THE GENESIS OF THE FIRST COMMAND STRUCTURE OF THE ROMANIAN MILITARY AERONAUTICS AND THE DOCTRINAL ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE WAR OF NATIONAL UNIFICATION

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Abstract: *At the intersection of the mythological dream of flight and the industrial pragmatism of the early 20th century, Romania succeeded in transforming humanity's ideal of conquering the skies into a scientific, technical, and military reality. Against a European backdrop dominated by rapid progress in aviation, Romanians made essential contributions, not only through avant-garde inventions, but also through a unique creative spirit, imbued with dedication, courage, and vision. In just a few years, Romania rose to the rank of an innovative nation, earning it a place of honor among the countries that laid the foundations of world aviation.*

This article traces the process of establishing the first command structure of the Romanian Air Force, in the context of the doctrinal and organizational turmoil of the early 20th century. Through historical sources and specialized literature, the paper captures the doctrinal transformations that Romanian aeronautics underwent in its early years, focusing on the establishment of the Aeronautical Corps and its role in the military campaigns carried out during the War of National Unification, a war that led to a redefinition of the concept of air power and the consolidation of a lasting institutional identity that would mark the subsequent evolution of the Romanian Air Force.

Keywords: *law, doctrine, aviation, War of National Unification, command.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The history of aviation is, in essence, a chronicle of human daring. From the myths of Daedalus and Icarus to the Wright brothers, space flight, and autonomous drones, humanity has relentlessly sought to free itself from the physical limitations imposed by nature. The desire to fly has been one of humanity's most persistent and symbolically charged aspirations. Over the millennia, the idea of conquering the skies has been found in myths, legends, religions, artistic works, and philosophical reflections. Beyond mere physical curiosity, the dream of flight has symbolized absolute freedom, transcending the human condition, and approaching divinity. In this sense, flight was perceived as a privilege reserved for superior beings—gods, angels, demons—and rarely accessible to mortals. However, this symbolic distinction was overturned by the scientific and technological revolution of the modern era, which transformed the impossible into tangible reality.

At the end of the 19th century, the whole of Europe was gripped by enthusiasm for technical discoveries. Ballooning had become an attraction, and the first attempts at gliding and self-propelled aircraft were widely publicized. Romania did not remain outside this trend.

In 1874, the first balloon flight in Romania took place in Bucharest, where French engineer Marius Willemot, together with three Romanian officers, took a trip in a balloon over their homeland, noting the remarkable potential of this aerostat for gathering information of military value. This experience marked the symbolic moment when the Romanian Army entered the age of aeronautics. The „Mihai Bravul" balloon was Romania's first flying machine.

In 1893, the Military Aerostation was created, which was the first aeronautical subunit within the Romanian Army, marking the beginning of the organized use of aerostats for tactical purposes. Lieutenant Eugeniu Asachi became the first Romanian officer specially trained to operate balloons for reconnaissance and transmission of information from the battlefield. The Romanian Military Aerostation began operations in 1910, during the royal maneuvers carried out on both banks of the Olt River, when an observation balloon was used for the first time. The experience gained at that time proved valuable during World War I, when balloons were successfully used in battles in southern Moldavia to monitor and direct artillery fire.

On March 18, 1906, Traian Vuia made the world's first flight in a heavier-than-air aircraft that took off under its own power in Montesson, near Paris. The flight covered a distance of 12 meters at approximately 0.6 meters above ground level. His aircraft, called Vuia I, was the first heavier-than-air aircraft equipped with an engine and all the components of a modern aircraft, which took off from the ground using its own means [1]. Vuia continued his experiments with Vuia II (1907) and Vuia III (1908), demonstrating the feasibility of mechanical flight.

Amidst the enthusiasm generated by technological advances and growing interest in flight, the young Transylvanian engineer Aurel Vlaicu, encouraged by the writer Octavian Goga, decided to come to the capital, wanting to turn his dream of flying into reality. After a series of successes with an experimental glider, tested in the summer of 1909 in Binținți, Vlaicu arrived in Bucharest with models and sketches of a flying machine of his own design. The specialist commission appointed by the authorities appreciated the value of the project, and the Romanian government approved the necessary funding for the construction of the airplane at the Army Arsenal [2].

