



Romania's Holy War: Soldiers, Motivation, and the Holocaust by Grant T. Harward.

Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2021. Pp. xvi, 340. ISBN 978-1-5017-5996-3.

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The significance of Romania's participation in World War II has generally been ignored or misjudged by historians. As a result, the view persists that Romania was an unenthusiastic and feeble participant in Operation Barbarossa (22 June–5 Dec. 1941), requiring constant support from its German ally. Nevertheless, until its defection from the Axis (Aug. 1944), Romania was, after Germany, the largest combatant in the war against the Soviet Union in terms of manpower; its army played a major role in the seizure of Odessa and other Soviet Black Sea ports in 1941. At the same time, the Romanian military was a major accomplice in the Holocaust: it carried out deportations and mass murders of Jews, Roma, and others in occupied Soviet territory. In *Romania's Holy War*, historian Grant Harward (US Army Medical Depart.) argues that Romanian soldiers were motivated to fight for the holy cause of creating a Greater Romania and to take part in the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Harward persuasively explains the growing impact of indoctrination in motivating the soldiers of the Royal Romanian Army. Throughout much of its early history, the sociopolitical dynamics of the army were like those of other militaries in the non-industrial states of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The officer corps, dominated by landed aristocratic elites, was apolitical aside from its reflexive adherence to the monarchy that supported its privileged position. The enlisted ranks for the most part were filled by politically inert peasant draftees who rendered mute feudal service to their aristocratic masters and endured a harsh disciplinary regimen. Authoritarian rule in Romania intensified with the establishment of the royal dictatorship of King Carol II in 1938 and Marshal Ion Antonescu's military dictatorship in 1940. At this point, not only did the officer corps grow more politicized, the Romanian army took steps to indoctrinate enlisted soldiers. These changes were driven by bitter resentment at Romania's territorial losses of Transylvania and Bessarabia and the fueling of traditional anti-Semitism by identifying Jews as agents of Soviet communism.

With the beginning of Operation Barbarossa (June 1941), the Antonescu regime decided to throw in its lot with Nazi Germany in hopes of reclaiming lost territories and realizing the dream of a Greater Romania by annexing Transnistria and possibly more Soviet territory farther east. As Harward explains, Romanian soldiers motivated by this "holy cause" performed well in offensive operations in the southern Soviet Union despite the army's material shortcomings, culminating in the hard fought capture of Odessa in October 1941. At the same time, the Romanian army, thoroughly indoctrinated with anti-Semitic propaganda, perpetrated more and more atrocities as it advanced eastward, including a massacre in Odessa.

Commanders directed soldiers' pent-up anger at the departed Soviet troops, who had inflicted so many Romanian casualties, against the Jews of Odessa. Soldiers shot thousands of Jewish men in a square by the port near the smoldering ruins of the Odessa Military Command and escorted Jewish women, children, and elderly to the city jail that held over twenty thousand Jews.... On 24 October [1941], soldiers marched Jews from Odessa's jail two kilometers down the road toward Dalnik,

shooting any who fell behind. After reaching antitank ditches, which were used as improvised mass graves, they machine-gunned groups of forty to fifty Jews at a time. Other soldiers shoved thousands of Jews into four warehouses near the jail, two with men and two with women and children, and set them ablaze. (128)

The capture of Odessa marked the climax of Romanian offensive operations, as Operation Barbarossa spent itself. While the renewed offensive toward the Volga briefly revived the momentum of Axis forces in 1942, the Romanians, like their German counterparts, suffered a devastating defeat at Stalingrad in winter 1942–43. Harward argues that the Romanian soldiers nevertheless remained motivated to fight an increasingly defensive war of maintaining security in rear areas. But the growing prospect of defeat led to a sparing of Jews by both the Antonescu regime and the common soldier. Upon the overthrow of Antonescu (Aug. 1944), Romania abruptly quit the Axis and turned on its erstwhile partners.

Based on extensive research in an array of Romanian sources, Grant Harward's new book highlights the experience of common soldiers in the Romanian army. In this regard, it nicely complements Mark Axworthy's *Third Axis, Fourth Ally*,¹ the authoritative study of Romania's war-time role on the strategic and operational levels. Moreover, in a manner reminiscent of Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men*,² Harward bridges the gap between military and Holocaust history by showing that Romanian soldiers were more willing than previously thought to commit atrocities against Jews and other civilians in occupied Soviet territory. If that were not enough, *Romania's Holy War* presents an engaging overview of the Romanian army from its origins through World War II, including a useful sketch of its operational history.

That said, the book has its flaws, notably an imprecision in distinguishing between morale and motivation. For instance, the author often claims that, while the morale of Romanian troops waned as the war dragged on, they still remained motivated. He curiously downplays the effect of Romania's traditional antipathy toward its Hungarian ally as a motivating factor. A superficial final chapter fails to explain how purportedly motivated Romanian troops could turn so quickly on their former Axis partners in August 1944.

Such lapses aside, *Romania's Holy War* is a stimulating and welcome addition to the scant body of English-language historiography on Hitler's Axis partners in Europe.

1. Subtitle: *Romanian Armed Forces in the European War, 1941–1945* (London: Arms and Armour, 1995).

2. Subtitle: *Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (NY: HarperCollins, 1992).