

## MILITARY PRIESTS FROM THE GORJ COUNTY IN THE BATTLES FROM MĂRĂȘTI, MĂRĂȘEȘTI AND OITUZ

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### ABSTRACT

*THE DECISIVE VICTORIES OF THE ROMANIAN ARMY FROM JULY – AUGUST 1917 STOPPED THE OFFENSIVE OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE FORCES ON THE SOUTH MOLDAVIA FRONT AND ENABLED THE PRESERVATION OF ROMANIAN NATIONAL STATE.*

*AS PART OF THE MILITARY UNITS THAT PARTICIPATED, IN THE SUMMER OF 1917, TO THE HEROIC BATTLES OF MĂRĂȘTI, MĂRĂȘEȘTI AND OITUZ THERE WERE THE GORJ COUNTY PRIESTS: CONSTANTIN DĂNĂU, SERVING AS DEACON FOR THE II<sup>ND</sup> ROMANIAN ARMY PRIEST, VASILE CERNĂIANU, AS PRIEST OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY REGIMENT, DUMITRU MURĂREȚU, AS PRIEST OF THE 7<sup>TH</sup> RANGER REGIMENT, AND VICTOR DOBRESCU, AS PRIEST OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> ARTILLERY BRIGADE.*

*THE MILITARY PRIESTS FROM THE GORJ COUNTY HAD AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION IN SUPPORTING THE MORALE OF THE ROMANIAN TROOPS IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF THE 1917, WHEN THE ROMANIAN ARMY WAS REBUILT AFTER THE MILITARY 1916 MILITARY CAMPAIGN, THAT ENDED WITH THE CENTRAL POWER'S OCCUPATION OF MOST OF THE COUNTRY, EXCEPTING MOLDOVA.*

*IN THIS CONTEXT, IT'S VERY RELEVANT THAT THE PRIEST CONSTANTIN DĂNĂU, ORIGINATED FROM THE GORJ COUNTY, WAS DEACON OF THE SECOND ROMANIAN ARMY AND, AFTER HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE MĂRĂȘTI BATTLE, HE BECAME THE SECOND SECRETARY OF THE ROMANIAN ARMY RELIGIOUS SERVICE.*

*SUBSTITUTE TEACHER AT "TUDOR VLADIMIRESCU" HIGHSCHOOL FROM TÂRGU-JIU, UNTIL THE SUMMER OF 1916, THE PRIEST CONSTANTIN DĂNĂU ATTENDED THE SORBONNE UNIVERSITY FROM PARIS AFTER THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR. AFTER RECEIVING HIS PH.D. IN PEDAGOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY, CONSTANTIN DĂNĂU TAUGHT AT THE NORMAL SCHOOL IN TÂRGU-JIU.*

**KEY-WORDS:** MILITARY PRIEST, CERNĂIANU, DOBRESCU, MURĂREȚU, WORLD WAR I.

### Introduction

The decisive victories of the Romanian Army in July - August 1917 allowed Romanian Army to stop the German-Austro-Hungarian's troops offensive on the Romanian front in southern Moldova and to safeguard the Romanian national state and the monarchy. This military effort was also supported by the military units whose religious priests were from the Gorj county,

the military units recruited in Gorj county that had military Gorj priests to which were added a series of military units recruited in other counties that had military priests from Gorj county.

### **1. Constantin Dănău – deacon of the Second Romanian Army**

In a special situation was the priest Constantin Dănău (Pătrașcu, & Pătrașcu 2016: 99-103) [1], originated from the Turcinești village, Curtișoara commune, mobilized on June 15, 1917 (Nicolescu, Dobrescu, & Nicolescu 2000: 344) [2], as the deacon of the 2nd Army priest (Dănău: 45; Dănău 2015) [3]. Under these circumstances, during the days and the night before the fighting in Mărăști, Constantin Dănău was around General Alexandru Averescu, Commander of the Second Army, contributing to the maintenance of a high morale among the troops (Dănău: 20) [4].