Despite administrative difficulties and the scepticism of his contemporaries, Vlaicu completed his work, benefiting from the support of some remarkable personalities: the Inspector General of Artillery, General Constantin Coandă [3], the Minister of War, General Grigore Crăiniceanu [4], and Ion I. C. Brătianu, the Prime Minister at the time. On May 30/June 12, 1910, on the Cotroceni field, Vlaicu conducted the first test flights of his aircraft.

The Romanian inventor's mastery was to be discovered by a large audience on June 4/17, 1910, at 6:00 p.m., including Crown Prince Carol, Professor Murgoci, and numerous representatives of the military and civilian elite. The aircraft, named „Vlaicu No. 1 – Model 1910", took off on its third attempt, after a run of about 40 meters, flying about 50 meters (distance) at 3–4 meters above ground level, and then landing without incident. The moment represented a historic first, being the first flight in Romania with an aircraft designed, built, and piloted by a Romanian, with the direct support of the Ministry of War and the Army Arsenal [2].

Following the demonstration, the military commission set up to evaluate the achievements of that historic day, composed of Adjutant General George Georgescu, Colonel Dumitru Iliescu, and Captain G. I. Negrei, drew up a laudatory report to the Ministry of War.

The document emphasized that Vlaicu, although without formal pilot training, had managed „to fly like the most famous aviators on his first attempt" [5], which proved the stability and maneuverability of the aircraft. The commission recommended that the aircraft be included in the army's equipment, considering it useful for reconnaissance missions.

Vlaicu's achievement marks the starting point for the training of Romanian military pilots. It is noteworthy that the „Vlaicu No. 1" airplane was owned by the Romanian Army, and the inventor, under a contract with the Ministry of War, performed military and demonstration flights to promote aviation.

Therefore, Aurel Vlaicu can be considered Romania's first military pilot, and his aircraft the first Romanian-designed and manufactured airplane to enter military service [2].

On September 14/27, 1910, Aurel Vlaicu took part in the Romanian army's military maneuvers, carried out in the Slatina–Piatra-Olt area, where he was assigned a historic mission: the air transport of a military operations order between two units belonging to the same command. The order was handed to him personally by King Carol I, who entrusted him with the task of delivering it by air to His Royal Highness Prince Ferdinand in Piatra-Olt, a moment that symbolically marked the first official air liaison mission in the history of the Romanian army [6]. By completing this flight, Romania became the second nation in the world to use aircraft for military purposes, after France, which had carried out a military air mission in August 1910 with pilot Louis Blériot.

Prince George Valentin Bibescu, a figure closely linked to the beginnings of Romanian military aviation, was one of the world's pioneers of flight. In 1909, he obtained his pilot's license in France, being registered as the 20th aviator in the world, which established him as one of the founders of the Romanian aeronautical movement and a promoter of the introduction of aviation into the army. In July 1911, he founded the second civil pilot school, and on September 16/28, 1911, he became the first Romanian pilot to fly on an international route, from Bucharest to Rusciuk, Bulgaria, landing in Giurgiu [7].

Also in 1910, at the Paris Air Show, Romanian engineer Henri Coandă (son of General Constantin Coandă) presented the „Coandă–1910", a revolutionary jet-powered aircraft. It was the world's first jet aircraft, although the experiment was not completed safely (the engine caught fire during testing). The idea of the air jet later became the basis for the „Coandă effect", the scientific foundation for modern aerodynamic developments. Although built in France, the Coandă aircraft demonstrated the technical potential of Romanian researchers.

Lawyer Mihail Cerchez, passionate about technology and a fervent supporter of national aviation, built a veritable aeronautical complex in Chitila by the summer of 1910. It included an aircraft factory, an airfield, and a flight school. There, the first Romanian military pilots learned to fly on aircraft built in the country, in Cerchez's own workshops, thus contributing to the development of the infrastructure and professional training of Romanian aeronautics.

On July 9, 1911, Second Lieutenant Ștefan Protopopescu became Romania's first licensed military pilot, registered with military pilot license no. 1, after a flight at the Chitila airfield. A few days later, on July 17, 1911, Second Lieutenant Gheorghe Negrescu received military pilot license no. 2, thus joining the ranks of the pioneers of Romanian military aviation [8].

The activity of the Cotroceni Flight School, under the patronage of Prince George Valentin Bibescu, was suspended for financial reasons and ended in the autumn of 1911.

