with the Bessarabian question than with the air war on Ploiești and Bucharest.

The dimension of destruction was, moreover, far greater in the German case and was, therefore, reflected differently in the literature. In some German books such as Jörg Friedrich’s *The Fire* or Hans Erich Nossack’s *The End. Hamburg 1943* the emphasis fell on what was considered as the deep irrationality of the air attacks and on a descriptive account of the facets of destruction. *The Fire* aims to demonstrate that the whole Allied conception of the air operations in Germany was centered around the idea of the total destruction of the German city including not just its military potential but its whole civilian population. For example, the fire storm phenomenon was the result of Allied military tactics based on a study of the flammability of the German city and the use of

certain types of ammunition, incendiary devices and bombing strategies in order to spread the fire.⁹

Romanian historians have taken a more moderate approach basing their conclusions on the analysis conducted in the 1940s by Romanian military experts, who evaluated the way the American and British forces executed the bombardments on Romanian territory. In these reports, cases are mentioned when the bombardments did not aim at military targets but rather at random destruction. When addressing the social dimension of the air war, the books published in Romania after the fall of communism emphasized the frequent difficulty of the Anglo-American planes to drop their bombs with accuracy as the solid defense artillery fire forced them to fly at, and drop their bombs from, a high altitude (usually above 7000 m) as part of a “carpet bombing” strategy.

From among the above-mentioned approaches to the subject I have chosen to use the comparative perspective at the macro level, which places the Ploiești bombardments in a wider historical context and compares the aspects of this bombing campaign with the more notorious German case. Given the lack of secondary literature with such a comparative framework, this thesis will try to make up for this and to place particular emphasis on primary sources related to Romania and on secondary ones about Germany.

⁹ Jorg Friedrich, *The fire. The bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*, New York, 2006, p.9

CHAPTER 1: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONFIGURATION OF PLOIEȘTI BEFORE WORLD WAR TWO

The social impact of the Anglo-American bombardments on the Romanian oil fields area cannot be understood in its real dimension without a close account of the social setup, with a particular emphasis on the Ploiești city. This chapter attempts to describe the local social-economic background against which the Allied air strikes were conducted. It will first discuss the link between industrialization and demography by highlighting the great importance of the oil factor in the development of the city. The analysis will concentrate on the exponents of this important urban development, such as the immigrants from the other areas of Romania. In this chapter, one of the research interests will be the structure of the oil industry and its interaction with the labour market in Ploiești and with other economic or administrative activities of the city. The second part of this chapter will study the largest ethnic and religious minority of Ploiești, the Jews, their role in the city and their tragic historic destiny during World War Two.

At the moment of the bombardments, Ploiești was a city with a booming development, a busy social life and a constant demographical growth as was recorded by the census data. Since the formation of the Romanian state in 1859, when the first census was made here, the population grew from 26,468 people to 77,341 in 1930 (living in about 12,419 buildings) and almost 90,000 inhabitants in 1941. On the whole, during this period the population of Ploiești grew faster than that of other urban centers of the Old Kingdom. This impressive demographic increase was not due to the natural growth as

expressed by the positive balance between new born and deceased. In the case of Ploiești, the increase in the number of its population was given by massive immigration from other areas of the country, mostly from rural areas. The explanation for this phenomenon is an economic one. Romania was confronted from the beginning of its existence as a state, and even more so during the first half of the twentieth century (up to the reforms of the communist regime implemented at the end of the 1940s) with a huge rural overpopulation. This affected the penetration of machinery into Romanian agriculture, whose productivity remained low. Many peasant families encountered serious financial problems and sought to find a better life in the city, which, given its economic potential, offered more opportunities.¹⁰

This demographical dynamics reflects another dimension of the city's evolution: its powerful industrialization, an aspect that brought progress for its inhabitants but also transformed it in a strategic target for the Allied air forces.

Between 1912 and 1930, when censuses were held, the population of Ploiești increased by 11.9% due to natural growth and by 88.1% due to immigration from other places of the country. The census data of 1930 recorded that in that year only 54.4% of the population was born in Ploiești, the rest being represented by new comers.¹¹ The figures show that, of the 2,589 industrial enterprises, with work force amounting to about 18,456, 434 (representing 16.8%) were created before 1914.

The main trigger of demographic boom and economic growth was the oil industry with its extraction facilities, industrial installations for oil processing and nevertheless

¹⁰ Mihail Sevastos, *Monografia orașului Ploiești*, București, 1937, p.243

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 245

with a strong transportation infrastructure. This industry was created by massive influx of foreign, alongside Romanian, capital. The figures for 1938 showed the level of this input: Romanian capital represented 26.16%; English capital, 20.62%; Anglo-Dutch capital, 16.2%, American capital 10%, Belgian, 6.44%; Italian, 3.47%; while the German capital represented 0.38%, and other sources of capital, 0.57.¹² At the end of the 1930s, according to the former mayor of the city, Mihail Sevastos, in the area functioned 15 refineries.¹³

Among these immigrants, the great majority were coming from other places in the Prahova County. During the air-bombardments of Ploiești, a large part of them and their families returned in the rural areas where they came from. Muntenia and Dobrogea figure among the historical provinces that most contributed to this population influx to Ploiești, while the smallest number of immigrants came from Bessarabia. About 2.7% of the total population were foreigners. Their presence was owing to the industrial activity, which required skilled workers. They also constituted the staff of the foreign companies which invested in Ploiești. The majority of the population were ethnic Romanians, who were culturally dominant in the city in relation to the other minorities, as several types of data confirm. From the point of view of religion, for example, the highest number were the Orthodox (87.5%) followed by the representatives of the Jewish faith (5.0%) and the Roman Catholics (3.4%). The majority of the people asked by the census workers what their the native language was, 71,183 (92.0% of the population), declared Romanian, 1,466 Hungarian, 1,302 German, 955 Yiddish, 614 Romani (Gypsy) and 1,821 other

¹² Ion Agrigoroaiei, *Industria extractivă între anii 1933 și 1940. Dezvoltare și modernizare*, p.21

¹³ This figure differs from that stated in Eugen Stănescu's study of the war-time period, where only 11 were listed as being in function, see Stănescu, *Războiul petrolului de la Ploiești*, p. 159.

languages. These figures show that in the city of Ploiești there were more native speakers of Romanian than the number of individuals that declared themselves Romanians. Among the other ethnic clusters, only 25% of the Jews used Yiddish and just 58% of the Gypsies spoke Romani.¹⁴

The natural growth of the city's population (the difference between births and deaths) had and a significant contribution to the growth of the total number of the population. However, natural growth took second place in terms of importance since the main element that determined the demographic boost here were the immigrants from other regions of the country and also from abroad. Indeed, between 1899 and 1912, the natural increase of the population represented 40.8% of the total demographic growth of Ploiești. During 1912–1930, the proportion of the natural growth corresponded to only 11.9% of the total growth of the population.¹⁵ The natural increase of the population here reached the highest level at the beginning of the 1920s, in the wake of the catastrophic demographical decrease between 1916 -1919. Towards the 1930s the natural growth started to decrease faster than the decrease of the mortality rate. In this respect, the destruction by the Allied air strikes of the economic infrastructure of the city in 1944 diminished greatly its further demographic growth.

The personnel employed in the oil industry amounted to 18,500 people in 1940. This figure indicates an increase of 7% following the precedent year but a severe decrease since 1929 when their total number was 30,170. Romanians represented the majority among workers, out of whom only 0.7% were foreigners. The workers were

¹⁴ Sevastos, p.260

¹⁵ Ibid, p.337

confronted by hardships at the beginning of the 1940s due to the economic upheaval characterized by a sharp increase in the consumer goods' prices. From the statistical data provided by the refineries, in September 1939 the average salary of the refineries industrial workers increased by 60% while the prices for basic food by 600%. This economic situation made the oil companies introduce the quota system which guaranteed a minimum of food for every worker. The economic crisis was made worse by the 1940 earthquake (7.4 on the Richter scale), which had significant effects on the urbanism of Ploiești.¹⁶ After this seism, the oil companies covered 40% of the expenses needed in the rebuilding of the affected zones. Once again, the income that came from this activity and determined the development of Ploiești contributed greatly to its revival.

Towards the end of the thirties and the beginning of the forties, Nazi Germany succeeded in transforming the Romanian oil industry into a war industry catering to a great extent for Hitler's military needs. For the refinery area of Ploiești, this meant the infiltration of the Germans in the economic activities, as the foreign capital became predominantly German. The defence of the refineries was undertaken by German soldiers. For them were allocated accommodation facilities inside the industrial area and the Romanian staff systematically attended German language courses.

Romania's economic problems at the beginning of the war represented a risk factor for the oil industry. The authorities feared that the discontented workers may be influenced by the communist ideas and, on this ground, sabotages will occur. Food shortage worsened after the 30th of August 1940, when numerous refugees from northern Transylvania came to Ploiești (where some of them had relatives or found employment).

¹⁶ Gheorghe Calcan, *Aspecte ale evoluției industriei petroliere românești în preajma integrării României în operațiunile celui de-al doilea război mondial*, Ploiești, 2003, p.45

The decrease of the life standard, especially for the officers of Romanian army, was considered in the analysis written at that time as another important risk factor. The spread of discontent among the military personnel of the Romanian units in Ploiești could have disastrous consequences on the effectiveness of the defensive.¹⁷

At the end of 1940 a decree was adopted for the militarization of civil and state institutions. By this measure, the Romanian authorities looked to made effective the functioning of local administration and also to keep a minimal economic life of Ploiești with a central military command and under permanent bombardments. According to this law, any institution could be militarized if the economic interest of Romania required it. Militarization presupposed the introduction of an entire system of control and discipline specific to the army while the civilians employed became mobilized. The lives of these people and their families were greatly disrupted by the air war, which affected the city as a whole and, implicitly, their work places, the refineries. Many of them were ordered to continue the industrial activities day and night facing death every time an Allied raid took place. They were subject to war legislation and the activities of the refineries were militarized. The workers' families were affected by the events in that many of them lost their houses and were forced by the imminent danger to flee from the city for a long time or at least during the day time.

Until 1921 all these industrial installations were outside the city's jurisdiction and could not contribute to the local budget. The local activities and the trade were not strong enough in financial terms to form through their taxes a solid economic base for further development. Lack of money was the main reason for which the local authorities in

¹⁷ Dana Beldiman, *Valea Prahovei 1940-1941. Factori de risc*, in *Festung Ploiești*, vol. 1, Ploiești, 2003, p.71

Ploiești did not find an effective way up to the end of the First World War in order to improve the infrastructure of the city. However, in 1921 a law was passed that enlarged the city's perimeter embedding inside it all the refineries and the nearby factories.¹⁸ This was the turning point for the total transformation of the city. In the years that followed, the oil industry had a huge social impact since a lot of economic and cultural fields depended on the capital it provided as taxes to the local budget. Between 1922 and 1934 there were built in Ploiești schools, hospitals, roads, buildings of public interest and other elements of infrastructure.

Moreover, Ploiești was planned to become even stronger from an industrial point of view since the economic experts considered this a solution to make its economy more effective. Starting from the late 1920s, in Ploiești the natural gas extracted together with the oil was used on a large scale in the area by various commercial enterprises. Therefore, the role of the natural resources of the area was even higher as the dependence of the whole social and economic life of the city relied on them to a large extent. All the new industries (such as glass, iron, and textiles) of Ploiești used natural gas extracted locally. The refineries of Ploiești processed in fact not just the oil coming from the numerous exploitations of Prahova county but most of the oil extracted in Dâmbovița county.¹⁹ However, the exploitation of the gas resources of the area was not efficient. An important amount of the natural gases was constantly lost because the industrial installations to use them were insufficient. The solution offered by the economic specialists was a plan for the increase of the industrial capacity.²⁰ This way Ploiești was supposed to become an even more dynamic and larger city.

¹⁸ Sevastos, p. 656

¹⁹ Sevastos, p.657

²⁰ Agrigoroaiei, p.19

Ploiești was a city that also encountered rapid modernization because the state and the private owners invested important amounts of money in different infrastructure projects. The sewerage municipal system was inaugurated in 1928 while public lighting was improved by attracting money from the local middle class. The city's authorities spent between the end of the First World War and to the middle of the 1930s significant amounts of money on building roads, sidewalks and public buildings (around 1.7 million American dollars at the exchange rate of 1929).²¹ The city had a large income due to the presence of the 11 oil refineries and oil fields around it. The total contribution per year of these refineries to the local budget was of 100,000 lei. Including the rest of the incomes of the city, the yearly budget of Ploiești amounted to 250,000,000 lei / year (approximately 1.5 million American dollars per year, at the currency rate of 1929).

By these improvements, in few years, the periphery of the city, inhabited by thousands of workers, received running water, electricity, side-walks and roads paved with stone. Ploiești had a small aerodrome, which had mostly a military role. In 1937, the mayor of the city, Al. Manoliu stated that: "Special attention was given to the problem of air war defensive by setting up artillery units and fighter planes squadrons as, should a war break out, the industrial potential of Ploiești, a city surrounded by factories and refineries, will make it the first objective of the enemy".²²

There were taken administrative measures that were useful during peace time but which increased the chances for a high rate of casualties in case of an air war. For example, the Ploiești authorities took as a development model the British one, following the English law in regard to the total number of houses per hectare, the density of the

²¹ Sevastos, p.475, to see also '*Raport leu-dolar înainte de război*'; <http://www.itcnet.ro/history/archive/mi2000/current2/mi43.htm>

²² Sevastos, p.589

population and so forth. It was considered that Ploiești became too spread out while the density of its population was too low and, as such, not efficient in economic terms. The authorities believed that this reality would determine the investment of too much money for the comfort of too few people (roads, electricity, plumbing). This was considered by the local urban planners as a setback factor so that their future project was to increase the density of the population inside the railway ring surrounding the city. It was also considered that the city needed more inhabitants because they were important as tax payers to the local budget. The main purpose of such an urban development strategy was to increase the efficiency of all the actions promoted by the mayoralty.²³

At the end of the interwar period, Ploiești had a single suburban commune, Ploieștiori. Part of the Ploieștiori inhabitants worked in the oil refineries of Ploiești. This situation gave their families a certain advantage during the war time since they had where to go. It remains still an open question how many of them returned during war time to the rural areas surrounding the city.

Ploiești had an important number of employees in the down-town area as workers in the various institutions existing there, which may explain to some extent the casualties resulted after the bombardments. The census data of 1930 reveals a dynamic Ploiești engaged in significant administrative and public activities. About 1/6 of the whole active population of the city had jobs in public institutions. The city was the capital of Prahova County and there the headquarters of several institutions were located such as the local railroads administration, or the administration of the state's domains. Ploiești had a busy city life, with a lot of office workers, lawyers, doctors and other representatives of liberal

²³ Ibid, p. 626

professions. According to the census data, the number of the people employed in the public sector of Ploiești exceeded the number of those working in the oil industry. Other types of professions were in the paper and printing industry, trade, the manufacturing and the metallurgical industries. Trade was mostly dependent on the success of the chemical industry and was boosted by the great traffic of foreigners coming to the city. The Romanian Jews were strongly involved in trading as they constituted an important segment of the local middle class.

Regarding this social and economic dynamics, one can raise the following question: to what extent did this activity continue during the war time, when hundreds to tons of bombs were dropped on the city? According to the estimation of Laura Cristina Geală, about 85% of the Ploiești inhabitants fled from the city after the wave of bombardments of April 1944²⁴. Eugen Stanescu also supports this theory and points out that the majority of the Ploiești inhabitants had left the city when the new bombing campaign began. The authorities kept in the city only the essential administrative services and their staff.

