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Glenn E. Torrey, *The Romanian Battlefield in World War I*. Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2011. Pp. xvi, 422. ISBN 978-0-7006-1839-2.

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*In the interest of full disclosure, I note here that Glenn E. Torrey participated in a documentary film brought out by my production company; details in note 1 below.*

The battles and battlegrounds of Romania are relatively unfamiliar to most readers of World War I history. For two war-weary years, 1916 and 1917, some two million men confronted one another in that zone of the Eastern Front. Entering the war late on the Allied side, the Romanian military was unprepared in weaponry, leadership, or logistics to defend a 960-mile front, the longest of any single country in the war. It ran to the south along the Danube River and Bulgaria and north along the rugged ridge-lines of the Carpathian Mountains on the frontier with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Dismayed by a crushing defeat early on, Romania retreated from Wallachia into Moldavia, north and east toward the province of Bessarabia in the tsarist Russian Empire. Meanwhile, Germany's capture of Romania's rich oil fields around Ploesti (present-day Ploiești) was delayed by British sabotage efforts in December 1916.

Glenn Torrey (Emporia State Univ.) recounts two years of military struggles and entwining political events in a detailed, lucid, highly readable narrative that sheds new light on the circumstances that changed what seemed predictable into the unexpected. He describes the war both strategically and tactically without bias to either side, unraveling the tangled political motives of the national leaders and generals who planned and sought to carry out carefully calculated battlefield orders. The most debilitating of the political changes in 1917 was the Russian Revolution, which caused the rapid collapse of demoralized and reluctant Russian divisions numbering one million men in Romania alone.

During the winter months of early 1917, the coldest on record, a broken Romanian army, suffering from disease, starvation, and death, fell in to disarray. Of 500,000 men mobilized in mid-1916, 160,000 were killed, another 140,000 taken prisoner, and many thousands wounded. Torrey proceeds to trace a most remarkable and unforeseen transformation, as Romania benefited from the substantial advice and arms support of French military teams. Under the leadership of Gen. Henri Mathias Berthelot, whole divisions were quickly brought back to fighting order. During the winter and spring months, an enormous inventory of arms reached Romania via Russian rail lines, including 199 airplanes for combat and air reconnaissance and, most critically, 2,700 machine guns, 1.37 million grenades, 220,000 rifles, 100 million cartridges, 2 million artillery shells, and other vital war supplies. By late spring, Romanian forces were ready to block the more than twenty Central Power divisions—German, Hungarian, Bulgarian, and Turkish—from pushing into Moldavia.

Torrey's authoritative account concentrates on the composition of armies, battle orders, political debates, and the personal encounters of individuals well known to readers of World War I history: German Field Marshal August von Mackensen and Gen. Erich von Falkenhayn, who joined in the initial invasion of Romania under orders from Gen. Erich Ludendorff; General Berthelot, who advised King Ferdinand of Romania and his generals Alexandru Averescu and Constantin Prezan; and the Russian Gen. Dimitri Shcherbachev.

I am familiar with stories of this bloody confrontation, which claimed the lives of almost one third of Romania's men of fighting age, through the memoirs of my father, Dimitri Dimancescu, a much decorated lieutenant (later captain), who fought from August 1916 to the initial armistice in 1917. His diaries offer a ground-level view of the war from the battlefields of the early defeats, to retreat, retraining, and finally a hard won victory in August of 1917, in which his reserve regiment helped repel the Württemberg Mountain

Battalion's last-gasp attempt to break through from hilltop positions in northwest Moldavia.<sup>1</sup> His direct opponent was Erwin Rommel who, though only a lieutenant, was leading twelve hundred men in an attempted breakthrough.<sup>2</sup>

The accuracy and attention to detail of Torrey's history attest to a masterly control of the wide range of primary and secondary sources he has consulted during his lifelong study of Romania in World War I.<sup>3</sup> He is especially enlightening on General Berthelot's success in modernizing and rebuilding Romania's military strength despite his often strained relations with General Averescu. Fueling Berthelot's efforts was the French government's determination to keep German and Austrian divisions away from the Western Front during the stalemated trench warfare of 1917.

Much to their surprise, the Allied Powers won a major victory in the critical battles of Mărăști-Mărășești-Oituz in Moldavia, where Romanian and Russian divisions held the line against a tiring and over-extended German war machine. This tied down sizeable German forces for months to come, although Germany was able to continue tapping Romania's rich oil and wheat resources.

To Romania, however, would come the fruits of ultimate victory: "Romania's intervention in the First World War was not primarily a reaction to the military situation in the summer of 1916, even the [Russian] Brusilov Offensive. It was the consequence of a calculated political decision to take a critical step in the nation's quest for national unification" (328).

With the victory of 1918, the rapid advance of Romanian troops into Hungary and occupation of Budapest in 1919, and the subsequent Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Romania doubled its size by gaining Transylvania from Hungary and Bessarabia (present-day Moldova) from Bolshevik Russia. As a result, Romania's population nearly doubled as well, from a prewar eight million to a postwar fifteen million.

Throughout this battlefield study, Torrey provides keen insights into the interplay between politics and "chess-piece" strategy that will enlighten students both of World War I and of warfare in general. Not the least of the book's lessons is that unpredictable elements—weather, revolutions, personal conflicts, logistical bottlenecks, communication breakdowns, and hidden agendas—can overtake even the most cogently defined plans. We have here an invaluable, unvarnished view of the political intrigues that encumbered both sides during the debacle of the First World War in Romania.<sup>4</sup>

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1. The final violent encounters are described in *Hill 789: The Last Stronghold* (Kogainon Films, 2009), directed by Nicholas Dimancescu, with commentary by Professor Torrey.

2. Rommel devoted 120 pages of his acclaimed and frequently reprinted 1937 World War I memoir/tactical textbook, *Infanterie Greift an* (Infantry Attack) to his two Romanian campaigns.

3. See his earlier books: *Romania and World War I* (Portland, OR: Ctr for Rom Studies, 1998) and *Henri Mathias Berthelot: Soldier of France, Defender of Romania* (Portland, OR: Ctr for Rom Studies, 2001).

4. The book is further enhanced by extensive chapter notes, a comprehensive bibliography, seventeen maps, and over three dozen photographs.