Consequently, the Ministry of War decided to purchase the entire material base of the school, which included two Bleriot monoplanes, a „Le Conard Voisin" biplane, as well as the existing infrastructure: a tent, a hangar, and the land belonging to the airfield [9]. With this acquisition, the Cotroceni airfield officially became the property of the Romanian army, becoming *the country's first military air base*. The first six Romanian military pilots: engineer Aurel Vlaicu, Prince George Valentin Bibescu, Second Lieutenants Ştefan Protopopescu and Gheorghe Negrescu, and Lieutenants Mircea Zorileanu and Nicolae Capşa carried out intense activities to promote aviation [2].

By consolidating this base, Romania took a decisive step towards institutionalizing military aviation, laying the foundations for its own training and air operations infrastructure. In order to ensure a modern and efficient structure, Major Macri made a fact-finding trip to France in the winter of 1911-1912, where he studied the organization of aviation schools and pilot training methods [10]. Upon his return to Romania, he brought with him the construction plans for a 1912 Farman aircraft, with the aim of reproducing the aircraft in Romanian workshops [7].

Following proposals submitted to the Ministry of War by Major Ion Macri, in his capacity as head of the Military Aviation, together with Second Lieutenants Ştefan Protopopescu and Gheorghe Negrescu, the military authorities approved the creation of a specialized institution for training military pilots. By Royal Decree No. 1953 of March 27/April 8, 1912, signed by King Carol I and countersigned by Minister of War Nicolae Filipescu, the Military Pilot School and Aviation Park was founded and established at the Cotroceni airfield, under the authority of Directorate 4 Engineering – Railway Battalion. Thus, on April 1/13, 1912, marked the institutional debut of the first military pilot school in Romania, one of the earliest such institutions in the world [2]. The leadership of the new school was entrusted to Major Ion Macri.

In April 1912, 20 young officers from all branches of the army were brought to the newly established school to be trained in the art of flying, thus marking the beginning of the systematic training of Romanian military aviation personnel.

By 1913, Romania had managed, in less than a decade, to move from the enthusiasm of pioneers to the organization of a functional military aviation, with its own schools, trained personnel, and real participation in operations.

This period represents the historical foundation of the Romanian Military Aeronautics, from which the modern doctrinal structures and the Romanian Aeronautical Corps would emerge in 1915. Through these achievements, Romania entered the select gallery of states that wrote the first pages of aviation history. But perhaps even more important is the fact that these achievements were born not in the large industrial laboratories of the West, but in modest workshops, out of the passion of people animated by their belief in the power of the Romanian mind.

2. LAWS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE ROMANIAN MILITARY AERONAUTICS

The year 1913 was a turning point in the process of institutionalizing Romanian military aviation, marking the beginning of a coherent approach to solving the many technical, organizational, and legislative difficulties that accompanied the establishment of this new field within the Romanian Army. On the initiative of the Ministry of War, the Romanian Parliament debated and approved on March 19/April 1, 1913, the Law on the Organization of Military Aviation, an essential piece of legislation that was subsequently sanctioned by King Carol I through Royal Decree No. 3199 of April 18/30, 1913 [11].

Through its provisions, the law established a unified legal framework for the operation and development of aviation, regulating the organization, equipment, and training of personnel in the form of the Military Aviation Service. According to Article 5, this central structure, based in Bucharest, had a central park with personnel, a school, aircraft, and all the necessary equipment.

From a hierarchical point of view, the Military Aeronautical Service was subordinate to the General Inspectorate of Engineering, an institution which, by law, expanded its powers to become the General Inspectorate of Engineering and Military Aeronautics. The new responsibilities included „the study, procurement, construction, and use of navigation equipment that could be used in the army", as well as the administration of aeronautical units, planning their mobilization, and training the relevant personnel.

The operational structure of the Service comprised two major components: the Aviation Section, responsible for activities related to „airplanes and other flying devices", and the Aerostation Section, which dealt specifically with balloons. Only active military personnel were admitted to the first section, with the exception of wartime or maneuvers, when both aircraft and aeronautical personnel belonging to private organizations and entities would be called upon.

An innovative element introduced by this legislative act was the creation of the Permanent Aeronauts Corps, an institution that enshrined the professional status of flight personnel. The Corps was divided into the same two sections, which included: airplane pilots, airship pilots (each with a military license for their specialty), airplane mechanics and airship mechanics, with defined salary rights, compensation in case of accidents, licensing conditions, and distinctions between licenses. Thus, two classes of licenses appeared: pilot license and senior pilot license. The lower license was granted to pilots upon certification, and the higher one was reserved for aviators with proven experience and skills in complex missions.