Graduate of the courses of the Central Theological Seminary in Bucharest, an educational institution led by the parental director Constantin Nazarie, in 1910, Constantin Dănău followed the courses of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Bucharest, graduating them in 1913, while also studying in parallel, the Faculty of Letters at the same university, which he graduated in 1915 (Dănău: 5) [5].

He started teaching in 1915, being a substitute professor at the Real Gymnasium in Târgu-Jiu, where he taught: Romanian Language, History, Geography and Latin (Dănău: 42) [6], and later, *"during the mobilization, Latin teacher Sterescu, entrusted me with the replacement of the chair and I had it until after the war of 1916, when in the autumn I was given half of the Romanian chair - History"* (Pătrașcu, & Pătrașcu 2013) [7].

On August 14, 1916, shortly before Romania's entry into World War I, Professor Constantin Dănău was mobilized *"at the Escape Hospital, which functioned in the high school"* (Dănău: 11) [8], following the declaration of war addressed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

After breaking the front of the Jiu Gorge at the beginning of October 1916, *"I took refuge with my father Dănău, from Turcinești to Bălești"*, the Turcinești locality, located in the north of Târgu-Jiu, in the path of the enemy troops advancing south. The exile of Priest Constantin Dănău continued through the village of Fărcășești, Gorj County, from where he headed to Strehăia, Craiova and Găiești. After *"we went through Galați with great difficulty, (...) without entering Bucharest, threatened with the takeover, we went up and my father-in-law into a freight train, to be named after two days in Galați"*. After several attempts to leave Galați, in the end, *"in the end of January 1917, we managed to get to Iași"* (Dănău: 9-13) [9].

Shortly after his arrival in Iași, priest Constantin Dănău presented himself at the Ministry of Public Instruction, where *"I legitimated the rights of secretary and substitute professor"*, so he was approved to pay the salary provided he worked at the Church House, *"Functioning at the Metropolitan Church of Iași"*. Within this institution, *"we were working at the office with Father Partenie and other House officials"*. As he confessed in his memoirs, the salary thus earned allowed the priest Constantin Dănău to assure the strict necessity and *"helped my kin"*, his wife and children remaining in the territory occupied by the Central Powers troops (Dănău: 13-16) [10].

Following the proposal of Father Constantin Nazarie, his former professor at the Central Theological Seminary in Bucharest, priest Constantin Dănău presented to General Constantin Prezan, at the Great General Headquarters of the Romanian Army, *"with the request to approve*

*my request to activate as a preacher in the army*" (Dănău: 18) [11]. As the request was approved, Constantin Dănău was named deacon of the 2nd Army priest (Dănău: 42) [12].

Referring to his participation in the Battle of Mărăști, the priest Constantin Dănău would note in his memoirs that *"I met in the drainage ditches of Mărăști with soldiers from my village: Grigore Ștefănoiu, V. Lupulescu, Tăiță Dijmărescu, Petre Dijmărescu, Roman Calotă, and at Mușunoaie, with Ion V. Voiculescu, giving him news about the brothers D. Thomas and Elias"* (Dănău: 23) [13].

On the other hand, Constantin Nazarie, the inspector priest of the Religious Service of the Romanian Army in the First World War, appreciated, referring to the activity of priest Constantin Dănău that *"in the battle of Mărășești he was almost uninterrupted on the front, encouraging and advising to fight resistance units of the army with which he came into contact"*, concluding that priest Constantin Dănău was noted as *"bold and contemptuous of death, like any good Romanian"* (Nicolescu et al.: 345) [14]. According to the priest's testimony Constantin Dănău, *"in the autumn of 1917, my position in the Second Army was diminished (...) to the priest's claims"*, so the priest Constantin Nazarie appointed him as *"secretary of the Religious Service of the Great General Quarter, where I stayed until my demobilization in June 1918"* (Dănău: 23-24) [15].

At the same time, the priest Constantin Nazarie showed that the priest Constantin Dănău *"was transferred as the second secretary to this service on November 1, 1917. Here, on the one hand, he proved himself worth of his assignment, and on the other, of his vocation. That means hardworking, skillful and punctual in the service. He joined me in various inspections, and everywhere he showed a prudent, devoted, skilled and skillful man. He fulfilled cleverly and intelligently any assignment given to him. He is a cleric who honors the army"* (Nicolescu et al.: 345) [16].