The people affected by the air-war belonged to different ethnic backgrounds while the professional structure of Ploiești registered different percentages from an ethnic group to another. This distribution of ethnicity varied also for different professions, as the statistic data of the 1930 census shows. For the most part, the Romanians had high percentages of participation in transport and agriculture (more than 95%). The wood industry had also a predominantly Romanian participation as well as the public administration (where ethnic

²⁴ Laura Cristina Geală, *Istoricul comunității evreilor din Ploiești*, București, 2008, p. 282

Romanians represented 90.5%).²⁵ The figures show that this ethnic group had a tendency towards the non-economic activities (a situation that might be explained by the socio-economic background of the typical Romanian family, which did not possess a large amount of capital). The lowest participation of the Romanian element, by comparison with its total number of individuals in the city, was in the credit and trade business and in the oil industry. The last had 84.9% Romanians but the capital was foreign for the most part. The oil industry engaged a lot of foreign capital and to a much smaller proportion staff and specialists who would handle the various industrial equipments and discharged the specialized tasks. The Germans and the Hungarians in Ploiești were mostly involved in industrial activities. About 34.6% of the Jews in the city were merchants, the rest of them engaging in banking, the liberal professions, medicine or in other industrial activities.

In Ploiești, the illiteracy rate was higher in those professions for which the Romanian element was predominant such as agriculture, the constructions industry or the metallurgical industry. In other economic fields, where the Romanians proportion was lower, so was the illiteracy rate.²⁶

Ploiești was to become a target of the Allied bombardments not just for the fuel provided by the oil industry to the Nazi war machine but also as a source of military equipments and weaponry. The oil society Concordia in Ploiești had a metallurgic department, which produced, among other things, military technology from ammunition and guns to whole hangars for Romanian aircraft.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, p.278

²⁶ Sevastos, p.282

²⁷ Calcan, p.37

1.1 Jews and anti-Semitic policies in Ploiești

The data above refers to the entire population of Ploiești, which was composed of ethnic Romanians in its majority. However, according to the census data of 1930, the city had a significant number of minorities. From a total population of 77,341, the Romanians were 67,364 (87%), the Jews, 3,741 (4.8 %), the Hungarians, 1,576 (2.0 %), the Germans, 1,314 (1.6%), Gypsy, 1,045 (1.3 %) and other smaller ethnic groups.²⁸ In 1940s, the total number of inhabitants of Ploiești grew to about 90,000 and, according to some estimations, the second largest ethnic group were the Jews, with almost 10,000 souls living in the city.²⁹ The Jews played a central role in the economic and commercial life of Ploiești and also in key professions such as medicine. They were the largest minority in Ploiești and an important segment of the local middle class. Therefore, in the next pages I will analyze the historic predicament of the Ploiești Jewry in the shallow waters of the World War Two.

The Ploiești Jews were subjected to the general anti-Semitic policies of the Romanian state as well as to separate, more local-oriented policies stemming from the authorities' fear of espionage and sabotages against Romania's interests in the oil fields area. The Ploiești oil center and the surrounding territory of the Prahova Valley having become a strategic zone, the foreigners and the Romanian citizens of a different ethnic origin were evacuated while German troops stepped in starting with the autumn of 1940.

The Antonescu government applied systematically a strong anti-Semitic policy during a regime of military dictatorship and many historians consider today that the death

²⁸ Sevastos, p.259

²⁹ Geală, *Istoricul cultului mozaic din Ploiești*, Ploiești, 2004, p.21

or survival of the Jews from Romania during this period was owing to the decisions taken by him³⁰. From the beginning of his rule, Ion Antonescu aimed to “purify” and “homogenize” Romania’s population and consequently set about organizing the deportation of the Jews.

The disappearance of France as a political and military force in Europe and the Soviet Union’s massive attack on Romania in June 1940 shattered the last chance for Romania to keep a more balanced attitude towards the main European events. As Nazi Germany seemed for the Romanian authorities the only country able to protect Romania in the face of the growing Soviet threat, which was confirmed in June 1940, the drive towards anti-Semitism became even more abrupt, and saw the continuation of the policies adopted under the Goga and Gigurtu governments. Other important causes derive from the character of the state, a military dictatorship, ruled by a single political force, that is, Marshal Ion Antonescu. His blatant anti-Semitic beliefs combined with the lack of any other relevant institution to stop him, a young king devoid of actual power, to which was added Antonescu’s ambivalence and the bureaucracy of the state. All these shaped the evolution of events in Romania during 1940-1944. With the accession of Ion Antonescu and the Iron Guard to power and the proclamation of a National Legionary State on 14 September 1940, new and strong Anti-Semitic measures were adopted and systematically implemented.

Under the Antonescu regime, each law incorporated a separate article on the definition of a Jew and the norm differed from one law to another. By defining Jewishness in various laws, the Romanian regime confirmed its political racism, which took the form of anti-Jewish legislation. Jews were not judged for what they did, but for

³⁰ Lya Benjamin, *Prigoană și rezistență în istoria evreilor din România 1940-1944*, București, 2001, p.127.

what they were considered to be. Jewishness itself was legally the equivalent of inferiority and belonging to it was considered a crime.

The military status of the Jews was changed by a decree given on 5 December 1940, which excepted Jews from military service but forced them to pay military taxes and to do community work according as required by the state authorities. Throughout the time Romania was at war under Antonescu's rule, many Jews were required to perform community work. Through another decree, on 14 July 1941, Jewish males aged between 18 and 50 could be used only by the army general staff individually or in groups for community labor (later known as forced labor) chosen by the army or by other state institutions (according to Matatias Carp, their number in the course of three years was around 150,000).³¹

In this context, about 1,172 male Jews from Ploiești were interned in the Teiș camp, in Dâmbovița County. The process continued over the next period with further dislocations, including not just the males but also other members of their families. Among these people, the ones that were not sent to forced labor-camps were asked to leave the city and to settle in rural areas, away of the oil field area. It is probably reasonable to believe that many families decided to leave the city prior to this decision in order to avoid repression.

In 1943, when the "Tidalwave" operation was conducted on Ploiești, 1,200 Jews were left in the city. The prefect Gheorghe Bartolomeu mentioned in a report the fact that

³¹ Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania. Facts and documents on the annihilation of Romania's Jews, 1940-1944*, Safety Harbor, 2000, p.48

among them only 99 were considered as useful as they were “merchants or specialists”. At the end of the war, the total number of Ploiești Jewry was of 760.³²

The irrationality of this policy was gradually understood by the state’s authorities. Initially, Ion Antonescu was informed on 18 July 1941 that 1,165 young Jews had been rounded up in Ploiești and interned in the Teiș camp in Dâmbovița County. He gave the order that, if any of them ran away, ‘one in ten should be shot’ and should they fail to work well, they should not receive food. This order was applied ‘to all camps with Jews and prisoners’ even if several of the Jews in Teiș camp were veterans of the First World War. Moreover, these people were between the age of 50 and 60 and, according to the law, they should have been exempted from the requirement to perform obligatory work. The fact that the bureaucratic system of the state failed to respect the laws regarding the Romanian Jews was demonstrated when thirteen such veterans petitioned the Minister of the Interior for their liberation and, on this basis, their request was later granted. Such decisions were also made after an investigation made by the Ministry examining the status of the Jews. At the intervention of I. Popescu (state secretary in the Ministry of Internal Affairs), the prefect of Dambovita county sent the Jews over 50 years old back to Ploiești and the rest of them in other forced labor camps at Gaiesti (Dambovita county), where they were thought to be more useful.

Ion Antonescu’s order to intern the Jews in camps was considered by his inferiors as being impractical. On 23 July 1941, the Ministry of Defense asked the Ministry of Internal Affairs to explain why so many Jewish cobblers and tailors were being held in labor camps when they were needed in the army’s workshops under the compulsory labor

³² Geală, pp.236-237

scheme. There they were expected to increase the production of boots and uniforms for the army.

The examination commission recommended that 1,225 internees be released “on condition that they did not return to the oil region (of Ploiești), but should settle elsewhere, since their presence in the region presented a danger to security owing to their obvious Anglophile sentiments.”³³ The Army General Staff understood that the camp was not only illegal but inefficient as well and closed it on 18 November, when about 200 of the Jews were sent to another camp at Găiești for forced work, while other 235, who were not suited for labor, were allowed to settle in a county capital other than Bucharest or Ploiești.

In 1941, the interned Jews from Teiș and Găiești were freed and asked not to return to the oil fields area.³⁴ The majority of them chosen small towns from Muntenia, in southern Romania, and fewer established in the Banat or in southern Transylvania. However, in their new residences, they were again recruited by the local work centers and assigned various other forced labor tasks (road building, fortifications). There were cases when the Romanian Jews worked side by side with the Soviet prisoners, each of the groups having a separate command.³⁵ From the Jews still living in Ploiești, the authorities took 20-30 on a monthly basis and kept them in a local camp in Ploiești (they were replaced the month following their arrest with an equal number of other Jews). These people were to be killed if the actions of the members of their community were directed against the state. This camp created in June 1941 was dismantled in February 1942 since

³³ Dennis Deletant, *Hitler's Forgotten Ally : Ion Antonescu and His Regime, Romania 1940-1944*, New York, 2006, p. 115

³⁴ Geală, p.251

³⁵ Ibid, p. 253

the local authorities understood that nothing in the behavior of the Ploiești Jews justified its existence.³⁶

Meanwhile, on 28 March 1941 the urban properties owned by Jews were nationalized. The former Jewish owners were paid a compensation totaling eight times their gross income, as calculated by the taxes they paid.³⁷ The Jews were, moreover, forbidden to own urban properties. By virtue of this measure, by 31 December 1943 around 75,385 apartments were nationalized.³⁸

Jewish compulsory work yielded low results as the Romanian authorities soon understood. This should not have come as a surprise since in many cases the Jews were forced to carry out work for which they had no training or they were not physically suitable. Food shortages and lack of medical support for the sick meant that many of the Jews were too weak to work. Even if some of the military authorities were sympathetic to their complaints, they continued to execute the orders that came from above.

There were strict rules for forced labor and ruthless penalties for people that disobeyed the orders they received. For the purpose of maintaining control, Antonescu gave an order on 19 July 1941, relayed by the General Directorate of Police to all regional inspectorates, saying that Jews in work battalions should undertake hard labor and that, if anyone ran away, one in ten of the detainees should be shot as a punishment.³⁹

Marshal Antonescu gave orders to deport certain categories of Jews from the Old Kingdom to Transnistria. On 20 February 1942, the Ministry of the Interior received Antonescu's order that all Jews who were Communist activists, especially those in Bucharest, the oil region of Ploiești, and in the ports of Constanța and Giurgiu, together

³⁶ Geală, p. 269

³⁷ Benjamin, p.136

³⁸ Dinu C. Giurescu, *România în al doilea război mondial*, București, 1999, p.141

³⁹ Deletant, p. 114

with all Jews who had illegally settled in Bucharest during the previous two years, should be jailed and deported to Transnistria in the spring. The order stressed that the action should not be conducted “in a wild manner”, which shows that even Antonescu started to think of the possibility of having to account one day for his behavior towards the Jews.

The social organization of Ploiești reflected its great development in the urban, economic and social fields. The main agent of progress was the oil industry formed mostly in the first half of the 20th century prior to World War Two. The mirage of enrichment or the chance for employment and a better life attracted to the small trading town of Ploiești a large number of people of various ethnicities. This dynamics defined the growth of this city ensuring long-term prosperity for it. The impressive oil resources in Ploiești and the large processing capacity available there as well as the political and military developments of World War Two transformed the city into a strategic target for the Allies. As the city became a war zone, this had disastrous consequences on the people trapped within.

CHAPTER 2: THE GERMAN-ROMANIAN DEFENCE AND ALLIED AIR STRIKES ON PLOIEȘTI AREA BETWEEN 1941-1944

This chapter will discuss the social and economic impact of the military preparations and operations on the area of Ploiești. Social life was greatly disrupted not only by the effects of the raids proper but also by the policies conducted by Romanian and German authorities in order to protect the area. As the chapter will emphasize, all the parties involved in the oil war at Ploiești (Romanians, Germans, Anglo-Americans) made mistakes and proved unrealistic in setting their goals and in choosing the steps to achieve them. The odd Nazi suggestion that the Romanian refineries (built in almost half of century) should be relocated within a few months, the Romanian short-term plan to create subterranean storage bunkers to serve the production of fuel or the tragic American low-altitude attack of 1943 and its “limited success”, are all failed attempts for which the highest bill was paid not by their initiators but by the civilians of Ploiești. I will examine from a comparative perspective the primary and secondary sources regarding the subject. For the most part, I will evaluate the connection between economic and military interests, military strategies and their impact on people’s life. The comparison will also include the German case, a research direction more often than not neglected by Romanian and foreign authors when dealing with the Ploiești air operations but quite useful when establishing the context of the events and their importance for the war.

For the protection of Ploiești against air raids, the Romanian authorities acted in two directions: towards defending the refineries and their workers, and towards the

protection of the city together with its inhabitants. Both actions presupposed a big human effort, and, consequently, part of the work force of the city was occupied with this activity. The existence of the refineries in the area demanded special measures of protection due to the very flammable installations, which were extremely vulnerable to air strikes.

In order to achieve the first objective, construction workers were brought to the refineries area. Here several bunkers were built in order to protect the personnel employed in the industrial complex. The oil pipes, the fuel storage and other components of the refineries were also protected with concrete walls or buried underground, where they would not be exposed to the blast of the bombs. In 1942, there was launched the plan of building subterranean storage tanks with capacities varying between 1,300 to 15,000 cubical meters). The project employed additional labor force from the city but had a limited finalization due to the short amount of time the Romanian authorities had at their disposal to put it in practice. The Allied forces started their air missions on Romania in 1941, had two raids in 1942 and 1943, and from April 1944 the American aviation, seconded by the British, conducted a massive campaign of bombardments.

As regards the defense of the city, part of the population was engaged in the alarming activities and in the process of building defensive structures. This way, Ploiești inhabitants were involved in the war effort of the country. The Romanian authorities were planning to build in the southern Romanian plain region (*Câmpia română*) four dummy towns Ploiești, with the purpose of making the American pilots mistake them for the real city and use up their fire power. Only one such construction was eventually built. However, in 1942 the Allies got wind of this trick but in the heat of the battle, bombs

were thrown several times on the real-scale model of the city.⁴⁰ For the defensive of the city, the authorities' plans included strengthen and better equipping of the fire departments and building of water reservoirs.

A plan for the rapid evacuation of the civil population from the city was developed in 1943. It is hard to estimate its realism and to what extent it was put into practice. Ploiești was not a large city and, therefore, the evacuation of the population within a certain time frame might have been theoretically achievable. However, the evolution of military events ruled out this possibility. The Axis system of radars and alarm points had a major problem in the Yugoslav space where Tito's partisans were still active. Here the Germans were not able to install an effective radar network. The Anglo-American planes made use of this „highway” to navigate from the Adriatic Sea to Romania without been detected. The sudden apparition of massive Allied air forces at the south-western border of Romania (less than 200 km of Ploiești) made all the temporary evacuation plans difficult to apply.

The defensive plans paid special attention to the labor during war time which was regulated by a law-decree from 1941. According to this new legislation, the work time lost during the alarms time was to be recuperated later on (but not more then 60 hours per week). Starting with 1943, when „The law-decree for the punishment of crimes perpetrated during war time” was published, sabotages and other categories of crimes were punished by death.

The local authorities in Ploiești declared two kinds of alarm during the day since they intended to avoid a major setback in the economic field through frequent alarms and

⁴⁰ James Dugan, Carroll Stewart, *Ploesti: The Great Ground-Air Battle of 1 August 1943*, London, 2002 p.10

disruption of activity. When the city was to be attacked by 1 to 3 enemy planes the population was asked to leave the squares and the streets but the work in factories was not allowed to stop. In the cases when the number of enemy planes was 4 or more the population was allowed to take refuge in air shelters, the production activity stopped in all factories as well as the traffic in the streets.

Another way the social setup of Ploiești was affected by the prospect of becoming a war zone was from the demographical point of view. Numerous military forces were brought to Ploiești by both the Romanians and the Germans, and requisitions were made from the population. Many of these troops had to be supported by the local economy, which was already affected by the air war proper. The basic role of the troops deployed here was to defend the oil fields and the refineries as they were of capital importance for Hitler's war. When the American attack took place on 1 August 1943, the Romanian army dispatched 5 squadrons of planes to cover the triangle Bucharest – Ploiești - Mizil. The Germans brought 4 squadrons. The Romanian and the German armies deployed in 1943 52 anti-aircraft batteries in the area Ploiești - Câmpina (21 Romanian batteries and 31 German). In 1944 their total number grew to 83 (35 Romanian and 45 German) representing about 40% of the whole anti-aircraft artillery in Romania. Additional military forces were brought here to serve the 20 battalions of searchlights and the artificial fog machines located in the nearby refinery area.