The normative act regulated the conditions for admission to pilot schools, the system for obtaining flight licenses, and the professional hierarchy within the new elite corps. Based on Article 11, paragraph 10, the law stipulated the obligation of permanent pilots to fly a minimum of 120 days per year, under penalty of returning to their units of origin in case of non-compliance. The law also precisely established the financial rights of flight personnel, based on their position and training. Flight bonuses were also established: 100 lei for the lower license, 300 lei for obtaining the higher license, and 10 lei for each additional hour of flight time above the minimum requirement.

With regard to the management of the Central Aviation Park, considered the core of the Romanian Military Aviation, Article 6 stipulated that the positions of commander and deputy commander should be held by senior officers. In practice, however, the youth and inexperience of the pilot corps meant that, for a long period, these positions were filled by personnel from other branches of the armed forces. Although necessary in the early years of organization, this situation had the side effect of slowing down the process of professional training, the development of Romanian military aviation, and the understanding of the specifics of the new branch.

On the basis of this law, the first aeronautical structures intended for mobilization were subsequently created, representing the beginning of the systematic organization of aviation components within the Romanian army.

Thus, the Law on the Organization of Military Aviation was not only an administrative instrument, but also the legal and institutional birth certificate of the Romanian Military Aviation, providing it with status, structure, and direction for development during a period of consolidation of the modern Romanian state and its defense capabilities.

3. ORGANIZATIONAL AND DOCTRINAL EVOLUTION (1913-1919)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the world witnessed a radical transformation of military art, driven by unprecedented technological progress. Among the major innovations of the era, aviation emerged as a tool capable of redefining defense and attack strategies, expanding the field of observation, and opening up new operational dimensions. While flight still seemed utopian at first, in just two decades, aircraft had become a decisive factor on the battlefield.

The geopolitical transformations in the Balkans, the rise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Russian Empire in the vicinity of the borders, as well as the doctrinal changes in the major European armies, prompted the Romanian political and military leadership to pay increased attention to new technologies. In this context, aviation, an innovation that was just beginning to demonstrate its military potential, began to be perceived not only as an experiment, but as a strategic necessity.

On June 20/July 3, 1913, the Romanian government, feeling directly threatened by Bulgaria's aggressive policy, which included attacking its former allies during the First Balkan War, and by its tendency to rebuild the multi-ethnic empire of Tsar Simeon the Great, ordered the general mobilization of its armed forces.

Under the code name „Hypothesis No. 1 bis" [12], the air force offered all its forces for use, in accordance with the military operations plan drawn up by the Romanian General Staff in the first part of 1913.

In accordance with the provisions of the war plans, the air force was organized into two distinct sections. Section I Aviation was formed by integrating the personnel and equipment belonging to the Military Pilot School in Cotroceni, a unit that already had trained personnel and its own technical resources. The command of this section was entrusted to Captain Ștefan Paraschivescu. At the same time, the Second Aviation Section was formed by mobilizing and transferring to the Romanian army the trained personnel and technical resources of the Flight School in Băneasa, an institution that had previously operated under the auspices of the National Air League. Its leadership was entrusted to captain (reserve) Gheorghe Valentin Bibescu.

The mobilization process of the Romanian Air Force, carried out simultaneously with that of other military structures, was characterized by remarkable speed. By June 23/July 6, the first Romanian air crew, consisting of pilot captain Constantin Fotescu and observer captain (reserve) Ioan H. Arion, was already ready for action, carrying out a reconnaissance mission on the route Vidin – Ferdinandovo – Belogradcik – return. During this operation, two cannon shots were fired at the aircraft, marking the beginning of aerial combat for our air force [13].

Until August 1/14, 1913, when Romanian aeronautical structures received the official order to retreat to their base airfields, military aviation activity had been carried out with remarkable intensity. The crews from the pilot schools had carried out an extensive series of reconnaissance and liaison missions, covering the entire tactical-operational depth of the front. The results obtained were extremely valuable: the information gathered during flights, supplemented by aerial images, allowed Romanian commanders to understand the operational reality of the front, thus contributing to the effective planning and coordination of military actions. Thanks to this data, the crossing of the Danube by Romanian troops, followed by the decisive advance towards Sofia, was achieved without major difficulties.

