

ROMANIAN MILITARY PARATROOPERS - 80 YEARS OF HISTORY (1950-2021)

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***Abstract:**In 2021, the military paratroopers celebrated 80 years of existence, since their establishment as a specialty, within the Romanian Aeronautics, later as a distinct specialization and generating, in turn, new military specialties, all vital for a military that wants to be modern and proficient. This specialty, established in the Romanian armed forces at the beginning of the Second World War, was an attempt to respond to and align with the needs and, why not, the modernity of the time. Passed through the difficult test of August 1944, disbanded immediately after the war and reborn from its own ashes in 1950, it managed, despite many hardships and sacrifices, some of which were particularly painful, to impose itself as an elite job profile in the panoply of the contemporary Romanian military. Side by side with the Air Force pilots, who always supported them with aircraft and aerodrome infrastructure, the paratroopers wrote history for modern Romania.*

***Keywords:** military paratroopers, aeronautics, aerodrome, elite military specialty.*

1. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PARACHUTE TROOPS IN ROMANIA DURING THE COLD WAR

Although the Air Force Command was concerned since the summer of 1948 with the establishment and preparation of a detachment of paratroopers to transform into a parachute battalion during the war and to perform specific air landing missions, it was not completed until the late 1950s [1].

By *Order of the Minister of Armed Forces of the Romanian People's Republic, no. 123239 of October 18, 1950*, [2] on November 1, 1950, the 1st Parachute Battalion was established in Tecuci, within the Aviation Training Center, subordinated to the Military Air Force Command (CFAM).

Based on *Order no. 001179 of January 23, 1951* issued by the Ministry of Armed Forces through the General Staff, on February 6, 1951, the Parachute Battalion changed its deployment from Tecuci to Botoșani, becoming subordinated to the 1st Military Region. After only three months, the battalion was brought back to Tecuci within the Aviation Training Center, where there were better training conditions. Captain Vasile Cosma, the commander of the unit, being appointed commander of the 13th Mixed Aviation Division from Ianca, at the command of the Parachute Battalion was appointed lieutenant-major Grigore Baștan.

He commanded the unit until 1964, when he was admitted to the studies of the Military Academy, after which he was responsible for the parachuting activity within the Command of the Air Defense of the Territory and the Command of the Military Aviation.

In 1971 he was promoted to the rank of major general, after, on May 20, 1970, he set a national height record, with a parachute of 9,500 meters.

At the command of the parachute unit, lieutenant-colonel Gheorghe Șoimu (1964-1969) and lieutenant-colonel Neagu Oțeleanu (1969-1980) followed.

In November 1951, the Parachute Battalion was deployed in the Buzău garrison, at first temporarily in the barracks of a transmission unit. The troops participated in the construction of their own barracks on the northwestern edge of the Crâng forest and thus began the epic of the Romanian military paratroopers in Buzau.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PARATROOPER UNITS BETWEEN 1950 AND 1980

Trying to respond to the ongoing process of transformation of the military body and the need to adapt to the new tasks it received from the country's political leadership, in the complex international politico-military context after World War II, paratroopers suffered over time numerous structural transformations that marked its evolution.

On February 1, 1958, the Research Company was established in the annexed state, intended for the preparation of research elements in the enemy's device launched by parachute. The company was subordinated on the line of combat training to the Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff, remaining further, from an administrative point of view, subordinated to the parachute unit. In September 1962, a research company and a transmission company were created, and in July 1963 the Parachute Research Battalion was established within the Parachute Regiment. Major Vasile Crăciun was appointed commander of the battalion. In June 1976, the unit became independent, the 404th In-Depth Research Battalion, subordinated to the Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff.

On February 1, 1973, the 60th Parachute Regiment came under the command of the Territorial Defense Command, and the following year, it was awarded the honorary title "Băneasa-Otopeni", in recognition of the heroism of the soldiers of the first parachute battalion in the August 1944 battles.

On May 1, 1977, when the Military Aviation Command was established, the 60th Băneasa-Otopeni Landing-Parachuting Regiment came under his command, and in June 1980 its name was changed to the *60th Băneasa-Otopeni Parachute Regiment* [3].