For the same defensive purposes, on 30 November 1942 the German General Alfred Gerstenberg, the commander of the German Air Mission in Romania, presented to Marshal Ion Antonescu a plan whereby Germany intended to reinforce the defense of the oil fields area. Germany proposed among other measures the dispersal of all refineries in Ploiești and offered advice on how to organize the protection of the city. Antonescu

accepted German assistance but rejected as unrealistic the proposal of removing the industrial capacities from the area. The limited time available, the volume of work and the cost of such a utopian project were considered unacceptable by the Romanian side.⁴¹

In Romania, the Allied High Command sought to achieve two of the main objectives of the strategic bombing conception applied in Europe during World War Two. These goals were: depriving the enemy of raw materials (in this case, the oil and its refined products) and the destruction of the transportation infrastructure. This meant bombardments on the Ploiești industrial area and its extraction facilities, 11 refineries and transportation network; on Bucharest – the economic heart of the country and the biggest transportation hub; the shipyard at Giurgiu, the IAR aircraft factory in Brașov, and the main Romanian port on the Black Sea coast, Constanța. For many Romanian historians, the Allied forces also tried to accomplish a third objective that was breaking the will of the Romanians to support the Antonescu regime and to fight the war. The Romanian authors substantiate this theory by making an analogy with the large-scale “morale bombing” conducted by the Allies in Germany. The Romanian military experts considered that this strategy was applied also to Romania since there are several cases when residential zones were bombed instead of military or economic ones. However, the military inaccuracy and lack of precision of the Allies bombardments might have been caused also by objective factors and may explain why a lot of civilian damages were inflicted during the air raids. These factors were derived from a specific military context which was also the explanation given by the Anglo-American prisoners. When asked by the Romanian interrogators why they shot civilians and peasants working on the fields,

⁴¹ Stănescu, p. 89

the Allied captured crew members declared that those actions were individual initiatives of some of them and not the official orders. Asked why they threw bombs of the civil areas of the bombed Romanian cities, they passed the responsibility on the shoulders of their high commanders that ordered the bombing tactics. The third chapter of this thesis will discuss these aspects in a more detailed way. It is, however, obvious that the Anglo-American military leaders did not factor in the life of civilians when planning and executing their military missions on Romania, which took precedence over anything else. In Bucharest, for example, the raid of 4 April 1944 only, killed 2,942 civilians (2,126 wounded) and a separate graveyard had to be built to bury the corpses.⁴²

As an element of comparison, in Germany, the Allied objectives were more extensive and aimed to win air superiority in order to destroy Nazi Germany's war machine and its industrial foundation. The air-strikes were targeted against factories, railways, dockyards, bridges, and dams, as well as against cities and towns, and intended to both annihilate Germany's war industries and to deprive its civilians of the resources and psychological capacity to fight. Because it aimed at diminishing the enemy power and morale, the strategy was called "morale bombing". In the middle of a mechanized war, this concept was predicated on the assumption that all industries were war industries and anyone who worked in this field was a contributor to the war effort no matter their status, civilian or military.⁴³ The Allied objectives included the destruction of 11 fighter assembly factories, 15 bomber assembly factories, 17 aircraft engine factories, 20 submarine yards and every production facility that catered for them. In addition to this, the Allies planned to damage 38 transportation targets, 37 electric power targets, 23 oil

⁴² Giurescu, , p.111 (to see also Mircea Ionițiu, *Amintiri și reflecțiuni*, București, 1993, p.32)

⁴³ Friedrich, p. 49

production targets, aluminum plants and so forth. These figures show that a far more extensive process of bombardment took place in Germany when compared to Romania. This discrepancy can be explained by the role played by the two countries in the war, their economic and military-industrial background and also by the fact that the Allies intended to prepare the ground for a planned land invasion in Western Europe.⁴⁴ The intensity of the bombardments on Germany can be explained also by the geographical location of this country, more accessible for the Allied planes than Romania was. Moreover, the air war on Germany lasted longer, almost for the entire duration of World War Two.

The bombardments on Romania were more specific in a sense that they were focused only on a few geographic regions. While in Germany the morale of the inhabitants was quite relevant for the war, in Romania it was less so because Germany possessed, up until the summer of 1944, the military means to defeat any mutiny here. The morale bombing in Romania was more difficult to conduct since a lot of the country's population lived in rural areas, a social reality which contrasted with the urban character of Germany.

The bombing campaigns on Germany and Romania had in common the Allied interest in slowing down the rapid offensive of Axis armies towards the east. After the collapse of France in the summer of 1940 and up until the landing in Italy in 1943, the air

⁴⁴ Levine, p.77

operations were the only way the Anglo-Americans could intervene in the military developments on the European front.⁴⁵

The architecture of Ploiești city was different compared to the majority of German cities bombed by the Allies. While the downtown was formed of 2-3 story high administrative buildings, the rest of the city had small houses generally consisting of the ground floor and a small attic, which were surrounded by gardens. This urban structure rendered useless some of the weapons of the Anglo-American forces (such as the phosphor bombs) since in the city of Ploiești (as opposed to the refinery area) the combustion potential was rather small. In Germany, this Allied strategy found a complementary reality on the ground because the typical German city was a very flammable environment. As regards the burning potential, the vulnerability of such a city grew from the periphery to the center. The center of German cities was formed of buildings made during the period of rapid industrial expansion in the late 1800s. These crowded buildings separated by little space absorbed heat well and burned quickly. In the process of burning, the fuel came from inside because they contained wood as one of the most present materials of their structure. The narrow streets of the typical German city were favorable to fire spreading out.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.25

⁴⁶ Friedrich, p. 14

2.1 Air Raids

The first bombardment in the oil region of Ploiești was conducted by the Soviet aviation on 13 July 1941. It was the most significant they conducted here during the whole war. Three refineries were affected by this raid (Astra, Orion and Lumina). The biggest destruction was made to Orion refinery while the repair of all the affected installations lasted between 2 and 4 months. The number of victims was small (5 died and 13 wounded).⁴⁷ The Soviets executed other small-scale raids but their military or economic impact was not relevant. More often than not, the Soviet aviation failed to spot the city under camouflage. Later on, when the front line moved from Bessarabia towards the East, the distance required for the Soviet planes to fly became too big and their raids were discontinued.

The most coherent, powerful and efficient actions which aimed at depriving the Axis forces of the fuel obtained from Ploiești were undertaken by the American aviation (and to a much smaller extent by the British one). From an economic point of view, in the summer of 1944, the fuel production of Romania was severely reduced as a result of this air campaign. From a social perspective, the military particularities of these operations had an important impact.

From January 1942, Washington military leaders started the study of a potential air strike on Ploiești, an idea for which the American President Roosevelt showed interest.⁴⁸ This operation was prepared and led by the American Colonel Henry Halverson and had two purposes. The first was to give a clear signal of the Allies interest on the southern flank of the Axis, at a time when Nazi Germany won victories in the

⁴⁷ Stanescu, p. 87

⁴⁸ Eugen Bantea, *Miza petrolului în vâltoarea războiului*, București, 1983, p.103

Soviet Union. The second objective was focused exclusively on Ploiești and was based on the belief of several American high military commanders that a single big blow given here by strategic bombers could decide the fate of the whole war.⁴⁹ The Halverson Project was the first US mission on Ploiești and also the first of the American air force in Europe since the start of World War Two.⁵⁰

On 6 June 1942, the US declared war on Romania and this mission got green light. On 12 June 1942, 13 B-24 Liberators flew to Romania from Fayd (Egypt) and bombarded the refinery area from an altitude of 4000 meters. Due to heavy clouds, several planes missed their target and dropped the bombs on rural areas of southern Romania.⁵¹ The only refinery affected was *Astra Română* while the guns of the German-Romanian defense had a delayed action and only one Liberator was shot down. The American attack, although a failure, made both the German and Romanian authorities aware of the danger. By 1943 the Romanians and the Germans had concentrated at Ploiești a huge number of guns of all calibers, machine-guns, defensive balloons and several airplane squadrons.

The weak response of the Ploiești artillery and aviation alongside other factors encouraged the American decision factors to insist on the idea that Ploiești refineries could be approached successfully and destroyed by a massive bombardment made from a low altitude.

After Hitler's failure to capture the oil fields in the Caucasus during 1942-1943, the only significant oil reserve at the disposal of Nazi Germany remained the Romanian oilfields. Therefore, the entire attention of the Allied high command was focused here.

⁴⁹ Dwight Eisenhower, *Cruciadă in Europa*, București, 1975, p.233

⁵⁰ Dugan, p.12

⁵¹ Ibid, p.13

After the great German-Italian defeat in the autumn of 1942, the Allies started the construction of an air base for heavy bombers at Benghazi in Libya. Against the background of the general offensive of the Red Army, the Allies considered the bombing of Ploiești as one of their most important objectives. In fact, by the destruction of Ploiești from which Nazi Germany took more than 1/3 of the oil products, the Allies aimed to finish faster the war in Europe. The mission began with the high expectation that surprise would give the Americans the decisive edge, at least initially, so as to reach the target area and then unleash a powerful bomb load of over three hundred tons⁵²

The commander of the bombing operation was General Lewis Hyde Brereton. He explained to the participants that "making unusable the Ploiești refineries by the land army assumes a massive ground invasion and it would last at least one year until the enemy can be deprived of one drop of oil. We could do the job in one day and with a lower cost of men and equipments".⁵³ Given this evidence, I share the opinion that the American military experts failed to evaluate correctly their chances to achieve this goal. They had no accurate knowledge of the tremendous fire power of the ground artillery, and tended to look upon the elite Romanian gunners as poorly trained. Consequently, they engaged in a mission without the protection of fighter planes (which had limited flight autonomy and could not do the trip Libya- Ploiești back and forth).

The American project came as a pleasant surprise to Winston Churchill, who backed the initiative. Some divergences appeared between the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) and the United States of America Air Force (U.S.A.A.F.) as the British military experts

⁵² Dugan, p. x

⁵³ Bantea, p.121

claimed that a low altitude attack may result in heavy casualties for the Allies. For all this, the operation proceeded according to plan.

On 1st of August 1943 (“The Black Sunday” as it was later called by the Americans), the Ploiești oil fields and refineries were attacked by 175 American planes. Their mission was named: “Operation Tidal Wave”. The Americans failed to spring the surprise they counted on.⁵⁴ As the Romanian officers recalled later, the young American pilots fought with great determination and courage to accomplish an almost suicidal mission. During this relatively short but extremely violent battle, the Romanian and German armies incurred 101 dead and 97 wounded. Among the city’s civilians 101 died and 238 were wounded. The Allied lost 579 men (446 dead or taken prisoners, 133 wounded) and 54 planes. (Those were, up until then, the heaviest losses sustained in all Allied raids in Europe during World War Two).⁵⁵ After the raid the distilling capacity of the Romanian refineries decreased to 40 percent. The Romanian workers brought here managed to repair the damage comparatively fast and on 18th of August 1943, the Romanian refineries were producing about 80% of their production prior to the Allied attack. In this respect, James Dugan, one of the participants in the mission, and later on the author of an informative study about it, wrote that the Germans were the ones that repaired the damages. The statement is not entirely correct since the majority of the labor force in the industrial complex of refineries was represented by Romanians while the whole activity there was subordinated to the Romanian authorities and, ultimately, dependent on Marshal Antonescu’s decisions.

⁵⁴ Dugan, p. x

⁵⁵ Dugan, p.xi

The raid of 1 August 1943 increased the German presence in Romania. The Germans brought an additional squadron of fighter aircrafts and new artillery units of heavy guns (105-128 mm. caliber), a camouflage brigade for the production of artificial fog and several radar stations.⁵⁶

The decisive victory in Ploiești, which had been so carefully planned by the Allies, did not materialize.⁵⁷ The price paid for the “limited success” recorded by the U.S. operation of 1 August 1943 gave food for thinking to the Allied High Command. For the rest of 1943, any other military raids on the Romanian oil area were stopped. The heavy concentration of guns in Ploiești (“Festung Ploiești”/ Fortress Ploiești, as it was nicknamed by the Germans) and the high number of men and planes lost during this raid, made the Allied High Command change the bombing tactics for the next raids, which would start in the spring of 1944. Another cause of this delay was the long route from Africa to Romania, which made the American fighter aircrafts vulnerable on the way back and inefficient in terms of quantity of bombs they might transport. But the Husky Operation in Italy during 1943 opened new possibilities of attack.

In 1944, the turn of military events and the building of air bases in Foggia (Italy) had a deep impact on the industrial area and the city of Ploiești. The Allied executed raids on the city using the carpet-bombing system, from 4,000-8,000 meters. In my opinion, the strategy offered protection for the Allied pilots, who were thus out of the range of massive ground artillery fire, but it was at the cost of a significant lack of precision in their bombardments. This had disastrous consequences for the civilians of the whole area.

⁵⁶ XXX, *Istoria artileriei și rachetelor antiaeriene române*, București, 1996, p. 281

⁵⁷ Dugan, p. xi

The massive attacks on the Ploiești area and on the oil region of Prahova Valley restarted on 5 April 1944, when about 140 American aircraft attacked the Romanian refineries. The raid caused damages to several refineries: *Astra Română*, *Standard*, *Unirea*, *Orion*, *Columbia* and the oil exploitation *Ochiuri* from Dâmbovița County. About 80% of the buildings of down-town of Ploiești were damaged or entirely destroyed by the Allied bombs. Additionally, there were destroyed, burned partially or totally the South Railway Station (*Gara de Sud*), the *Schuller* Hospital, two churches, two kindergartens, 7 factories, and 44 streets were blocked by the rubble.⁵⁸

The Allies frequently sent in the wake of their air raids small formations of De Havilland DH-98 Mosquito planes to take pictures of the effect of their bombings. If they evaluated an unsuccessful attack, the Allied command center could modify and repeat the mission until the objective was achieved.

On 24 April, a new raid was conducted by almost 200 American planes, which bombed from 7000-8000 meters following the carpet bombing system. The effects were significant and several refineries (*Orion*, *Columbia* and *Astra Română*), the last being the most severely damaged. After this mission, their production was stopped for a period between 60-90 days. The Central School for Girls (*Școala Centrală de Fete*) was affected by the bombs, 35 streets were blocked and the *Schuller* Hospital was again damaged.⁵⁹

The American raids of 5 and 6 May 1944 made with 400 respectively 200 bomber planes had decreased the processing capacity to 55% of the total and caused also a big loss of oil by burning of 25,000 tons. However, in about 20 days the production increased

⁵⁸ Stănescu, p.162

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.163

again to 90% of the initial capacity. About 1000 buildings were affected and hundreds of dead civilians were recorded.⁶⁰

On 18 Mai 1944, a new attack was mounted by almost 300 American planes from 7000 meters. The mission failed because of the lack of precision. The center of Ploiești was, however, affected and victims were made among civilians because the eastern district of the city was hit (among the destroyed buildings were *Gara de Sud*, two schools, the Saint Friday Church, the Financial Administration, the Police Central Headquarters and 11 streets were blocked).⁶¹

The next raid, on 31 May, was the direct consequence of the lack of success of the previous one. The city of Ploiești and the surrounding oil region were bombarded by almost 600 planes, which threw about 2582 bombs from a 4,000-6,000 meter altitude. The raid managed to cause strong damages to several refineries (*Standard, Româno-Americană*, and *Vega*), while the distilling capacity was again reduced to 52%. In Ploiești, 1539 houses and other buildings were burned or destroyed during this raid and other hundred civilians were killed (Ploiești Town Hall, *Halele Centrale*/Covered market place, Boldescu Hospital, the Prahova County Court of Law and School no. 11).⁶²

Under German pressure and with the participation of German experts, the Romanian authorities conducted constant repair work in the refineries, which determined the Allies to continue the bombing campaign and led to more victims among civilians. The Anglo-American military actions on the Romanian oil fields of Prahova County and on the Ploiești area determined a significant decrease in the output of refined products.