In a short time, the Romanian Army reached the Bulgarian capital, which decisively accelerated the epilogue of the Second Balkan War.

This war experience, the first of such magnitude for the Romanian Air Force, was a revelation for the ground command, which began to perceive aviation not only as an auxiliary element, but as an indispensable tool in gathering information and maintaining communication between units. Although the limitations of aviation were obvious, a concise conclusion emerged from the conflicts of those times, namely that aircraft could be used effectively in reconnaissance, liaison, and operational order transmission missions.

In 1914, against the backdrop of the worsening international political and military situation, the leadership of the school and the aviation park at Cotroceni initiated concrete measures to consolidate and develop Romanian military aviation. The experiences of the 1913 campaign unequivocally demonstrated the need to create a solid technical base, modernize aircraft, and train a professional aeronautical corps [7] capable of meeting the demands of modern warfare. Consequently, emphasis was placed on improving the training of pilots and observers, expanding the aircraft fleet, and institutionalizing a coherent air doctrine that would allow aviation to be integrated into the army's operational plans.

Thus, in February 1914, the „Regulations of the Military Aviation Law" [14] were adopted, a normative act that laid the foundations for the modernization and coherent functioning of Romanian aviation. Subsequently, the process of consolidating the legislative framework continued with the drafting of two essential documents: the „Instructions on the Use of Airplanes" and the „Rules for the Use of Airplanes in Campaigns" [15]. The first document established the organizational structure of military aviation, consisting of four squadrons under the command of the Military Aviation Squadron, while the second regulated in detail the use of aircraft in wartime, clearly specifying the role and subordination of air units. Thus, in a situation of general mobilization, the aviation squadrons were to be under the direct command of the General Headquarters, being attached to army corps or divisions only when the operational situation required it.

At the end of August 1914, the General Inspectorate of Engineering and Aeronautics submitted to the Ministry of War a detailed proposal on the organization and equipment of the squadrons belonging to the Military Aviation School in Cotroceni, based on the aforementioned regulations. The proposal covered both the specific missions of these units and the necessary personnel structure and technical equipment. After receiving approval, the Cotroceni Military Aviation School was organized to prepare for conflict, structured around two combat squadrons with the necessary logistics and personnel, each comprising a flying squadron and a ground squadron [2].

In the event of mobilization, the National Air League was tasked with mobilizing the flight personnel and aircraft that made up Squadrons 3 and 4. At the same time, the Flight School in Băneasa was to provide the army with six Bleriot aircraft (80 hp, two-seaters) and two Farman aircraft (70 hp, two-seaters), as well as five qualified pilot officers and one pilot sergeant [2].

The normative documents and proposals submitted by the General Inspectorate of Engineering and Aeronautics played an essential role in the legal and organizational foundation of the Romanian Air Corps, which was established in 1915. These technical-military and doctrinal initiatives laid the foundations for a coherent aeronautical structure, adapted to the modern requirements of warfare, and proved to be of unquestionable value during the campaigns of 1916–1917.

According to Ministerial Decision No. 305 of August 10/23, 1915, the Romanian Air Corps was established within the Ministry of War, with its garrison in Bucharest, by merging the two branches already existing in the Military Aeronautical Structure: aviation and aerostation, to which a third component, anti-aircraft artillery, would be added during the course of hostilities.

This complex structure represented the first unified organization of the Romanian Air Forces, capable of actively participating in military actions [16].

The establishment of the first Romanian aeronautical structure was not only an organizational measure, but also an immeasurable step in the maturation of the Romanian Army. Aviation was now recognized as a distinct weapon, with its own role and long-term development prospects.

However, the outbreak of war caught Romanian aviation unprepared from a technical, logistical, and training standpoint, with obvious shortcomings in terms of modern equipment and flight crew training. The experiences of 1916 showed that the mere existence of a command was not enough. Doctrinal integration into campaign plans was needed.

The situation improved significantly with the arrival in the Kingdom of Romania of the French Military Mission, led by General Henri Berthelot, which included a specialized aeronautical mission under the command of colonel de Malherbe. French pilots and observers were integrated directly into Romanian groups and squadrons, working side by side with Romanian aviators, while French training methods and flight tactics were introduced into the training programs of aviation schools.