On March and April 1918, priest Constantin Dănău was proposed to advance to the rank of captain assimilated as a result of his merits in service and in support of the morals of the troops during the rebuilding of the Romanian army in the winter of 1916-1917 and during the summer battles of the 1917 (Nicolescu et al.: 345; CSPAMI) [17]. After demobilization, priest Constantin Dănău returned to Târgu-Jiu, where *"I did not serve under German until September when I was appointed substitute at the Gymnasium of Târgu-Jiu"* (Dănău: 45) [18].

During 1919, Constantin Dănău graduated the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Iași. Besides, in the second and third years of studies at that faculty, Constantin Dănău developed a series of exegesis studies of the New Testament and Christian morality, being awarded by the faculty dean's (Teotoi, 1999)[19].

In November 1919, he obtained, by contest, the post of deacon of the Romanian Church in Paris in December 1919 enrolling at the Faculty of Letters of the Sorbonne University in Paris, in order to graduate from the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology in 1923 within that faculty. Subsequently, holding bachelor's degrees in: Theology, Philosophy, Philology and Psychology, will enroll in the Ph.D.

Under these conditions, in 1924, he obtained his Ph.D. in Pedagogy at the Sorbonne, followed by the title of Ph.D. in Psychology at the same university in Paris.

In the summer of 1921 the Romanian church in Paris was visited by King Ferdinand I, Queen Maria and Princess Ileana, on which occasion the royal family appreciated the work of Deacon Constantin Dănău (Dănău 2015: 3-4) [20].

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1924, Constantin Dănău presented his resignation from the post he held at the Romanian church in Paris. After returning to the country, he was appointed Professor of Pedagogy at the "*Spiru Haret*" Normal School in Târgu-Jiu, contributing to the formation of nearly twenty generations of teachers both as a teacher and as a director of this institution education (Dănău: 35) [21].

In recognition of his merits, on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1924, King Ferdinand I conferred on Constantin Dănău the medal "*Reward for Work for the Church*", the first grade, on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1933, the deacon Constantin Dănau being decorated by King Carol II with the Order of the "Crown of Romania" in the rank of Knight.

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1947, Constantin Dănău donated to "*Tudor Vladimirescu*" High School in Târgu-Jiu, in memory of his son, a book consisting of 110 works in French and 117 works in Romanian. The donation has been added to a 10 millions lei fund for the purchase of new books useful to high school students. According to Dumitru Dănău, in 2015, "*the situation (...) of this book fund is unknown*" (Dănău 2015: 5) [22].

## **2. Vasile Cernăianu – the priest of the 18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment from Târgu-Jiu**

According to the testimony of Colonel Stănescu, Commander of Regiment no. 18 Infantry Gorj, priest Vasile Cernăianu, "from the decree of mobilization until today, stood in the midst of the soldiers, whom he cherished with speech and parable on all occasions" (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 339) [23]. Priest Cernăianu Vasile was mobilized as a priest of Regiment no. 18 Gorj Infantry after the November 20, 1916, when priest Ionescu Gh. Vasile was taken prisoner by the German troops in the Greci village of Argeș County (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 339) [24].

At the same time, priest Vasile Cernăianu "steadfastly followed the regiment on every terrain and all the weather", which determines the commander of Regiment no. 18 Infantry to appreciate that "he fulfilled his priestly duty with all his abnegation and Christian love, and did not baptize his person on any occasion" (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 339)[25].

Priest Vasile Cernăianu was listened to and respected by the staff of Regiment no. 18 Infantry, being "endowed with the gift of speech, deeply acquainted with the soul of the peasant and infused with an infinite love for this element of hope of our nation", so that, in all these qualities with which he was endowed, "Father Cernăianu strengthened (...) many natures shaken by nostalgia and suffering" (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 339)[26].