⁶⁰ The National Archives of Romania, Prahova County branch , fond “Prefectura Județului Prahova”, file no. 89/1944, p. 1

⁶¹ The National Archives of Romania, fond “Presedinția Consiliului de Miniștrii - Cabinetul Militar Ion Antonescu , file no. 94/1944, p. 55

⁶² The National Archives of Romania, Prahova County branch , fond “Prefectura Județului Prahova”, file no. 91/1944, page 23

This had as a direct consequence a reduction in the export of these products to Germany. Additionally, there was recorded a decrease in extraction from 385,000 t. in March 1944 to 192,000 in May 1944. Under such circumstances, Nazi Germany showed increasing concern and asked Bucharest to supplement the share of oil products delivered by Romania. In June 1944, Marshal Keitel tried to persuade the ruler of Romanian state, Marshal Ion Antonescu, to take all the necessary measures in order to repair the damaged installations of the refineries affected by bombings as they had decisive importance for the war.

During the summer of 1944, the Anglo-American air forces mined several times the Danube River and also sank massive German oil tankers. Their objective was not just to decrease the extraction and refinery potential of Romania but also to destroy the transportation infrastructure towards Germany or towards the front line. This was the main rationale for which Bucharest was also bombed several times; here the target was mainly the North Railway Station (*Gara de Nord*), an important transportation knot for ammunition, fuel and other materials that sustained the war effort of Romania and of Germany.⁶³

New Allied raids took place during June 1944 in a military context increasingly unfavorable for Hitler's war. On 6 June 1944, about 200 bombers defended by fighter planes bombed superficially the city of Ploiești. The main objective was the refinery zone and the secondary one was the railway network of the city. The damage caused to the targets was minimal.⁶⁴ The next bombardment took place on 10 June 1944 and represented a surprise from the tactical point of view. It was made exclusively by about

⁶³ Stănescu, p.132.

⁶⁴ The National Archives of Romania, fond "Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii - Cabinetul Militar Ion Antonescu, file no. 96/1944, pp. 1-20.

100 American fighter planes, (each carrying a 450 kg bomb) guarded by 150 planes without bombs. This air formation had a single target during the attack, which was the Romanian American refinery, the only big Romanian refinery that still functioned at its maximum capacity at the moment of the attack. The refinery was damaged and its activity was stopped for the next 10 days. The raid did not stick strictly to military objectives so that lot of civil targets without military importance were machine-gunned from these planes (villages, peasants working in the fields, small countryside railway stations, passenger trains, sanitary trains, personal cars).⁶⁵

On 24 June 1944, 300 heavy bombers and 200 fighter planes bombarded in four waves the Ploiești area. The economic impact was significant as the distilling capacity of the targeted refinery (the Romanian American refinery) was again reduced.

During July, the Allied air forces made new incursions to bombard the already damaged targets of Ploiești. In a study of the Romanian Intelligence Service (S.S.I.) it was mentioned that “in the oil industry systematic and heavy blows have been recorded as an effect of the air war (...) it will take years after the end of the war for the total recuperation of the Romanian oil industry”.⁶⁶

On 4 July 1944, the Romanian refineries produced 997 wagons of fuel per day. This quantity could be achieved by 24 hours’ work. The frequent alarms which put a stop to activity reduced to a certain extent this productivity. At the beginning of July, several refineries were out of service (*Creditul Minier, Orion, Columbia, Redevența, Concordia, Steaua Româna, Câmpina* and other smaller refineries). Some of them under repair such

⁶⁵ The National Archives of Romania, Prahova County branch , fond “Prefectura Județului Prahova”, file no. 93/1944, pages 1-6

⁶⁶ Stănescu, p.134

as the *Creditul Minier* refinery, which got its replacement equipments directly from Germany.

On 9 July 1944, 250 American planes attacked the refineries and three of them had to stop their production (*Vega, Xenia* and *Columbia*) for a period of 3 to 15 days. The fighting capacity of the Romanian-German air forces was severely limited after this raid due to the heavy losses of men and planes, and also because Germany withdrew several squadrons and had them sent to other sectors of the front. The diminished riposte capacity made the Allied bombardments more efficient and increased the German-Romanian losses.⁶⁷

New American raids took place on 15 and 24 July by massive air forces (about 500 planes), which inflicted additional damage to the still functioning refineries. The British forces attacked Ploiești as usual during the night and had as the main objective the Romanian - American refinery. The raid did not produce any damages to it and, on the whole, the night attacks had no considerable effects. On 28 July a strong bombardment was executed by the American air force on the city and on several refineries (*Astra Română, Standard, Unirea, Orion, Creditul Minier* and *Româno-Americană*).

The last raid during the month of July was on the 31 July 1944 and caused big losses to the civilians of the city as an important part of the bombs hit the center of Ploiești and the northern and western neighboring districts. Ironically, the least damage was inflicted on the refineries. During this air-raid there were damaged, among other buildings, the church “Sfântul Dumitru”, the High School “Petru și Pavel”, the schools

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.135

nos. 5 and 7 and also the ammunition factory “Concordia.” About 33 streets were blocked by the rubble.⁶⁸

Although the frequency of the Allied bombing of the oil fields area was high during July 1944, the Romanian refineries continued to produce at 70% of their normal capacity. In my opinion, the explanation for this is the following: the fire power of the German-Romanian artillery constantly forced the Anglo-American planes to approach the targets from a high altitude following a bombing strategy that had little efficiency. Another reason for this was the deployment in this industrial area of numerous maintenance units, which worked round the clock to repair the damages caused by bombings. As the time passed, the war context made even more difficult the task of the defenders of Ploiești.

The American air forces started in the summer of 1944 “shuttle” raids on the Romanian oil area, flying from their new bases in Italy to the ones in the Soviet Union. This meant that the targets in Ploiești were bombed twice as hard as they were in the past, once on the way towards USSR and a second time on their way back to Italy.⁶⁹ As part of her examination of the massive air-war in Germany, authors like Sybille Steinbacher accused the Allied forces of failing to destroy by means of air raids the gas chambers and the railways towards extermination camps such as Auschwitz. Indeed, since the construction of an air base in Foggia (Italy) in early 1944, the Anglo-American forces had the capacity to hit targets in Poland, but they merely bombed what were considered targets of military interest in Germany, Hungary and Romania.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Stănescu, p.164

⁶⁹ Stănescu, 137

⁷⁰ Sybille Steinbacher, *Auschwitz. A History*, Munich, 2005, p.119

The continuing decrease in the Romanian fighter aircraft determined Marshal Antonescu to order the Romanian Air Force on 7 August 1944 to stop fighting against the Allied planes, which made the incidence of the Allied actions even greater, affecting to an equal extent the refineries and the city's neighborhood. The order had a temporary character and was to be applied until the Romanian forces received the new fighter planes Me 109 G. Other Anglo-American raids on the oil fields area of Ploiești were conducted on 9, 9-10, 10, 17, 18 and 19 August 1944. The 9th and 18th of August bombardments caused the most damage to the two big refineries still functioning at Ploiești (*Vega* and *Româno-Americană*). The last was inoperable for almost 10 months after the attack. Contrary to Marshal Antonescu's order, the head of the Fighter Aviation of Ploiești, the German Colonel Woldenga, sent into the fight all the available forces. The 44 planes (27 Romanian and 17 German) were forced by virtue of this order to put up a fight against 800 American planes. There were also cases of volunteering. The best pilot of the Romanian Air Force, Captain Alexandru Șerbănescu was shot down and killed during this air battle. He declared before the fight: "I cannot accept that the enemy should enter our country as you would a village without dogs."⁷¹

The Soviet offensive started on 20 August 1944 broke the thin Romanian-German front line in Moldavia and offered to King Michael and to the representatives of the historical parties and of the Communist Party the chance to put into practice their plan to remove Antonescu from power. On 23 August 1944, King Michael arrested Marshal Antonescu and Romania changed radically its policy towards Nazi Germany and declared war on it. The Soviet advance and the Romanian army attacks (after 23 August) made Germany unable to destroy what was left functioning of the Romanian refineries. Taken

⁷¹ Stanescu, p.138

aback by this turn of events, the German forces ultimately retreated towards the Hungarian border (in Transylvania). The Romanian refineries were taken over by the Soviet forces during the next days following the *coup d'état* of 23 August.

In Romania, the Ploiești area with its 11 refineries and with the extracting and transportation facilities was the main target of the Anglo-American air forces during World War Two. Between 4 April and 19 August 1944 there were recorded 1,045 hours of alarm, a reality that had important consequences on the entire economy. Of the 43 bombardments on Romania, 30 were on the oil area of Ploiești-Câmpina-Moreni-Valea Prahovei. The American forces lost here 230 planes from a total of 443 planes shot down in Romania and had 1,550 pilots dead and 1,700 taken prisoners.⁷²

At the end of the bombing campaign Romanian oil industry produced at 50% of its initial capacity.⁷³ According to some estimations, the extraction capacity of Romania was reduced to 40%. For the Romanian oil industry, the material losses represented almost 25 billion lei⁷⁴ (see also Stanescu, p.140-141). This was the equivalent of about 110 millions American dollars, at the value of the year 1940.⁷⁵

In Romania, the Anglo-American air missions resulted into 7,693 dead, the majority being civilians; 7,809 wounded and about 30,000 houses and buildings destroyed. In Ploiești, tens of thousands of bombs of all calibers (explosive, flammable and delayed-action devices) were thrown. About 800 people died, 750 were wounded, 9,000 houses and buildings were destroyed and 23,000 people became homeless.⁷⁶ The

⁷² Giurescu, p56-57

⁷³ Stanescu, 138

⁷⁴ The Military Archives of Romania, fond 948, file no. 1798/1945, pages 1-7

⁷⁵ XXX, Raport leu-dolar înainte de război; <http://www.itcnet.ro/history/archive/mi2000/current2/mi43.htm>

⁷⁶ Stănescu, p.139.

total number of casualties was limited by the fact that the biggest part of the civilians fled out of the city during the day and returned at night. This and the small impact of the night attacks made by the RAF explain why the total number of casualties among city's inhabitants was not even bigger.

Due to the massive bombing campaign, the socio-economic life of Ploiești was severely disrupted. The food supplies decreased despite the fact that the trade people were forbidden to leave the city. This difficult situation was caused for the most part by the problems encountered by all the merchants of the city in getting their products, the lack of means of transportation, and the decrease of their financial power and the permanent danger of having their stocks destroyed. Lack of customers was another problem since many of the inhabitants left the city on a regular basis during the day and purchased goods and food from other places. The workers of the local administration, who were ordered to stay in Ploiești, were supplied with the products they needed by their own institutions. The groceries and meat processing factories had a low productivity because of the damages incurred during the bombardments. In June 1944, a part of the merchants were allowed to leave the city to pursue their commercial activity in the neighboring villages and town where the population was dispersed. Construction work, privately or state owned, was stopped because of the impact of the bombardments and the lack of materials. This situation continued for a long time after the end of the bombing campaign as the destruction caused to the houses, official institutions, commercial spaces, utilities and transportation networks was difficult to remedy.⁷⁷

The same predicament was shared by Germany but on a much larger scale. As a result, Berlin had lost by the end of 1943 over 1 million inhabitants, about 25%. In the

⁷⁷ Stănescu, p.166

rural areas where this massive population was settled, the only form of paid work was in maintaining facilities essential for survival. Moreover, the Nazis decided to relocate also the industry from cities and its work force. This caused in certain areas a rural overpopulation and created additional problems. The regime relocated about 6 million people to the rural surroundings of the cities. There was recorded even a population movement to the occupied territories outside the Old Reich such as Poland.⁷⁸

The bombardments on Ploiești showed how important the oil factor was for the World War Two actors. The city of Ploiești was ravaged by the Anglo-American raids, which had as a consequence hundreds of dead civilians and major infrastructure damage. Caught in the middle of a tremendous battle the Ploiesti the inhabitants attempted to find a way out, which led to the city becoming depopulated and a day-night migration phenomenon. As the next chapters will show, this population perceived the reality differently from Romania's leaders of the time.

⁷⁸ Steinbacher, p.74

CHAPTER 3: PUBLIC MORALE AND THE IMAGE OF THE ENEMY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ALLIED BOMBING CAMPAIGN

The main aim of this chapter is to evaluate the effects of the Allied bombing campaign on Romania's population in the broader context of World War Two developments. With a view to this, I will dwell on the causes of the Romanians' conservative view regarding the enemies and the friends of their country. I will start with short summary of the military particularities that led to civil casualties in the bombed Romanian cities. The reflection of the events in the press of the time is relevant in establishing how the mass mentality was shaped since the press remained one of the most important factors involved in this process, connected also with the phenomenon of war propaganda. The present chapter will also account for the absence of a revolt in Romania, in the context of the air war. The last part of the chapter will discuss the evolution of the public morale in Romania during various stages of the war. The chapter will end with a study about Romania population's perception of the enemy, of "the other", a conservative, inertial public image as well as a paradoxical one in the military circumstances of the 1940s.

The Allied bombing campaign on the Romanian oil fields area aimed from the beginning at total annihilation and conceived by the Allied High Command as a major blow to the war conducted by Nazi Germany. Inside this perimeter, the main objective was constituted by the 11 refineries catering for the German-Romanian war needs and the secondary one was the transport network. As the first two chapters have showed, the big number of casualties and heavy losses of planes incurred by the Anglo-Americans during

the 1943 “Tidal wave” operation on the Ploiești area determined them to adopt a different military tactics in the following air raids. Consequently, they used the “carpet bombing” strategy extensively, since all the other attempts had not been successful, and thus achieved to a great extent their military and economic objectives but at a high cost in human lives among the civilians of Ploiești, Bucharest and other bombed Romanian cities. However, total number of victims in Ploiești is comparatively low judging by the scope of the Allied military operations inflicted upon the city. In Bucharest, however, the total number of civilian victims was almost ten times bigger (around 800 killed in Ploiești compared to about 6,500 in Bucharest).

The suffering brought by the war was perceived by the people both individually and collectively. If the individual aspect might be analyzed through personal testimonies and memories, the collective mentality and the attitude of the masses towards the war events is much more difficult to define or quantify. The collective mental attitude of the Romanians regarding their experience caused by the air-war should have been the object of many studies, which unfortunately are missing. Its reflection in the press of the time, for example, constitutes an important instrument of research since it brings into discussion many aspects of this problem. Nevertheless, many of the data circulated in the press are obviously biased and also carefully selected by the censorship imposed during the dictatorial military regime of Marshal Antonescu. In fact, through the press a sort of dualism was expressed between the filtered voice of the masses and the official message towards them from the regime.

The mass mentality and morale of the Romanians were shaped by factors that had more to do with the general conditions of World War Two than with the Anglo-American bombardments on the country and their consequences. When Romania entered World War Two in alliance with Nazi Germany, the Antonescu regime presented this as a holy war for the liberation of the occupied territories taken by the Soviet Union in 1940 (Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and Herța). This project was strongly supported by the population, the politicians, King Michael, cultural personalities, military and other representatives of the Romanian society. Even the political opponents of the Antonescu regime backed this campaign, with the exception of the communists. The morale and the confidence of the people were high, even enthusiastic, as the military campaign was presented to the masses as a legitimate defence action, as Romania's response to the Soviet Union's act of war of June 1940.⁷⁹

On 22 June 1941, the public radio service broadcast the proclamation of the leader of the Romanian state, General Antonescu: "Soldiers, I order you. Cross the Prut River! Crush the enemy from the East and North. Free your enslaved brothers from the red yoke of bolshevism. Bring back to the country our ancestors' native land." After listening to the speech, the Bucharest people spontaneously gathered in public places, expressing their wish to free eastern Moldavia and to make up for the humiliation at the hands of the Soviet Union, and the consequent 1940 retreat of Romanians from their own country.⁸⁰

The perception of the masses that the regime was doing the right thing in giving a justified military response to the greed of the Soviet Union was also due to the camouflage in the media of the time of the horrors perpetrated by the Romanian army on

⁷⁹ Giurescu, p. 94

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.95

Antonescu's orders against the Jewish minority in Bessarabia and against the Romanian Gypsies, which constituted Romania's contribution to Holocaust.