Through the direct involvement of french personnel in the training of romanian personnel, pilots, observers, mechanics, aerial photographers, and through their active participation in frontline air operations, the reorganization of the romanian aeronautics became, in essence, a french-inspired project [17]. The new concept had major effects: it redefined the internal structure of the armed forces, clarified the role and responsibilities of the command bodies, modernized the training system, and ensured the doctrinal coherence necessary for the integration of aviation into the Romanian armed forces as a whole.

Therefore, the reform of Romanian military aviation in 1915-1916, decisively influenced by the french model, represented a turning point its evolution, transforming an incipient system into a modern and functional branch of the armed forces, ready to respond to the challenges of a war of European proportions.

Following the approval issued on December 7/20, 1916, by General Constantin Prezan, then head of the General Headquarters, a comprehensive reorganization of the romanian aeronautics was decided upon, aimed at giving it a solid structure, adapted to the complex requirements of modern warfare. According to this directive, an Aeronautics Directorate was to be set up within the General Headquarters, consisting of two main components: one dedicated to aviation and the other to aerostation. The purpose of this structure was to coordinate aeronautical activity at a strategic level, providing direct support to the armies on the front.

Each operational army was assigned its own aeronautical group, designed as a complex unit, composed of a specialized staff, a logistics park, a variable number of aircraft squadrons and air station companies, arranged according to the tactical needs of each combat sector. These formations were intended to ensure liaison between the commanders of large units, to carry out reconnaissance, aerial photography, and observation missions, as well as to directly support ground troops.

The new Aeronautical Directorate was conceived as a body with complex responsibilities. Its structure included a Central Aviation Park, intended for the maintenance and supply of aircraft, a General Aviation Reserve to ensure the rotation and replenishment of crews, and a Central Air Station Depot for the storage and maintenance of technical equipment.

At the same time, essential auxiliary services were provided for, such as the Aerial Photogrammetry Service, responsible for mapping the front, the Meteorological Service, indispensable for mission planning, but also training institutions: a pilot school, an aerial observer school, and a specialized aerostation center, where personnel were trained to operate and manage observation balloons.

The implementation of these measures led, by May 1917, to a complete reorganization of the Romanian Air Corps, which was prepared for active participation in the military campaign of 1917. The new structure comprised three air groups and an aerostation corps, all directly subordinate to the General Headquarters. Lieutenant Colonel de Vergnette de Lamotte was appointed head of the Aeronautical Directorate, and the position of commander of the aviation was entrusted to Major Constantin Fotescu, an emblematic figure of Romanian aeronautics.

The three aeronautical groups were arranged as follows [18]:

– Aeronautical Group 1, subordinate to the Romanian 2nd Army, commanded by Major Sturdza, consisted of Squadron N1 (Captain Micheletti), Squadron F2 (Captain Chalet Panait), and Squadron F3 (Captain Ștefănescu Scarlat);

– Aeronautical Group 2, attached to the Russian 4th Army, led by Major Andrei Popovici, included Squadron N3 (Captain Grand), Squadron F4 (Captain Haralambie Giossanu) and Squadron F7 (Captain Gaulin);

– Aeronautical Group 3, supporting the 6th Russian Army, under the command of Major Nicolae Capșa, included Squadron N10 (Captain Blery), Squadron F5 (Lieutenant Irimescu Radu) and Squadron BM8 (Captain Delas).

The Air Station Corps was commanded by Major Ioan Iarca, with reserve Major Laudet, an engineer, as his collaborator and Head of the Air Station.

The effectiveness of this reorganization was evident during the heroic battles of the summer of 1917, when Romanian aviators demonstrated a high level of professional training, dedication, and spirit of sacrifice. During the battles of Mărăști, Mărășești, and Oituz, the Romanian Air Corps provided protection for its own troops, carried out reconnaissance and bombing missions, and fought intense air battles to repel enemy attacks. The contribution of the Romanian Air Corps proved equally significant in the final stages of the war, when, through the logistical and intelligence support provided to the troops, it facilitated the advance and decisive victories that would lead to the Great Union.

In the tense context of the autumn of 1918, when the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was imminent and the national ideal of the Romanians in Transylvania was nearing fulfilment, the Romanian government, which had taken refuge in Iași, sought to establish direct links with Transylvanian political leaders in order to coordinate actions aimed at achieving the Union. To this end, it was decided to organize a special air mission to facilitate a rapid exchange of information between the authorities in Moldova and the representatives of the Transylvanian Romanians.