3. THE CONCEPT OF USE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PARACHUTE TROOPS BETWEEN 1950 AND 1990

The use of air landing in modern combat actions forced decision makers to give due role to the preparation of airborne troops, knowing that no major offensive action could be conceived without performing the maneuver vertically, in order to quickly penetrate their own forces into the opponent's encampment.

In 1951, the Military Air Force Command issued *Instructions for the use of airborne troops in modern warfare*, stating that [...] *in modern warfare, the process of air landings will be used on a larger scale than in the past. [...] Troops airborne by covering some of the successive defense areas, by preventing the influx of operational reserves to the front, by disorganizing the enemy supply system and especially by interrupting the communications system linking troops to their material base, can greatly contribute to increasing the pace of the offensive ground troops. [...]* [4].

In October 1962 the unit participated in a two-way application with Romanian, Soviet and Bulgarian troops, in the Dobrogea region, where it had for the first time a large number of aircraft (12 Li-2 aircraft), which took off from the aerodrome. Bobocu, on the route Giurgiu, Varna, Cavarna and Topraisar. The parachuting was carried out north of Topraisar, staggered on patrols, from a height of 600-700 m, together with Soviet paratroopers.

In 1980, with the reorganization of the superior structures subordinated to the General Staff and the establishment of two more army commands, three more parachute units were established, so that each of the four existing armies could materialize the vertical maneuver with one of these regiments: 64th Parachute Regiment, in the Titu garrison, destined for the 1st Army, 60th Parachute Regiment, in the Buzău garrison, destined for the 2nd Army, 56th Parachute Regiment, in the Caracal garrison, destined for the 3rd Army and the 62nd Parachute Regiment, in the Turia Fields garrison, for the 4th Army. The deployment of each unit took place near a military airfield, on which aircraft made available for training and embarkation could land as soon as possible in order to carry out combat missions.

The 60th Băneasa-Otopeni Parachute Regiment continued its activity in Buzău, responding, from now on, to the challenges that the new units will face in a short time, in a competition that will prove beneficial for the development of the troops of paratroopers. Part of the unit's frames formed the cores with which these structures set off.

Based on the *Order of the Minister of National Defense no. M.C. 346 of 30.07.1980*, Colonel Achim Alstani, former chief of staff of the 404th Reconnaissance Battalion, was appointed commander of the 60th Parachute Regiment "Băneasa-Otopeni". On January 3, 1983, Lieutenant-Colonel Gheorghe Constantinescu was appointed to command the unit, Colonel Achim Alștani being appointed, based on the Order of the Minister of National Defense no. M.C.03, head of the Parachute Section of the Military Aviation Command.

On July 1, 1986, within the regiment was established *Parachute training, training and specialization course*, the first military training unit in the parachute troops, designed to train military paratroopers and part-time soldiers, future reserve personnel. Colonel Mina Perju was appointed to command this structure. He was followed on command, until 1990, by Major Nicu Murgu and Colonel Ștefan Spănu.

On July 16, 1988, at the command of the 60th Parachute Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexandru Săulescu, his former chief of staff, was appointed.

The 56th Parachute Regiment, established in the Caracal garrison, by *Order of the Minister of National Defense no. O.G. 0008 / 02.04.1980*, set off with a group of personnel from the 60th Parachute Regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel Dan Gabor, former head of the artillery at the 60th Parachute Regiment, was appointed commander of the unit, who in 1988 was to be appointed head of the Parachute Section of the Military Aviation Command. Chief of Staff of the unit.

The 62th Parachute Regiment, established by *General Order no. 8 of 02.04.1980 of the Minister of National Defense* in the Câmpia Turzii garrison, also had, as its basic nucleus, a group of personnel from the 60th Parachute Regiment, to which were added an important number of personnel from the units of the 4th Army, the Military Intelligence Directorate and other structures. The commander of the unit was appointed lieutenant-colonel Alexandru Plăieșu, former head of reconnaissance at the 60th Parachute Regiment. Major Dumitru Sterian, former chief of staff of the 56th Parachute Regiment, followed the command of the unit in 1983.

The 64th Parachute Regiment was established according to the *approval of the Minister of National Defense no. C.L.00757 of June 30, 1980*.