Public optimism gradually faded away and ultimately turned into pessimism and desperation after Antonescu's controversial decision to continue the military offensive beyond the Dniester River (the old border of Moldavia and, later on, of Romania with Russia and also the eastern historical and ethnical border of the Romanians). From this moment on, things got out of his hands as Romanian forces came under German command and incurred heavy losses in terms of men and equipment. The news that came to Romania from the front line along unofficial channels (such the retreat of soldiers and staff) had a devastating impact on the psychology of the masses. In his initial speeches, Antonescu did not mention to the Romanians his plans to advance with two Romanian armies deep into the Soviet territory. If the masses supported the regime in the fight for the lost historical territories, together with King Michael and many other politicians, what followed started to alter the masses' feelings and morale.

The country entered a state of war with Great Britain (7 December 1941) and with the United States (12 December 1941), the latter initiating bombardments on Romania as early as 1942. Romania's armies were engaged by Antonescu's military decisions in an asymmetrical fight against a huge enemy with whom it fought about 3 years in strategic and technological inferiority as well as being greatly outnumbered. Basically, about 2/3 of the approximate 600,000 Romanian soldiers sent to the Soviet Union perished, were wounded or taken prisoners (only a few thousands returned home after the war, the rest having died in Siberia, the Urals or in areas inside the arctic circle). If the Romanian press described the massacre of the weakened, unequipped, erroneously commanded and small

Romanian armies at Stalingrad as a great battle in which the Romanian soldier behaved bravely, the wounded soldiers sent home for recuperation told the rest of the story. From them, their families, friends and acquaintances found out about the arrogance of the German ally and about the injustice of treatment of the Romanian soldiers that survived the battle of Stalingrad (many of them were shot for being ‘cowards’ by the Germans without any trial).

It is against this psychological background that the Allied bombings took place, further contributing to the growing gap between the Romanian population, on the one hand, and the Antonescu regime allied with the Nazis, on the other.

A relevant question is in this respect is why the Romanians did not overthrow the regime as a legitimate expression of this internal conflict. One possible answer might be the inertial process in which Romania found itself: it was a dictatorship with its democratic parliamentary system destroyed since Carol II’s rule. Its entire economy was in the hands of the military regime, under strict military command and organization. The significant German military presence in the key areas of the country further discouraged such a line of action. Later on, during the war, the perspective of the massive scale invasion of Romania by the Red Army discouraged many Romanians that looked for ways to oppose the Antonescu regime. Paradoxically, the air war and the destruction it caused created indeed great dissatisfaction among many people but at the same time rendered the masses even more dependent on the regime. On a much greater scale, this phenomenon also took place in Nazi Germany, where the people that remained without

homes and sometimes without families after the air strikes counted on the regime's bowl of warm food, shelter and further assistance as they were increasingly vulnerable.⁸¹

In 1944, if we judge by the reflection given by the press, the general impression of the masses was that by means of these bombardments the Allies aimed to terrorize the civilians. This belief was supported by the fact that at least at the beginning of the campaign the accuracy of the bombardments was low and most of the bombs thrown by the Allied planes fell on people's houses. As chapter two showed, the Anglo-Americans employed in Romania two different bombing tactics: the low height attack, which proved unsuccessful, and the high altitude one known as the "carpet bombing" strategy, which eventually destroyed a big part of the desired industrial-military targets but had little accuracy and caused the death of a great number of civilians (old people, women and many children). Of course, the majority of the population had no way of knowing this as the reports and the studies made by the Romanian military experts remained confidential.

The press never talked about the real psychology of the masses and it never published information of military importance. However, the huge public tragedy and indignation caused by the bombardments was not and could not be influenced in any way by the state's censorship.

The following paragraphs are samples from the newspapers of the time.

"Bucharest, the peaceful capital of a small country which did not wish anything more than a free life, has become the scene of an unexpected tragedy; there are yet unknown all the tears that fell over the mangled bodies, over the blood rivers that flowed on the unrecognizable faces of the children, parents and all the

⁸¹ Friedrich, p.375

beloved that remained forever still and deaf to the desperate calls of the survivors.”⁸²

“(…) I have seen dead children! Lots of them…Some with missing parts of their bodies, others crushed. Some with their parents….I have seen crazy mothers, running along streets without any destination (…) Almost for an hour, Death flew omnipotent, terrible, mad, on the streets of the Capital (…) Dear Bucharest, you’ve received on your forehead a hero wreath.”⁸³

“Trains full of refugees [from Moldavia] that were to leave the railway station took a full blow. Poor, miserable people, since they had to flee from the advancing units of the Red Army found a violent death under the dense bombardment.”⁸⁴

The press activated other powerful factors which influenced the mass perception and judgement. For example, the newspapers published the message of the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Nicodim, to the Canterbury Bishop of Great Britain, asking him to use his influence on the political decision factors in his country to stop the bombing campaign. The public content of this letter, as well as the huge prestige of the Orthodox Church among the majority of the Romanians, increased the public belief that the Allied forces were pursuing a terror bombing campaign on the country. Among other things, the Patriarch said in this letter the following: “In the capital and in the rest of the county were wiped out entire neighbourhoods inhabited by poor people and workers. There were struck and burnt hospitals full with wounded and ill people, charity

⁸² XXX, Bombardarea Bucureștilor, p. 1, in “Universul”, LXI, no. 97 of 7 April 1944

⁸³ Dan Bălțeanu, 4 Aprilie 1944, p.3, in “Universul” LXI, no. 99 of 9 April 1944

⁸⁴ XXX, Prin Bucureștii îndoliați, in “Universul” LXI, no. 100 of 10 April 1944

organizations, all places of Christian mercy. Our churches were transformed into pyres, and Christ from the holy shrines was burnt by the sons of your church”.⁸⁵

The war propaganda promoted by all the participants of the war had a major importance on the public mentality of the nations involved in World War Two. As many historians consider today, the defeat of the German armies started with the change in the perception regarding the German soldier invincibility, which had for a long time existed in the minds of the Soviet soldiers. The Allies promoted this message in Romania as well. Keeping the proportions, the Romanian official messages tried to neutralize the stronger propaganda machines of the Allied forces, and to motivate the fight of the Romanians against them.

Regarding the perception of the enemy, the Romanian propaganda underlined the danger of the “red plague”, which is how the Soviet state and its communist system were named.⁸⁶ The message was successful, in my opinion, due to its confirmation in June 1940. The sudden military invasion conducted by the Soviets, the Romanian forced exodus towards the unoccupied regions in the rest of the country, the several border massacres, the numerous executions and massive deportation to Siberia of “hostile elements towards the Soviet power” or “Romanian collaborators” deeply strengthened the official message. In fact, the term “propaganda” is not perfectly suitable since the Romanian authorities’ official message was just a reminder of what had happened there. However, this message was not entirely honest. If the part regarding the Soviet threat was accurate, the official message also contained a second component, since it used the

⁸⁵ “Scrisoarea I.P.P.S. Patriarhul Nicodim adresată episcopului de Canterbury”, p. 1, in *Timpul*, VIII, nr. 2562, 25 June 1944.

⁸⁶ Constantin Hlihor, *Imaginea “Celuilalt” în timpul bombardamentelor Anglo-Americane asupra Ploieștilor*, in *Festung Ploiești*, vol. 2, Ploiești, 2004, p.162

phrase “the Judeo-Bolshevik menace”, falsely associating the Jews with the criminal plans of Stalin and his close but constantly changing collaborators. By associating a real threat (expansion of the Soviet empire) with an imaginary one, i.e. the Jews, the political regime made many honest Romanians fall into this trap by placing the Jews among the aggressors.

Paradoxically, the Romanians had a negative image not only of the Russians/Soviets but also of the German ally. The attitude towards the Germans was shaped by both historical experience and the circumstances surrounding the military and economic collaboration of the two countries during the World War Two. Romania had had a painful military and social experience during the First World War, when its military offensive in Transylvania was stopped by the German reinforcements called in for support by the Austro-Hungarian armies. The German armies defeated the Romanian ones and ultimately invaded the southern part of the country, including Bucharest in 1917. The great number of Romanians killed in the battles of the First World War (more than half a million) and the following exploitation for almost a year of the Romanian economy, was conducive to a negative image of the Germans in the minds of the Romanians.

Another historical experience that added to the already negative the image of the Germans in eyes of the Romanians was the Second Vienna Award (30 August 1940), an international blackmail orchestrated by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, which gave to Hungary the northern part of Romania (northern Transylvania). This infamous event happened in the summer of 1940, almost a month after the Soviet Union launched about 30 divisions on a neutral Romania, stripping it of land, people, resources and

investments, and causing in the occupied territory a tremendous national drama (tens of thousands of deportations in Siberia until 1941, border massacres, executions, Russification and so forth). Therefore, 1940 contributed to the Romanians' perception of who the enemy was for them: the Russian (a facile way to identify the more ambiguous Soviet citizen) and the German. They would remain "the enemy" throughout World War Two.

The alliance between Romania and Germany made at the beginning of the 1940s was not able to erase this pre-existent collective perception. Furthermore, many Romanian soldiers told their families and friends about the arrogance of the German ally, and sometimes even its cruelty (like the already mentioned practice of the Germans to execute Romanian soldiers surviving the battles with the Red Army as traitors). Generally, regarding the Eastern Front, there are accounts of German forces seizing food, vehicles or horses from the Romanian units.

It is difficult to evaluate the social impact of the propaganda via the leaflets thrown from Allied planes on Romania. The messages had a very direct and well chosen text. The general idea of these key messages was to encourage the Romanians to sabotage the German war machine and to get out of the alliance with Hitler.⁸⁷ The emphasis was put on the possibility of thus shortening of the war, which would spare the Romanians a lot of suffering. The existence of these leaflets and this type of request to the Romanian people led the military experts of the time to believe that the Allied forces employed

⁸⁷ The National Archives of Romania, fond "Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii - Cabinetul Militar Ion Antonescu", file no. 94/1944, p. 253

terror bombing on Romania, as an additional and far more cynical persuasion instrument to achieve this goal.

One aspect that the Romanian authorities' official discourse and the propaganda apparatus were not able to modify was the relatively positive image of the English and the Americans in the Romanian public perception.

The, for the most part, friendly attitude of the Romanians towards the Anglo-American enemies was owing to a complex imagological background, which had to do with cultural affinities and interests. The Americans and the British continued to remain the "good guys" while the Germans were perceived, paradoxically, as the baddies.⁸⁸ The Americans and the British always represented for Romania an ideal of civilization, towards which the country aimed. Great Britain represented also the old ally of Romania in the First World War and one of the partners of Romanian diplomacy, together with France.

As a practical expression of this friendly attitude of the country towards them, the American prisoners were well treated by the Romanian authorities, who respected the international legislation on war prisoners and also reflected the Christian values of the largest part of the population. By adopting this behaviour towards the captured members of the Allied crews, the Romanian state proved also a certain political attitude aiming to prepare the ground for a possible peace agreement.

The state's benevolence was doubled by the position of the simple people of Romania. A study made in the 1940s by the American Military services and having an

⁸⁸ Hlihor, p.165

internal military usage as it served to inform the American pilots about the social realities of Romania, made pertinent observations regarding the social background of Romania at the moment of the air strikes as well as the culture, mentality, feelings and interests of the Romanian people. Among other things the study mentioned the followings:

” The Romanian people, and in particular the peasants, are honest, friendly, kindly and hospitable to strangers. They like the French, the British and the Americans and they fear the Russians. They loathe the Germans, who came to their country as enemies in the last war and treated them as only Germans can treat conquered countries, and have now come as ‘friends’ and are stripping Romania bare of all its food and oil.”⁸⁹

Before being taken into custody by the Romanian military authorities, mostly gendarmes in the rural areas, the Americans and the British were first captured by the local peasants. Before embarking on their mission, the pilots got special instructions about the way they should behave in case they were captured. Among other things, the following was mentioned in these instructions: “Do not act impulsively [if you are caught], and do not show that you are alarmed. The Romanians are a nation with great moral dignity and they respect the ones that are like them. Be calm and they will be the same”.⁹⁰ Generally, the accounts of the Anglo-American prisoners mention that the locals treated them with dignity. The only violent incidents occurred only in the early stages, when the locals did not know if the pilots they found on their fields were Russians or Anglo-Americans. Immediately after understanding they were Americans or British, all violence stopped.

⁸⁹ The Military Archives of Romania, fond 948, file no. 170/1943, p.48

⁹⁰ Mircea Pietreanu, Prizonierii americani învață limba română, in “Magazin Istoric” nr. 2(311) of February 1993, p.58

Many Americans recounted that they were invited to simple peasant houses, poor but very clean, they were put at the table and served with food and țuică (a traditional alcoholic Romanian drink). And only after this “ritual” the peasants called in the gendarmes. These stories were written in the letters that the Allied prisoners sent home (which were read and copied by the Romanian intelligence services).

What follows are some fragments from their letters reflecting the good conditions of detention enjoyed by the American and British prisoners and their perception of Romanians.⁹¹

“The Romanians are indeed splendid people. I would never believe that they can be so friendly with their enemies” (Lt. John Roades).

“I am in a Romanian hospital. They have here the best medical equipment and everybody treated us as if we were their own (...). You have to know that we are prisoners to the Romanians, not to the Germans, and this is a great advantage for me” (Cap. James E. Mann)

“In the hospital the doctors are good and treat us very well. I don’t feel very comfortable since I came here to bomb these people and now I find them so kind to us⁹²

These statements also confirm the attitude of the Romanians towards the Anglo-American prisoners, from the high state authorities down to simple peasants. Because the Anglo-American pilots too had a good impression of their Romanian enemies, all these accounts seem to indicate a symmetry of the positive imagological paradox between these two opposite sides found at a war with each other.

⁹¹ Notes on Romania, in Festung Ploiești, p.176-177

⁹² The Military Archives of Romania, fond 948, file no. 360/1944, p. 427 (also in Cornel Marandiuc, *Inimi cât să cuprindă cerul patriei*, Cluj-Napoca, 1995, p.67)

The Anglo-American prisoners were interrogated in relaxed and informal manner. Their declarations were extremely interesting since they offered explanations concerning several aspects of their military missions on Romania (objectives, civil casualties, their perception of the enemy). Taking them into account, I consider that all these statements must be looked at in a relative and contextual manner. The Allied may well have repeated what they were taught by their superiors in order to make the Romanian authorities more benevolent towards them.

What is striking for me is the contradiction between facts and statements, analysed in a historical perspective. While after the war, Great Britain and the United States of America allowed the Soviet Union to have a full control on Romania, the declarations of the Anglo-American prisoners made during the war carried an opposite message. Moreover, they criticized several external actions of the Soviet Union, such as the seizure of Bessarabia, northern Bucovina and the Herța region in 1940, a tragic event that brought the war into the houses of all Romania's inhabitants. These harsh critiques against the Soviet Union, coming from the Anglo-American prisoners are quite odd since at the time of this military aggression on Romania, the great democracies of the world remained embarrassingly silent.

The British prisoners were confronted with the results of their own night bombardments on Ploiești and Bucharest.⁹³ The interrogators told them that the Romanian side considered these military actions as terror bombing. The English pilots defended themselves by saying that they did not aim to spread terror through their raids since Romania could not help doing what it did. Even if in June 1940, Great Britain said

⁹³ Notes on Romania, in *Festung Ploiești*, p.175.

and did nothing to support Romania in front of the Soviet attack; the British prisoners said that this gesture made by a country that started from the Dniester River and ended to the Pacific Ocean was a “pure insanity.”⁹⁴

The captured Anglo-American crews’ members further declared their objective was the liquidation of Germany. The air missions on Romania were aimed at this, and this was their only purpose. According to these statements, the strategic military objectives of the Allied forces were to destroy the Romanian oil and the communication network because those served the interests of Nazi Germany, which must be taken out of the war as fast as possible.

When asked about the reason why they threw a large quantity of bombs on civil areas of Romania’s cities, the Allied pilots said that this was not their responsibility but that of their military leaders who ordered them to bombard from 7,000 meter altitude. They explained that a small delay of only a few seconds could cause the launched bombs to miss their targets and destroy the surroundings of the designated area. Even with a perfect execution, under these conditions, the precision of the bombardments was still very low. Therefore, they admitted that such civil casualties would not have occurred so frequently if their own superior commanders had shown some concern for the faith of the non-belligerent victims and used instead a different bombing method.