In view of all these considerations, the commander of the Regiment no. 18, Colonel Stănescu, appreciated that priest Vasile Cernăianu was a true "*model of honor and work*", reason for which he expressed his conviction that "*this priest honors the ecclesiastical institution and the regiment he serves. Worthy in all manifestations of his being, priest Cernăianu has gained a moral ascendant on all, the ascendant who gave the richest fruits*". Referring to the participation of priest Vasile Cernaianu in the battles of the summer of 1917, the commander of the Regiment no. 18 Infantry Gorj, Colonel Stănescu, appreciated: "*I consider it a duty to say that in the marches of Mărăști and Muncel, the priest Cernăianu has his right side, a spiritual one*" (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 339)[27].

### 3. Victor Dobrescu – the priest of the 1<sup>st</sup> Artillery Brigade

Originating from the village of Crețești, Țicleni commune, Gorj county, priest Victor Dobrescu took part in the First World War and was mobilized on August 14, 1916 and participated as a priest of the 1st Artillery Brigade in the campaigns of the years 1916-1917.

The 1st Artillery Brigade was formed on 14 August 1916 by mobilizing existing units and subunits at peace. The Brigade consisted on Regiment no. 1 Artillery and Regiment no. 5 Artillery. The Brigade was part of the organ of the 1st Infantry Division, being deployed at peace in the Târgu-Jiu garrison.

On August 15<sup>th</sup> 1916, the 1st Artillery Brigade was commanded by Colonel Constantin Lupașcu. The 1st Artillery Brigade participated in the military actions carried out between August 15<sup>th</sup> 1916 and November 11 1918 (Ioanițiu, 1929) [28].

In the campaign of 1916, the 1st Artillery Brigade participated in the struggles in the Jiu Gorge, the retreat to Bucharest and the struggles for defending the capital, and later, withdrawing to the south of Moldova.

In the campaign of 1917, the 1st Artillery Brigade took part in the combat operations of the First Infantry Division, participating in the Battle of Mărăști. During this campaign, the 1st Artillery Brigade was commissioned by Colonel Nicolae Buzetescu (Ordinea de bătaie – 15 iunie 1917: 45) [29].

As a result of his work on the front, he would receive many appreciations from the superiors, who reported that *"he is doing his duty with great zeal, being always in the midst of soldiers"*, which is why *"was proposed to advance with the report no. 16 May 17<sup>th</sup>, in which his entire activity was detailed"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 338) [30].

According to Colonel Nicolae Buzetescu, priest Victor Dobrescu *"has been proposed twice for advancement,"* concluding that, *"in terms of how to act in all circumstances, it is worthwhile to advance"*, the same appreciation being made - after analyzing the activity priest Victor Victor Dobrescu on the front - and by the generals Stratilescu and Văitoianu (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 338) [31].

In his turn, Major Gheorghe Constatinescu appreciated that during the period *"the Regiment was in recovery, [priest Victor Dobrescu, n.] fulfilled with his love and warmth the duty. He did not get back off from anything, exposing his life to self-sacrifice, walking from the infirmary to the infirmary, which was between 24 and 30 km, with 600-700 patients suffering from recurrent and typhoid fever, comforting them in the sufferings and distributing drugs to them without having any physician until he himself fell ill with typhoid fever"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 338) [32]. Colonel Barca also remarked that the priest Victor Dobrescu *"followed the band on the front"*, so that *"during the actions there was always the soldiers"*, which is why *"the smallest misunderstanding between the comrades disappeared, because he has a gift especially to preach love"*, concluding that *"we have only admiration for his holiness"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 338) [33].

At the same time, Colonel Constantin Tănăsescu reports that priest Victor Dobrescu *"is loved and esteemed by all for his beautiful qualities of man and priest. Educated, modest, exemplary fairness. He served, for example, officers and the band under all circumstances. Fanatically patriot, admirer of the military institution. I love him and I respect him!"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 338) [34].

In another report on the work of priest Victor Dobrescu, Colonel Pașalega concluded: *"I only had admiration for Father Dobrescu. The beautiful feelings they possessed were the balm for the band and the officers, talking to them and being a powerful lever in supporting the morale of the band"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 338) [35].

#### **4. Dumitru Murărețu – the priest of the 7<sup>th</sup> Rangers Regiment**

Dumitru Murărețu, originated from Păișani village, Stoina commune, was the priest of Regiment no. 7 Rangers, serving in the first line of trenches or helping the regiment's physician as well as first-aid staff to carry out dressings and care for the wounded.