A nucleus consisting of 13 personnel and 7 civilian employees from different research units and from the 60th Parachute Regiment, laid the foundations of the new unit, deployed in the barracks of Titu aerodrome. Lieutenant-Colonel Tănase Niculescu was appointed commander of the regiment. He was followed by colonel Dumitru Horghidan (1984) and Lieutenant-Colonel Radu Cantuniari (1986).

Further subordinated to the Military Aviation Command, for the coordination of the parachute troops, in 1980 the Parachute Section was created, destined to solve the new problems appeared regarding the organization, endowment and management of the parachute units. The new structure was to be imposed as an interface between the parachute units and the Military Aviation Command, as well as with the armed armies, and formed the nucleus that, in 1990, gave birth to the Parachute Troops Command.

A permanent concern was the search for the most modern solutions for parachuting personnel, equipment and materials, by improving the existing means of launching and introducing new types. In addition to the existing covers and containers, parachuting systems with shock absorbers (SPPA) have been successfully tested and introduced, starting with 1987, with which important quantities of materials and equipment could be parachuted in the area of combat actions. Improvements were further made to the B.G.-7M and B.G.-3 M parachutes, while experimenting with new types of parachutes.

The jumps were performed during this period from AN-2, AN-24T, AN-26 planes and from the MI-8 helicopter, that were subordinated to the Military Aviation, but, among the problems that the parachutists did not manage to solve then, nor later, it was that of air transport capacity. If a parachute regiment had been used together, the military aviation could not provide it with sufficient means, which gave rise to many questions from the planners of the operations. In many cases, theoretically, the option of transporting troops in several echelons (waves) or civil aviation was used, which, during the war of the entire people, would have had to make available the transport capabilities it had. The problem of transport planes has been and will be one of the thorniest and will often weigh heavily in the planning of airborne actions, but especially in decisions about the future of paratroopers.

4. THE EVOLUTION OF PARATROOPER STRUCTURES AFTER 1990

Like the entire Romanian army, the paratrooper troops were in full combat training program in December 1989, after most of the troops had participated, with special efforts, on the front of gathering crops that year.

Considered at that time as being among the most prepared units of the Romanian army, the decision makers appealed to them from the first moments and introduced them in the hottest places (Timisoara; Bucharest / Romanian Television, Royal Palace, Bucharest Hotel; Otopeni / Military and international airport). Following the intervention to guard and defend these objectives, 15 paratroopers (cadres and military in term) lost their lives.

On November 30, 1990, the Paratrooper Troops Command was established, subordinated to the Military Aviation Command, by transforming the Paratrooper Section from this command. On the basis of the same order, at the same time, by restructuring the four parachute regiments, three parachute brigades, the parachute battalions and the special mission battalions were set up (each brigade had between 2 to 4 paratrooper and special mission battalions), as well as the Paratrooper Training Center. Colonel Dumitru Sterian, former commander of the 62nd Parachute Regiment, was appointed Commander of the Paratrooper Troops.

On December 1, 1990, the command changed its name to the **Paratrooper Troops Inspectorate**, and on March 1, 1991, it became the **General Inspectorate of Paratrooper Troops**, and in 1992 returned to the name of **Paratrooper Troops Command**.

On March 15, 2001, the Paratrooper Troops Command passed from the Air Force General Staff (SMFA) to the Land Forces General Staff (SMFT). At the end of 2002, the Parachute Troops Command was disbanded. Within the SMFT, two parachute training and flight safety and parachute coordination offices have been established.

The **Paratrooper Training Center** was established in the Buzău garrison, in the barracks of the 60th Parachute Regiment and staffed, for the most part, with personnel from this unit and from the “**Course for training, improvement and specialization of paratroopers**”, whose successor was on the line of military education. Lieutenant-Colonel Mircea Moraru, former commander of the 60th Parachute Regiment, was appointed commander of the institution.

On 01.08.1991, the title of the structure was changed to the **Center for Advanced Training of Paratrooper Troops**, and on 25. 10.1992 it received the honorary title "Major General Grigore Baştan".

On June 1, 1997, the Center was transformed into the **Application School for Paratroopers**, subordinated to the General Staff of Aviation and Air Defense.