The press coverage, the historic records, the accounts of the Anglo-American pilots, or the studies made by the Allied military services about Romanian people showed to a great extent the status of the collective mentality and the Romanians’ perceptions

⁹⁴ Ibid

about war and enemies. Among all the crimes committed by the regime, the average Romanian showed positive feelings towards its Anglo-Americans enemy. The public fear of the communists and the cynical seizure of the eastern part of Romania (Bessarabia, Bucovina and Herța) preserved a bad image of the Russians all through the war and after.

In the same way, the image of the Germans was shaped by a reality that relied on the present but couldn't erase the past historical experience. During the war proper, the civilians' morale or their image regarding various aspects of the military conflict didn't influence the military operations for any of the parts involved. However, when a sudden military change occurred, like the coup d'état of 23rd of August 1944, the psychological ground was already prepared contributing greatly to the success of the military operations that followed. The enrolment of many civilians in the patriotic forces that fought the Germans together with the Romanian army, to free Bucharest and other cities of the country, was significantly determined by perceptions, morale and interests.

Conclusions

The current thesis aimed to redirect the research focus from the military side of the subject, which is traditional in Romanian historiography, to the social one. At the same way, the thesis offered a close-up account of a major historical event such as the Allies bombing campaign on a relatively small industrial and urban area of the Ploiești city. This passage from macro-history to a micro-analysis based on a given study case was approached on several components: military, economic and social. In addition to the information taken from primary sources, this thesis has aimed to contribute to the field of urban history during World War Two by gathering and critically evaluating all the relevant data from a multitude of secondary sources. These works covered, for the most part, the military aspect of the problem and offered only occasionally data about the social impact.

The oil industry boosted the development of the small 19th-century trade town of Ploiești. It brought wealth to the city and attracted like a magnet Romanian and foreign capital, also bringing with it a large number of immigrants, mostly from the overpopulated rural regions of the country. The building of 15 refineries together with the rest of economic activities which flourished around them generated an impressive urban growth of the city. The progressive destruction of the city during the war by air-strikes turned all this evolution into involution.

Due mostly to the power of the oil industry, Ploiești succeeded to overcome the setback recorded during the Great Depression years and to carry on its development and modernization. The number of inhabitants continued to grow up to approximately 90,000 in 1941 (when Romania entered the war). This demographic dynamics and the

consolidation of the down-town of the city with numerous administrative and commercial buildings brought numerous benefits during peace time. When the war broke out, however, this development increased the city's vulnerability.

In the interwar period, Ploiești was a multiethnic city; representatives of different ethnic groups settled down here and started business in an open and positive economic and social environment. It is the case of many Hungarians coming mostly from Transylvania as well as a significant number of Jews, the second largest ethnic group in Ploiești, after the Romanians. In 1940's for a total population of about 90.000 people the Jews represented almost 10.000.⁹⁵ The city kept its prevalent Romanian character in all the socio-economic aspects. However, the integration of the minorities in the economic life of the city, the existence of ethnic schools (such as the Jewish boys school "Luca Moise"), and various religious institutions showed the open heart and wisdom of the Ploiești community, also interested in the further capitalist development of their city. This "golden age" of inter-ethnic cohabitation turned into a very dark experience during World War Two. The greatest part of the foreigners in the city was expelled. The ones that suffered the most were the Romanian Jews. Loyal and valuable members of the local community of Ploiești, they were considered unreliable by the Romanian political regime and, therefore, they were removed from the Romanian oil fields area (from the city and its surroundings). They were also subjected to the general anti-Semitic policies of Romania during the military dictatorship of Ion Antonescu.

The oil factor continued to shape the destinies of the people of Ploiești during World War Two. All the parts involved in the conflict made their military plans in Romania having a close interest in this particular aspect. The Anglo-Americans

⁹⁵ Geală, *Istoricul culturii mozaic din Ploiești*, p.21

understood even before the war the huge importance the Romanian oil would have for the German war machine. In order to destroy it, they developed a military mechanism, which is of a particular importance since it is the dynamic element that produced victims among civilians. As it has been shown, the failure or the ineffectiveness of all attempts to destroy the oil industry by sabotages or by a few isolated air blows, led the Allied high military authorities to adopt a different military tactics. The huge cost both in men and planes recorded by the Anglo-American forces after “Tidalwave” operation in 1943 (the highest loss in all their air raids in Europe up to then), and its semi-failure prompted a change in the military approach. The “carpet bombing” system, used by them extensively in the 1944 bombing campaign on Romania, succeeded to damage a big part of the oil refineries and of the country’s infrastructure but at a high cost paid by the civilians of the bombed areas. Besides the annihilation of the military and industrial targets, this method of attack inflicted damage on civilian buildings as well.

The response of the Romanian authorities influenced the social effects of this bombing campaign as well. By allowing the biggest part of city’s dwellers to flee towards other cities or regions of the country, the authorities limited considerably the total cost of human lives in Ploiești. However, at the end of 1940 a decree was adopted for the militarization of civil and state institutions. By taking this decision, the Romanian authorities kept in function the local administration and a minimal economic life of Ploiesti. This was possible due to war legislation and a central military command that carried on its duties in the context of heavy bombardments upon the city.

In normal and democratic circumstances, the perception of the people regarding Romania’s leaders and their policy would have has important political consequences, if one takes into account the instrument of the universal suffrage. However, in the 1940s,

the Romanians found themselves trapped in the infernal mechanism of a military dictatorship and thrown by a chain of unfaithful events into the blaze of World War Two. Under such circumstances, the mass response to the war, generally, and to the Allied bombing campaign and to the Antonescu regime, in particular, was shaped by pragmatic reasons. No mutiny began against the military regime of the country, and the main causes that stopped the masses to do this were: the Soviet danger, the significant military presence of the Germans in Romania up to the summer of 1944, and the economic dependency of the population on the Antonescu regime.

Regarding the imagological aspect, in the 1940s the Romanian population did not change its older perception of the enemy. As the thesis has shown, this was determined a paradox since Romania was in alliance with a state about which the largest part of the Romanians had negative feelings, based on the historical experience of World War One. The German ally was perceived as a “bad boy” mainly as a reflection of the behaviour of the German army during the First World War and due to the legends created at Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz, the fortification line where the Romanian army had defeated the Germans and stopped their offensive. The mutilation of Romania’s territory by the Second Vienna Award (30 august 1940) instrumented by the same German state, this time under the rule of Hitler, was another contribution of the Germans to their negative image in the minds and hearts of the Romanians. The unfair behaviour of the Germans to the Romanians soldiers on the Eastern front and the economic exploitation of the Romanian economy were other reasons for the Romanians to retain the enemy image of the Germans.

The Americans remained “the good boys” even as attackers because they were associated with the West and the ideal image of Western culture that the Romanians had

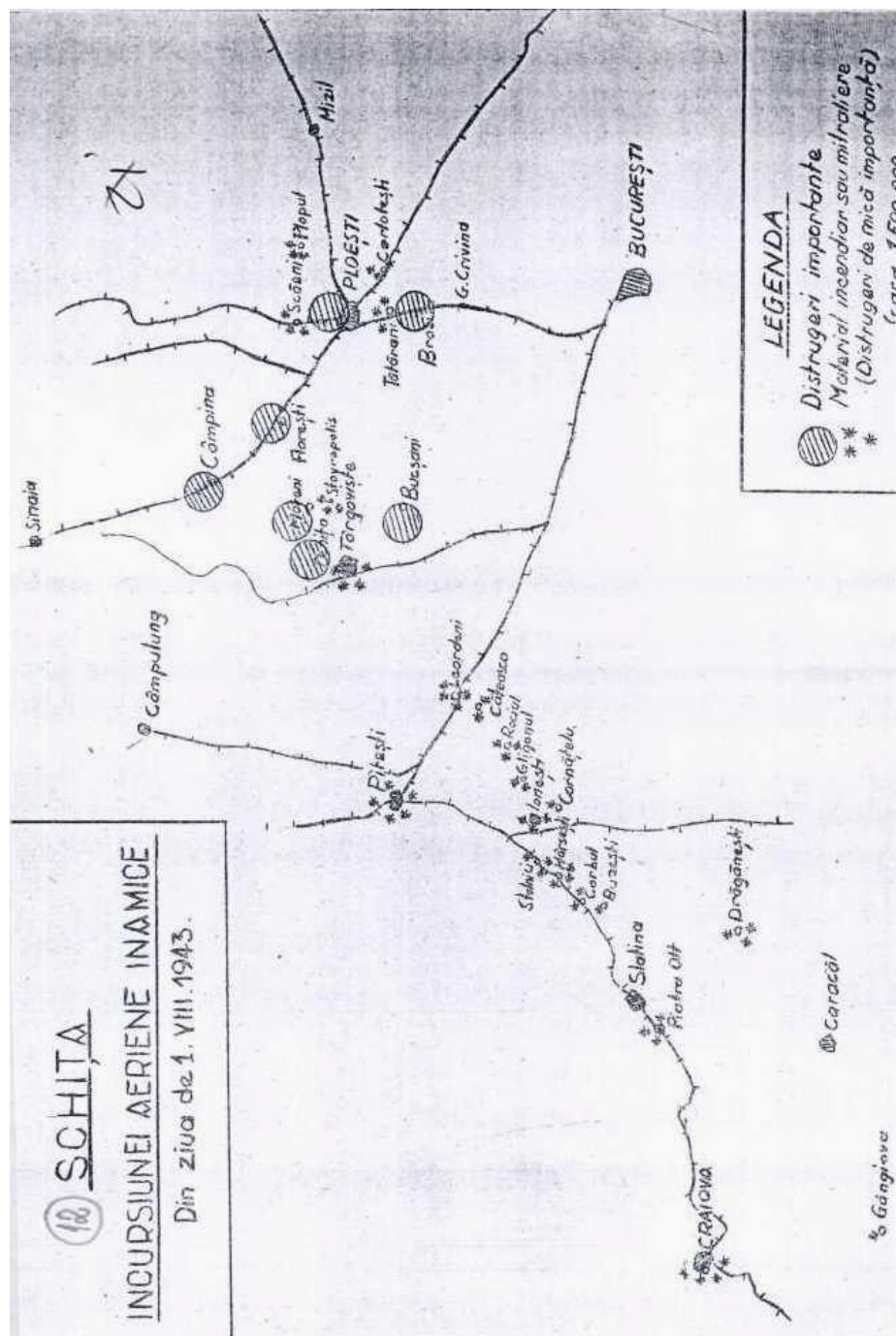
held up for themselves. To this was added that fact that, during the First World War, it had been the Americans who decisively contributed to the defeat of Central Powers and, as a consequence, gave Romania the chance to end its state building process by incorporating the Romanian inhabited provinces of Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania in 1918.

One enemy that remained a fierce enemy was the new type of man, the Soviet. The Romanians overlapped its shallow and unclear identity with the image of the Russian imperialism. The attack on the neutral Romania in June 1940, followed by the seizure of 1/3 of Romania's territory, the loss of million of Romanians (renamed "Moldavians" by Stalin's ideologists), the massive deportations to Siberia of the Romanian element from these lands, the several collective border massacres, the countless executions made there by the NKVD and the extremely credible perspective of an invasion of the entire Romania, left no chance for the Russians to present themselves in a better light to the Romanian people.

The topic of Allied bombardments on the cities belonging to the Third Reich or on those of its allies remains under-researched. The general military and strategic approaches of post war historical literature must be balanced with micro-analysis based on case studies, to reveal the real causes of a historical phenomenon and its consequences for the most important element of historical science: the human beings.

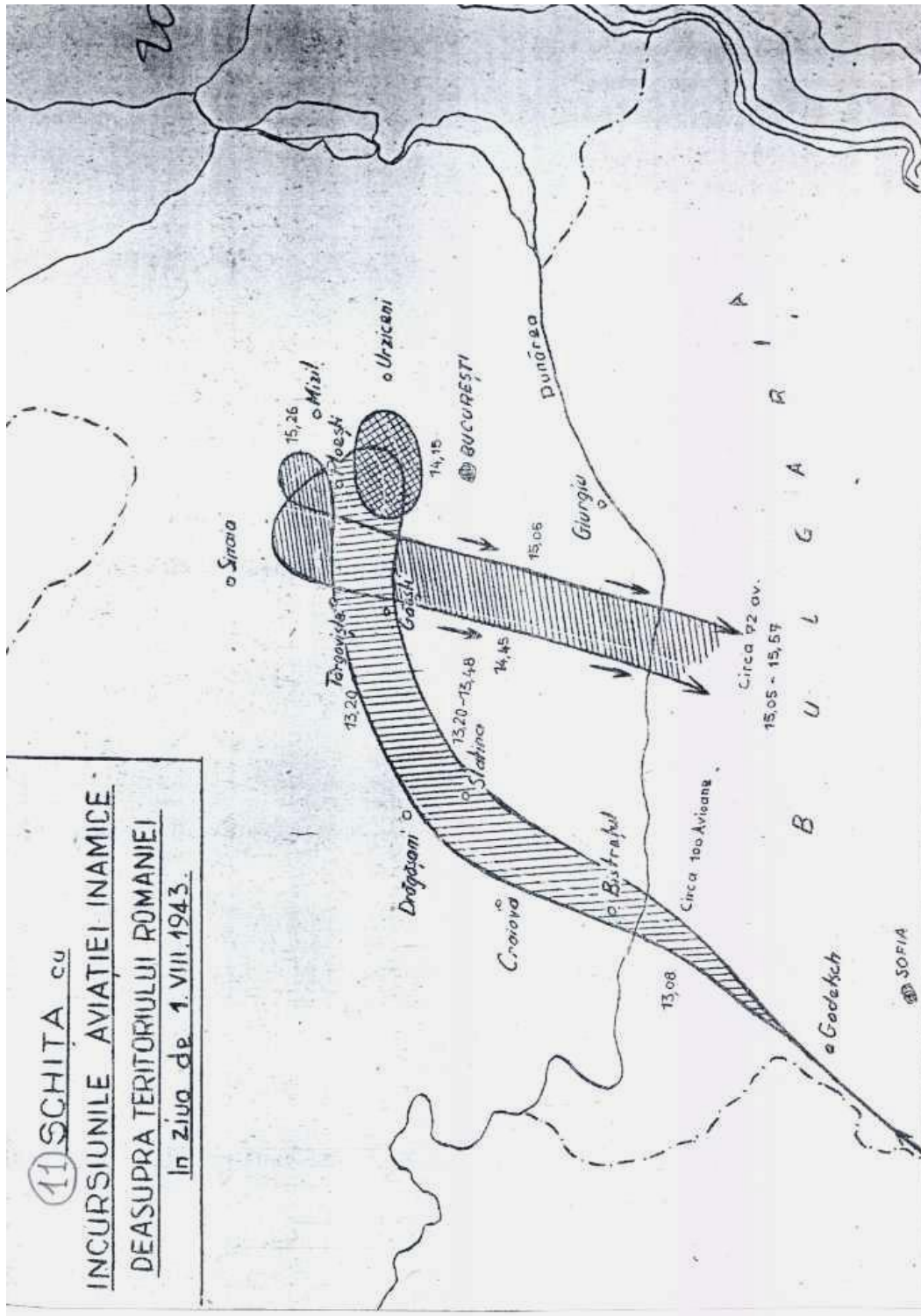
Appendices

1. The targets of the Allied planes in southern Romania during the low-altitude attack of 1 August 1943 and their level of destruction⁹⁶