The decision was made to send a Romanian military aircraft from Moldova to Blaj, a town with deep national significance, considered one of the symbolic centers of Transylvanian Romanianism. The mission was entrusted to Lieutenant Vasile Niculescu, an experienced pilot, and Captain Victor Precup, an observer, both officers distinguished by their courage and loyalty to the national cause. The historic flight was carried out in difficult weather conditions and in an extremely unstable political context, marking one of the first political-national liaison missions in the history of Romanian aviation.

After accomplishing their objective, the crew returned to Moldova the next day, bringing with them a message of crucial importance: confirmation that, within a week, the Great National Assembly would take place in Alba Iulia, an event intended to consecrate the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania.

This aerial mission, as daring as it was significant, became a symbol of territorial unity and the devotion of Romanian aviators, demonstrating that aviation, beyond its military role, could be an instrument of national connection and affirmation of the will of the nation [19].

The experience of 1916-1919 led to several fundamental doctrinal conclusions: aviation could no longer be considered an auxiliary weapon, but an indispensable component of modern warfare; the need for a unified command capable of planning and conducting complex air missions; the importance of continuous training of personnel and specialization of pilots by mission type; the usefulness of aviation in offensive actions, beyond its traditional role of reconnaissance.

Thus, the experience of the War of National Unification (World War I) transformed Romanian military aviation from an experimental structure into a modern doctrinal weapon, ready to play a major role in the interwar period.

CONCLUSIONS

The genesis of the first command structure of the Romanian military aviation and the doctrinal transformation that took place during the War of National Unification represent a complex historical process, resulting from the combination of internal and external, political, technological, and military factors.

The emergence and development of Romanian aviation was made possible by a combination of favorable circumstances: on the one hand, the initiatives of internationally renowned pioneers—Vuia, Vlaicu, Coandă—who put Romania on the map of aeronautical innovation; on the other hand, the openness of military and political decision-makers to new technologies, in a tense geopolitical context.

Practical experience – the Bulgarian Campaign (1913) and the first actions in 1916 – showed that the mere existence of aircraft and pilots was not enough. A centralized command structure was needed, capable of coordinating air resources, integrating them into campaign plans, and defining rules for their use. Thus, the establishment of the Romanian Air Corps marked the transition from the initial organizational phase to a consolidating institution, comparable to that of other European armies.

The doctrinal transformation and the establishment of aviation as the main weapon of war was directly determined by the experience of the War of National Unification. While in 1916 aviation was used almost exclusively for reconnaissance and liaison, in 1917-1919 its role diversified: artillery fire control, tactical bombing, air combat, and direct support for the infantry. Cooperation with General Henri Berthelot's French mission accelerated this process, bringing Western models and modern equipment, but also a doctrine applied in Western theaters of war.

Another fundamental aspect is the identity and symbolic dimension. Through their sacrifices and victories, Romanian aviators contributed to creating a heroic image of aeronautics. This was not only a technical weapon, but also a symbol of modernity and Romania's ability to rise to the level of the great powers. By participating in the Battles of Mărăști, Mărășești, and Oituz, the Romanian Air Force demonstrated that it could decisively influence the outcome of a campaign, thus consolidating the military and political prestige of the Romanian state.

From an organizational perspective, the legacy of the war was essential for the interwar period. The principles outlined at that time, the need for a unified command, the diversification of missions, the specialization of personnel, and joint integration became the foundation of Romanian aviation doctrine.

On this basis, the first major structures of military aviation were built during the interwar period, laying the foundation stone of the national aviation industry and thus creating a history of Romanian wings inscribed in the book of the nation with the feathers of glory of our great pilots from times long past.

Viewed as a whole, the history of the romanian air command is not only a technical page in military history, but also a testament to the Romanian nation's ability to adapt to the challenges of modernity. Through organizational efforts, human sacrifices, and strategic vision, Romania managed to transform a technical innovation into an effective weapon, contributing decisively to the realization of the ideal of the Great Union of 1918.

In conclusion, between 1910 and 1919, the Romanian Military Aviation traveled an extraordinary path: from the first test flights and incipient structures to the establishment of a modern air command and active participation in a large-scale war. This experience generated a military and doctrinal tradition that profoundly shaped the evolution of the Romanian Air Forces and consolidated aviation's place as an integral part of national identity and security.

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