On July 1, 2001, on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the first educational structure in the Romanian parachute troops, the **Museum of the Parachute Troops** was inaugurated within the school, designed to protect and preserve the cultural and historical heritage of the weapon and to promote the image of the military paratrooper as an elite fighter in the Romanian Army. On January 15, 2008, by order of the Minister of Defense, the **Parachute Museum** was affiliated to the National Military Museum.

On August 1, 2002, the **Paratroopers Training School** was directly subordinated to the Land Forces General Staff, and the school commander was also appointed paratrooper inspector.

On April 17, 2003, the **Reconnaissance Training Center**, commanded by Colonel Niculae Vochin, was transferred from the 404th Research Battalion to the Paratroopers Training School.

On August 1, 2005, the Paratroopers Training School was transformed into the **Special Operations Forces Training School**, subordinated to the Land Forces General Staff. Its structure included the **Special Forces Training Center** (commanded by Colonel Alexandru Rusu), the **Military Intelligence Training Center** (commanded by Colonel Ioan Cobiliță, later by Colonel Niculae Vochin) and the **Reconnaissance and Paratroopers Training Center** (commanded by Colonel Corneluş Mardare). Colonel Mircea Moraru was appointed commander of the Application School. Colonel Mihail Pîrlog, Colonel Mircea Tănase, PhD, and Colonel Vasile Cerbu followed at the command of the school.

On September 1, 2008, following the continuation of the restructuring process of the Romanian army, and implicitly of the military education, the School of Application of the Forces for Special Operations “General-Major Grigore Baştan” was transformed into the **Training Center for Special Forces**, subordinated to the School of Training for Combat Units. At the command of the new structure, Lieutenant-Colonel Doru Enache was appointed. He was followed by Lieutenant-Colonel Alexandru Teodorescu and Lieutenant-Colonel Gabriel Carpiuc.

Starting with 1997, jumps were made from the C-130 Hercules plane, of American manufacture, part of the Romanian army and which ensures the simultaneous parachuting on the two side doors or on the hatch of 60 paratroopers equipped for combat, as well as transport and disembarkation. of 80 fighters, which is a major advantage in terms of transporting and parachuting subunits in the area of combat actions. At the same time, the AN-2, AN-24 T and AN-26 planes, as well as the MI-8 helicopter remained in the equipment of the military aviation and at the disposal of the parachute troops.

In 1998, the endowment of the research groups and special missions from the parachute units with PSD-2M parachutes, “wing” type, high-performance parachutes, with a high speed of horizontal movement and with a high precision of landing, for the execution of parachutes type *HAHO / HALO (High Altitude High Opening / High Altitude Low Opening)*. Starting with 2004, we started to experiment and homologate a new complete parachute for personnel, according to the western model, *PSP (Standard Parachute for Personnel)*. The parachute is manufactured in Romania by S.C. Condor S.A. (former Parachute Factory), with it can be executed jumps from low height (up to at least 100 m), compatible with NATO parachuting technique.

5. RESTRUCTURING-OPERATIONALIZATION-INTEGRATION

An integral part of the force structure of the Romanian Army, after a first stage of quantitative development of the organizational structures, the paratrooper troops were subjected to the same extensive reform process, some units being transformed into special forces structures, others being disbanded.

The paratroop barracks were, in turn, disbanded, and paratrooper and special mission battalions were also disbanded or transformed into battalions of special operations forces, subordinated to this new structure established at the General Staff level.

The existing paratrooper and special forces structures, operationalized and engaged in missions together with the alliance partners, proved, through the level of training achieved, that they were no better than the other structures of the Romanian army that acted in the theaters. of operations.

The concerns of some states to set up, maintain and use parachute structures both for carrying out missions in the range of special operations and for those specific to airborne troops, in the depths of the enemy device or their own troops, confirm the opportunity to maintain and further prepare these structures. and in the staff of the Romanian army.

Parachuting missions will be credited in the future as effective solutions to achieve the most diverse objectives, characteristic of airborne troops or other structures.

Romanian paratroopers carry on a history that was built in 80 years of work, hard work, joy and pain, self-denial for the idea of growing this military specialty. Today, they are engaged on the upward trajectory of confirming the place they occupy in an army that wants to be of high-class professionals. Those who will be destined to carry the battle banner of military paratroopers must be aware of the noble but heavy burden at the same time of a glorious tradition that must be carried over the waves of the times to come.

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