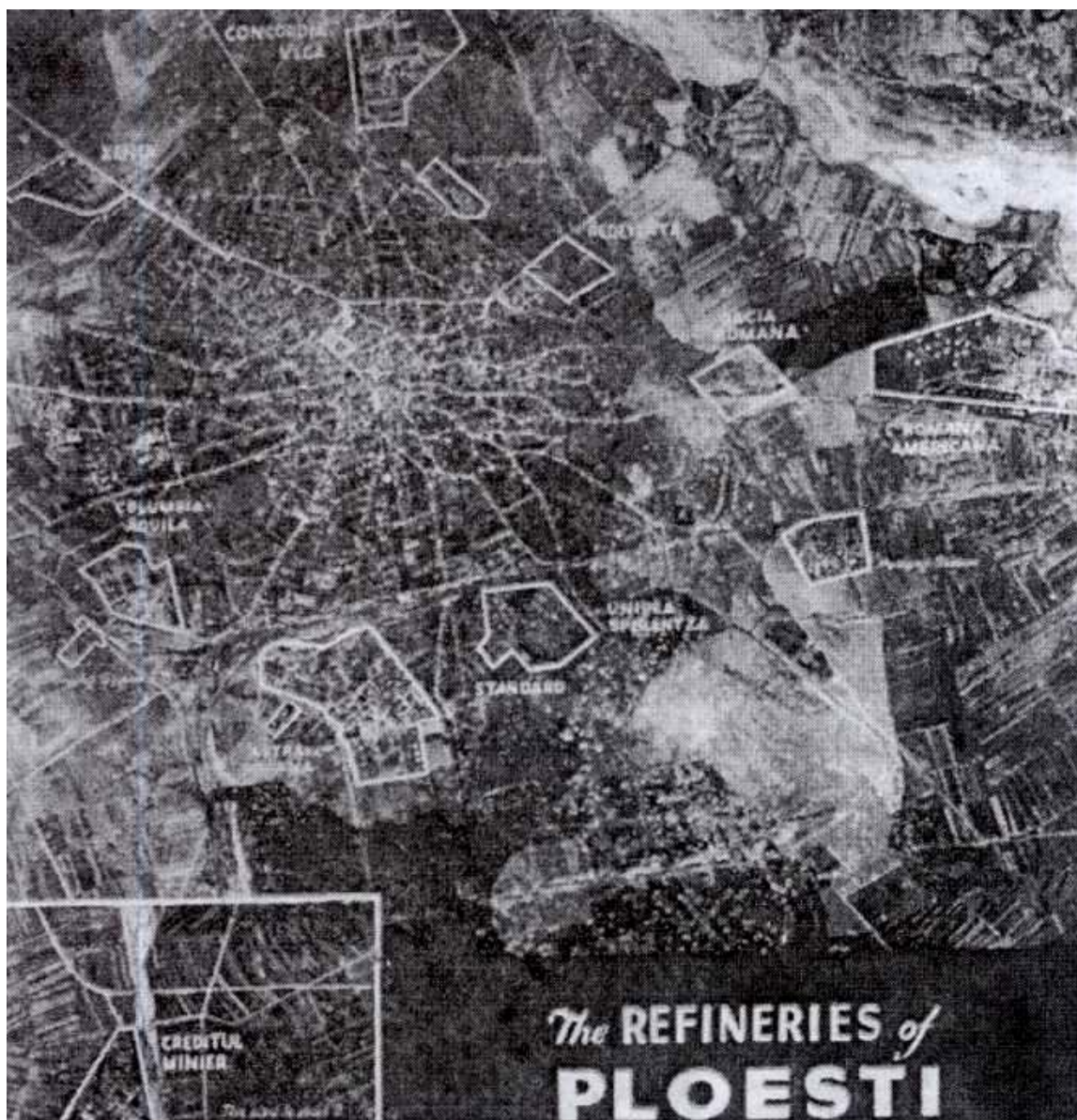
⁹⁶ The Military Archives of Romania, fond 948, file no. 170/1943, p. 21

- The route of the Allied planes in southern Romania during the low-altitude attack of 1 August 1943 – Operation “Tidal Wave”⁹⁷



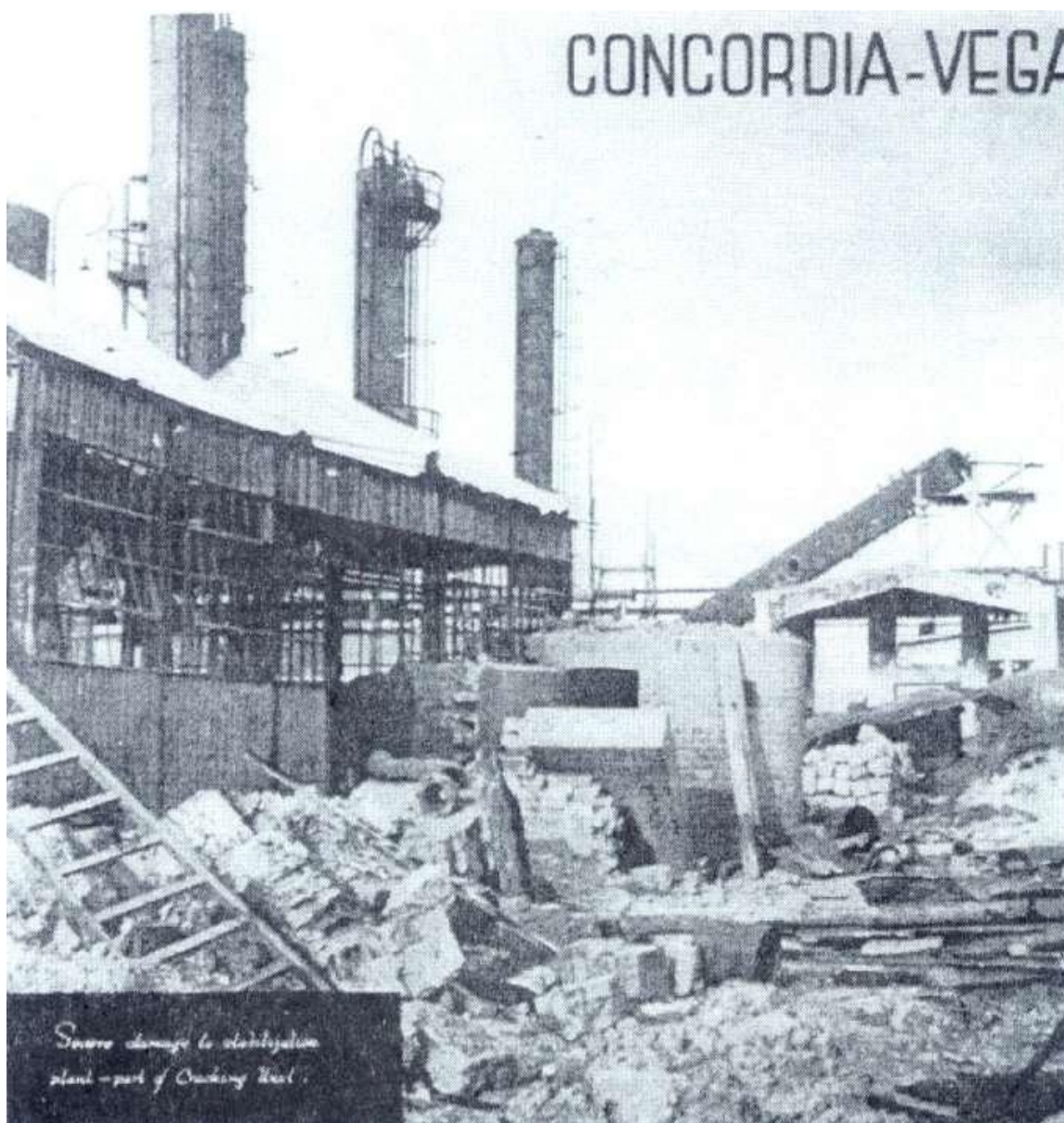
⁹⁷ The Military Archives of Romania, fond 948, file no. 170/1943, p.20

3. The disposal of the refineries around Ploiesti city⁹⁸



⁹⁸ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.145

4. „Concordia-Vega” refinery after the bombing raid⁹⁹



⁹⁹ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.149

5. Internal damage at „Creditul Minier” refinery¹⁰⁰



¹⁰⁰ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.155

6. Destroyed fuel tanks inside „Concordia Vega” refinery¹⁰¹



¹⁰¹ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.146

7. Leaflet dropped by the Allies asking the Romanian people to end Romania's alliance with Nazi Germany¹⁰²

ROMÂNII,

Viața fiecăruia dintre voi și soarta țării voastre sun azi în cumpănă.

Hotărâți-vă!

Aveți de ales între a pieri pentru Hitler și a trăi pentru România.

CÂND FRAȚII VOȘTRI MAI PUTEAU FI SALVAȚI, Hitler a poruncit rezistența nebunească în Crimeea, numai spre a vă determina să continuați lupta zadarnică pe pământul României, ACUM, CÂND ROMÂNIA MAI POATE FI SALVATA, Hitler vă cere să rezistați în România, numai spre a întârzia dezertarea celorlalți aliați ai Germaniei și prăbușirea frontului intern în Reich.

• • •

**AȚI PLĂTIT SCUMP BIRUINȚELE VREMELNICE
REPURTATE ALĂTURI DE GERMANI!**

• • •

**VEȚI PLĂTI CU MULT MAI SCUMP, DACĂ
INFRÂNGEREA IMINENTĂ VĂ VA SURPRINDE
ALĂTURI DE GERMANI!**

Lansat de Aviația Regală Britanică
și Aviația Armatei Statelor-Unite



C/RA/108

¹⁰² The National Archives of Romania, fond "Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii - Cabinetul Militar Ion Antonescu, file no. 94/1944, p.253

8. Leaflet dropped by the Allies asking the Romanian people to end Romania's alliance with Nazi Germany in order to shorten the war¹⁰³

Vorbe

“.....BIRUINȚĂ SAU MOARTE...”

“.....HOTARUL VOIVODAL
AL MOLDOVEI...”

“.....FATALITATE GEOGRAFICĂ...”

“.....STĂVILARUL RĂSĂRITEAN
AL CIVILIZAȚIEI...”

ROMÂNI,
TRECETI DELA **vorbe**, CU CARI
GUVERNUL VOSTRU PRELUNGESTE
RĂZBOIUL, LA **fapte** PENTRU
A-L SCURTA.

Lansat de Aviația Regală Britanică 
și Aviația Armatei Statelor-Unite 

C/RA/701

¹⁰³ The National Archives of Romania, fond “Președinția Consiliului de Miniștrii - Cabinetul Militar Ion Antonescu, file no. 94/1944, p.252

9. Information about air raid warnings and instructions as to what civilians and the labor force of Ploiești should do during air raids.¹⁰⁴

(7)

Primăria Municipiului Ploiești

SERVICIUL DE APARARE PASIVĂ

PUBLICAȚIUNE

în privința semnalelor de „ALARMA AERIANĂ”, date cu sirenele

Se aduce la cunoștința populației, că instrucțiunile publicate la 7 Octombrie 1943 se modifică stabilindu-se următoarele:

IN TIMPUL ZILEI

I. Înainte cu 10 minute ca orașul și regiunea petrolieră să fie atacate de 1--3 avioane inamice, sirenele vor suna o alarmă specială, numită „ALARMA PUBLICĂ” care alarmă se compune din 3 (trei) sunete lungi fiecare de câte 15 secunde, date la interval de 4—5 secunde, între ele.

La auzul acestui semnal, aglomerările din piețe, sau de pe străzi se vor împrăști. Salile de spectacole se vor evacua.

Populația însă, poate să-și vadă de ocupații.
Circulația nu se întrerupe.
Lucrul în fabrici, uzine, ateliere nu se oprește.
Cine dorește, se poate adăposti.
Adăpostirea nu este obligatorie.

Când avioanele inamice s'au îndepărtat se sună încetarea obișnuită a alarmei.

II. Înainte cu 10 minute, ca orașul și regiunea petrolieră să fie lovită de un atac aerian inamic la care ar lua parte 4 sau mai multe avioane se va suna „ALARMA AERIANĂ OBISNUITĂ” compusă din mai multe sunete modulate, repetate timp de 1 minut.

În acest caz, populația se adăpostește obligatoriu, circulația pe străzi și lucrul în fabrici, se oprește, cum s'a procedat și până acum la sunarea alarmei.

IN TIMPUL NOPTII

Înainte cu 10 minute, ca orașul să fie atacat de orice număr de avioane inamice (1-3 sau mai multe) se sună: „Alarma aeriană obișnuită”, ca la punctul 2 de mai sus și se iau toate măsurile de siguranță:

- oprirea circulației,
- oprirea lucrului în fabrici,
- adăpostirea obligatorie.

IN REZUMAT

- ZIUA — Pot fi 2 feluri de ALARME AERIENE.

a) — ALARMA PUBLICĂ, cu 3 sunete pentru 1—3 avioane.

b) — ALARMA AERIANĂ OBISNUITĂ, cu mai multe sunete modulate pentru 4 sau mai multe avioane.

- NOAPTEA — Este un singur fel de ALARMA AERIANĂ pentru orice număr de avioane inamice.

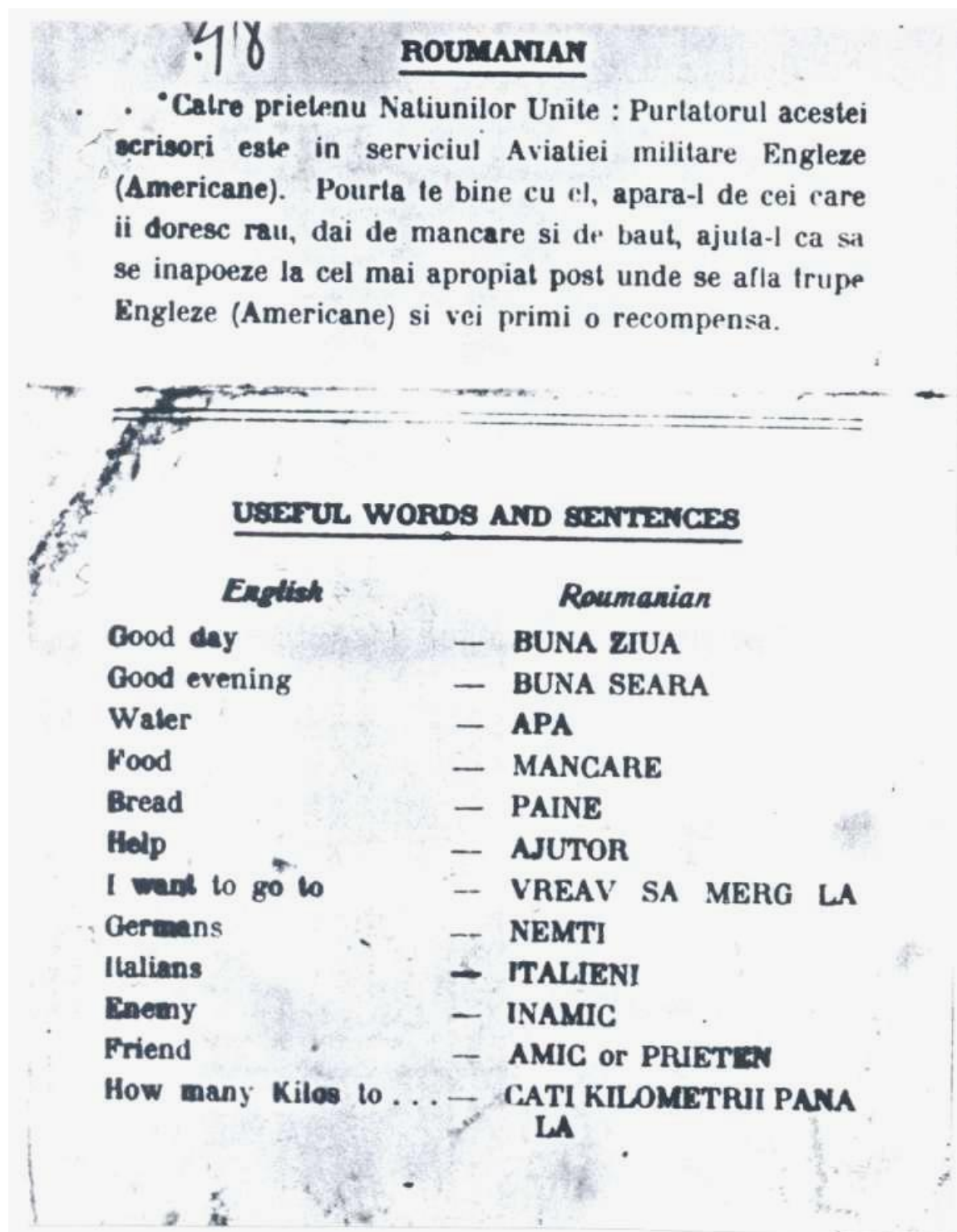
Data în cabinetul nostru azi 11 Decembrie 1943.