Regiment no. 7 Rangers was part of the 6th Infantry Division of the 3rd Army Corps. The Regiment was formed on 14 August 1916 by mobilizing the units and subunits belonging to the 7th Rangers Battalion from the permanent army, a battalion deployed in the Galați garrison. On August 15<sup>th</sup> 1916, Regiment no. 7 Rangers was commissioned by Colonel Dumitru Gherculescu.

In the campaign of 1916, regiment no. 7 Rangers participated in the military actions of the 6th Infantry Division, namely: offensive from Transylvania, defense of passes in the Carpathians, clashes on the Cricov-Ialomița alignment, fighting at the Râmnicu Sărat-Viziru alignment, as well as and the actions that led to Siret front stabilization.

In the 1917 campaign, Regiment no. 7 Rangers participated in the battle of Mărăști and the third battle of Oituz under the command of Colonel Constantin Paulian and, afterwards, in 1918 the Regiment no. 7 Rangers to be part of the 3th Rangers Brigade of the 2nd Rangers Division.

According to the testimony of Major D. Gheorghiu, the priest Dumitru Murărețu *"accompanied the regiment all the while stood in a position and in battles, making his religious service in the first line of trenches, seeking on all occasions to raise and exalt the soul of men. At the first aid station he helped the doctor to make bandages and caressed the injured"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 340) [36].

Another testimony, belonging to Colonel Dr. Rădulescu, noted that the priest Dumitru Murărețu *"loves the soldiers"*, being *"always in the middle of them, giving them good advice"*, which is why the colonel showed that *"I was pleased how he has accomplished his mission"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 340) [37].

Referring to the participation of priest Dumitru Murărețu at the battle of Oituz, Colonel Dr. Rădulescu appreciated that he faced every danger *"without fear, despising death, giving good examples to soldiers and officers of the regiment"*. In this respect, Colonel Rădulescu stated that, during the battle of Oituz, the priest Dumitru Murărețu *"stayed only close to the front and to the command and first aid post"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 340) [38].

According to the testimony of Lieutenant Colonel Paulian, priest Dumitru Murărețu *"has shown courage, because in April [1917, a. n.] he voluntarily accompanied the reconnaissance performed by officers and patrols to the enemy wire networks, also bringing letters and other materials found near networks"*, the same witness stating that *"in the battles of Hârja (Oituz) he showed courage"*, which is why, in Lieutenant Colonel Paulian's opinion, *"can serve as an example of courage under fires"* (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 340) [39].

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1918, in recognition of the qualities and courage he had shown on the battlefield, priest Dumitru Murărețu was advanced to the assimilated captain (Nicolescu et al. 2000: 340; CSPAMI) [40].

Subsequently, Dumitru Murărețu was the priest of Regiment no. 39th Infantry of the 10th Division, which after the union of Bessarabia with Romania had the garrison in Bender (Tighina).

In recognition of his merits and the courage proved on battlefields during the First World War, the priest Dumitru Murărețu was decorated with the Order of the "Crown of Romania", as well as with other Romanian decorations. After the end of the First World War, the priest Dumitru Murărețu moved to the Urdari parish, where he would cease to live on September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1927, at the age of 45.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, from the military units that participated in the heroic battles of Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz in the summer of 1917, battles that glorified the brave soldiers and Romanian officers, the Gorj priests included: Constantin Dănău, in his capacity as deacon of the 2nd Army priest, Vasile Cernăianu, priest of Regiment no. 18 Infantry, Dumitru Murărețu, priest of Regiment no. 7 Rangers, and Victor Dobrescu, First Artillery Brigade, all of whom contributed to the victories obtained by the Romanian Army by supporting the morale of the band, through their involvement in supporting efforts to care for the wounded, through their closeness of the soldiers and front-line officers of the front and through the strengthening of the soldiers and officers conviction in obtaining the final victory, the justice of the Romanians' cause of liberation of the national territory, as well as of the Romanian historical provinces, found under foreign rule.

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