

D Caracostea, *Aspectul Psihologic al Războiului*, ediție revăzută, studiu introductiv, note și bibliografie de Eugenia Bârlea [*The Psychological Aspect of War*, introductory study, notes and bibliography by Eugenia Bârlea], Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iași, 2015, 281 p.

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What started as a course held at the Staff College between 1919-1921, the paperwork signed by D. Caracostea is an innovative transformation example of the post-war trauma into an ample explanation of the role, the nature and relevance of the psychological aspect in the breakdown and rebirth of the 1916-1917 years.

By entering the First World War alongside the Triple Entente and against the Central Powers, Romania's population manifested an intense enthusiasm doubled by some small victories, but which were sadly followed by a series of disastrous defeats. The ampleness and immediate war consequences have forced the Romanian Government, The Royal House, The Army and most of the administrative structures to retreat to Moldova, the place in which high hopes were invested for a moral and psychological recovery of the soldiers.

For the military and political heads of the inter-bellum period, the poignant experiences of both the civilian population and Romanian army, raised some interrogation marks of vital issue as to: How could we, in the future, prevent confusing situations, poor coordination and getting caught off-guard? Convinced of the fact that "the lack of psychological knowledge in handling people can be as damaging as the lack of instruction and technical preparation" (p.51),

D. Caracostea realized the need of an actual paperwork destined to help the students from the Staff College. While studies and paper-works needed as a cornerstone were scarce, he resorted to something much more ingenious: he took his students' Bachelor Degree paper-works, former soldiers. Asking them to write about the two chapters of the war - the campaign from 1916 and afterwards about the restoration of the army and its victorious battles from 1917- from a psychological point of view, describing their reality during those two years, D. Caracostea gathered materials in which he defined the fundamental ingredients found in the human soul during a combat defeat and victory as well.

Out of the most dangerous emotions, fear is considered to be the main enemy of self-preservation, of the thirst to be, and, much more than that, when it is faced with surprise and astonishment, the effects are very calamitous. Being responsible of destabilization and the altering of one's ideas and beliefs, "fear can grow so strong as to become dreadful and to instill panic"(p. 109). Amid the numerous forms that fear presents itself as, and from which it also feeds, the most common are a tendency of shutting eyes to the danger, a display of an unjustified superiority attitude before the engagement in battle, and also the excessive fear of using new weapons. Grenades, for example, ammunition sent to the guarding regiment of Danube, the section between Danube and White Fortress, are returned to the base because "the soldiers are not used to handle such delicate and also powerful weapons"(p. 116).

If one is asked to add to all of these issues, a turmoil state of mind which gives birth to illusions and distorted reality, the effect, through mass contagion, is easy to deduce. The episode related by Major Jinga Petre(p. 120) is eloquent. During full military campaign, the soldiers that were in his command fell into a state of illusion, confusing a shiner with the enemy's zeppelin, generating a state of mass hysteria. Alongside these numerous situations that enhanced the fear of Romanian soldiers during the 1916 campaign, the darkness, their fatigue, visual and auditory sensations have amplified the terror. "From the moment in which you could hear the cannon shot's

specific whistling, to the noise made by its explosion, it was impossible to follow with the same level of attention your previous idea”, narrated Major Florescu Simion, established at quite some distance from the front. “This officer, whenever the bombarding started, used to come out from wherever he was, to the center of the Command post’s yard, pale, shivering and running relentlessly from a place to another, without looking for a hideaway, solely with the purpose of moving” (p. 126), it was described in another report as to the out of balance behavior of a sub-lieutenant. And so it was emphasized that aside from the battle, many more other aspects of war posed a real threat to the soldier. Inactivity can be disturbing too as it can prove to be a fruitful ground for fear. The reserve corps, for example, are the first to fall victim to paralyzing fear (p. 130), the rumors spread from them, being the most poisonous for the whole army.

Naturally, the appetite for revenge prepares the base for reevaluation, preparation and, finally, leads to a combat. The sincere hatred of the soldiers seems to be the main force of this transformation. Its conservation and fueling guarantees “offensive starts with the most intensity” (p.180). Among the most important ways of soul reinforcement, so that the participation to the war seem like a conscious and assumed choice, are the need of preservation of one’s property and family, the need for social justice and the release of the soldier from the family’s problems. The danger of “profanation of one the most holy aspects of the soldier’s life” (143), the family, its property, village and country, suscite its energy to continue the fight. Obviously, beside this state of being, a big role is played by the Headquarter with its broadcast of war “stir the spirits” (148). Of great importance in this matter is the boosting of confidence in values like social justice, protecting the needy, weak and abused ones which has its role of increasing the soldier’s attachment to the array, and, mostly to the national ideal. “The infantry’s excitement rises or falls down depending on their impression of how the artillery is handling the situation in battle”. (163) The fact that each and one of them understands that solidarity in the array brings hope and vitality to

resist to situations that otherwise would bring the army down, is imperative. And by following the statement that “the one capable of serving everyone is the one capable of leading”(168), we draw the conclusion that the leader and his actions lead to two decisive matters in obtaining the victory. The captain’s profile portrayed by D. Caracostea revolves around the classic quotation “timor et amor”.

Coming from someone that “hasn’t felt in a profound way the vibration of the religious feeling”(p.247), D. Caracostea makes pertinent observations regarding the role and form in the religious feelings of the soldiers. Among these, the preponderance of the religious feeling during the combat is found in many confessions: “before taking any action, I crossed...my soldiers were also doing the same thing. When the bombarding and the hubbub was stronger, before even getting on guard, the soldier were crossing”(p. 259).

The book of D. Caracostea is essential to the understanding of the war mindset. Balanced and actual, the book can be both a work instrument for all of those preoccupied with Romanian military history, and an extraordinary mirror of moral resurrection of the Romanian society in times of war.