Primar, GH. VLAICULESCU

Seful Serviciului A. D. Căntan GHEORGHE

¹⁰⁴ The National Archives of Romania, Prahova County branch, fond “Prefectura Județului Prahova”, files no. 89/1944, p.179

10. Anglo-American leaflet handed to locals by the captured pilots. It contains instructions for the local Romanian population to help the Allied pilots and some essential Romanian words and phrases.¹⁰⁵



¹⁰⁵ The Military Archives of Romania, fond 948, file no. 170/1943, p.48

11. Information from the training program of the Anglo-American pilots regarding Romanian society and people's attitudes.¹⁰⁶

19

NOTES ON ROUMANIA

The Roumanian nation is composed of about 80 percent peasants and workmen, and the remainder are clerks, artisans, business people, shopkeepers, and the richer classes.

They are of Latin stock, being descended from the ancient Romans, and their language is of predominantly Latin origin too; hence, anybody who knows Spanish, or better still Italian, will soon find that he can understand a great deal of the Roumanian language.

The distinguishing feature about the peasants and many of the workmen is that they still preserve their national dress, composed of white, close fitting trousers, overlaid by a skirt or smock of white. All other classes of the population wear ordinary European clothes.

The police in the main towns wear a brown uniform and carry an automatic pistol. The country police (gendarmes, or, in Roumanian "jandarm") wear a rather bright blue uniform and carry carbines or rifles; some of them are mounted on horses or motorcycles with sidecars. There is a "post de jandarmi" (police station) in practically every village, generally with a flagpole, striped like a barber's pole, outside.

The Church of Roumania is Greek Orthodox and churches are to be found in almost every village. The priests are easily distinguished by their beards and long black robes.

As a general rule, it can be taken that the peasants to the South and East of the mountains speak only Roumanian; North and West of the mountains, many of them know some German, Hungarian, or Serbian. A considerable number of the middle classes know some French or German and perhaps English, whilst almost all of the richer classes speak French and some English. It is not very likely that you will find anybody who speaks English in the villages, except in the vicinity of the oilfields.

The people of Roumania, and especially the peasants, are honest, friendly, kindly and hospitable to strangers. They like French, British and Americans and they fear the Russians. They loathe the Germans who came into their country as enemies in the last war and treated them as only Germans can treat conquered countries, and have now come in as "friends" and are stripping Roumania bare of all its food and oil. Amongst the middle and upper classes, however, there are many grafters and others of the same kind who are friendly to the Germans because it suits their own pockets. Generally speaking, it is therefore safer to keep to the villages and small towns, although it is of course easier to hide and get civilian clothes in the big towns if you have a friend to take you there and show you how.

It would be inadvisable under any circumstances to try and cross the main range of the Carpathian Mountains (in Roumanian written Carpati, pronounced "Karpats") for there will be concentrations of Roumanian and Hungarian troops on both sides of the frontier, as well as strong frontier guards; furthermore, over the mountains there are scores of thousands of people of German descent, who are every bit as bad as the Huns from Germany; these Germans live in towns, villages and on farms too, so keep South of the mountains. There are lots of Germans (civilians as well as troops) in Bucharest and Ploesti, as well as in some of the other larger towns.

If you have to land in Roumania, observe the following points:

- a. Get rid of your flying suit if you are wearing one, otherwise the people may think you are a paratroop and take hostile action.
- b. If people approach you, don't show fight, or wave a gun; if you have one it is much better to keep it out of sight. It is highly unlikely that you will find an armed civilian anyhow.

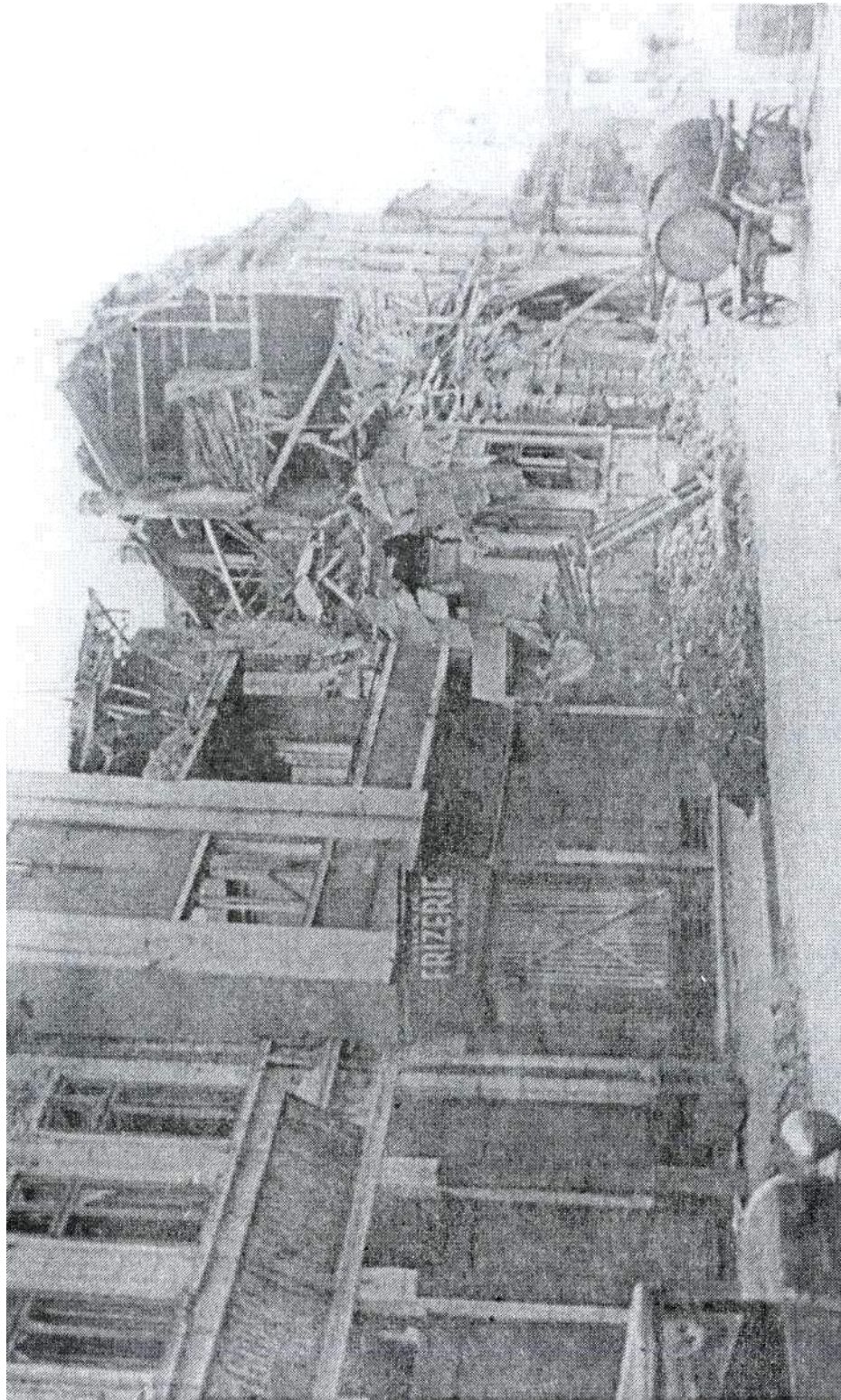
Give a friendly wave of the hand and smile. Say:
"Buna Ziua. Eu sunt aviator american"
pronounced "Bunner zee-u-er. Ye sunt avi-attor ammerikan" (stress the underlined
syllables)
means "Good day. I am an American aviator"

Further useful phrases are given later on.

Don't swagger and don't do the opposite and show that you are worried. The Roumanians are a people with a great deal of natural dignity and will respect

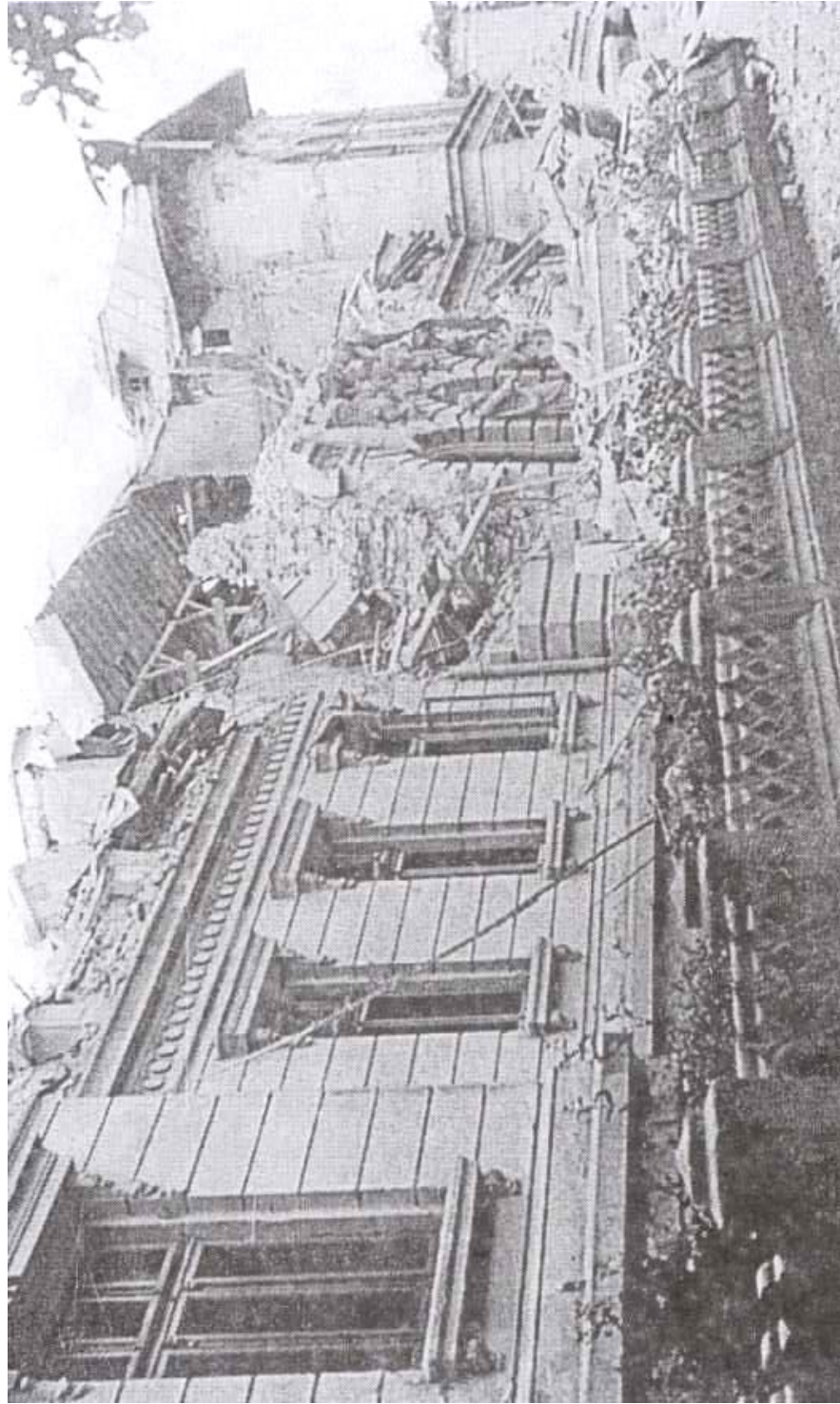
¹⁰⁶ The Military Archives of Romania, fond 948, file no. 170/1943, p. 44

12. A street in Ploiești during World War Two.¹⁰⁷



¹⁰⁷ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.176

14. A bombed house in Ploiești¹⁰⁸



¹⁰⁸ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.178

15. A ruined hotel near a destroyed building¹⁰⁹



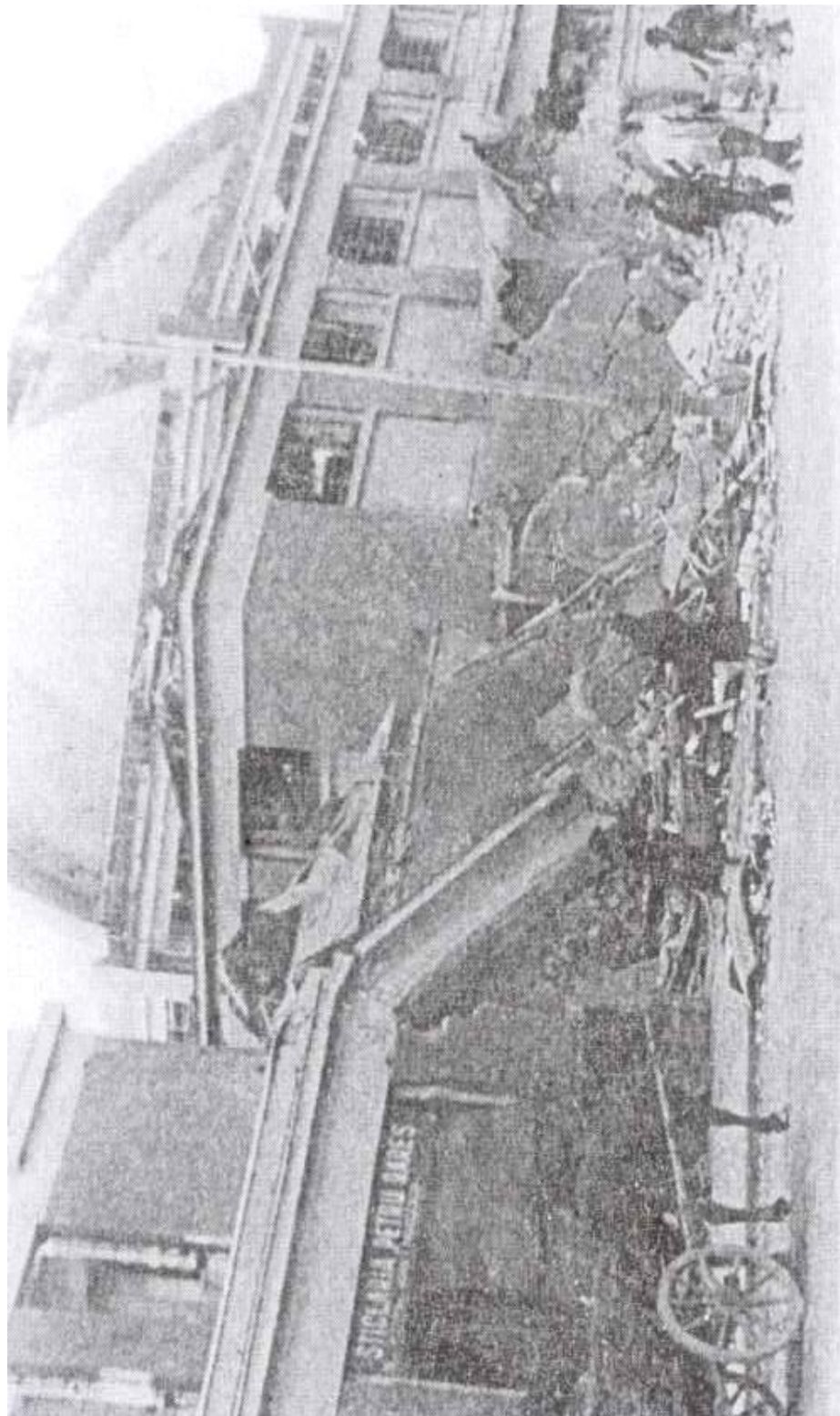
¹⁰⁹ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.171

16. Down-town Ploiești. Piața Obor, Halele Centrale¹¹⁰



¹¹⁰ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.168

17. A street in Ploiești during the Allied air raids¹¹¹



¹¹¹ Eugen Stănescu, Gavriil Preda, Iulia Stănescu, *Petrol și bombe la Ploiești*, p.170

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