

THREE YEARS OF WAR (1916-1919). PAGES FROM THE JOURNAL OF THE TRANSYLVANIAN OFFICER MARIAN POPU

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Abstract: Marian Popu was born in the village of Diviciorii Mici, in Solnoc-Dabâca County, in 1889. He came from a Romanian family of intellectuals. After attending middle and high school in Gherla, in 1909 he enrolled in the „Ludovica“ Honvéd Military Academy in Budapest, from which he graduated in 1912, obtaining the rank of second lieutenant. At the outbreak of World War I, he was incorporated into the Honvéd Infantry Regiment no. 32 of Dej and advanced to the rank of Lieutenant-Major. A career officer, Marian Popu was decorated several times in the war, when he served in the Hungarian army on the Galician front and then on the Italian Front. In the autumn of 1918, witnessing the collapse of the Monarchy and its army, he returned by train to Dej and put himself in the service of national ideals. To that end, in December 1918, he was part of the command structures of the Romanian National Guard in Dej and then served in the Romanian Army, being assigned to the Intelligence Office of the Sixth and Seventh Divisions. He was commander of the Cluj railway station and he was later entrusted with guarding and censorship missions at the Central Post Office in the city. In early 1919 he participated in the establishment of Infantry Regiments no. 83 and 99 of the Romanian Army, being sent to the Western Front, where he took part in the fighting against the Bolshevik regime in Hungary.

Keywords: World War I, memoir, Galician front, Brusilov Offensive, Italian front, the 1919 war against Hungary

Rezumat: Marian Popu s-a născut în anul 1889 în satul Diviciorii Mici din comitatul Solnoc-Dăbâca și provenea dintr-o familie românească de intelectuali. După ce a urmat cursurile gimnaziale și liceale la Gherla, în anul 1909 s-a înscris la Academia militară de honvezi „Ludovica“ din Budapesta, pe care a absolvit-o în anul 1912 obținând gradul de sublocotenent. La izbucnirea Primului Război Mondial a fost încorporat în Regimentul de infanterie nr. 32 honvezi din Dej și avansat la gradul de locotenent-major. Ofițer de carieră, Marian Popu fost decorat de mai multe ori în război, perioadă în care a luptat în armata ungară pe frontul din Galiția și apoi pe frontul italian. În toamna anului 1918, martor al colapsului Monarhiei și a armatei sale, s-a reîntors cu trenul în Dej și s-a pus în slujba idealurilor naționale. În acest sens, în decembrie 1918, a făcut parte din structurile de comandă ale Gărzii Naționale Române din Dej și apoi a activat în armata română în cadrul Biroului de informații al Diviziei a VI-a și a VII-a. A fost comandant al gării din Cluj iar ulterior a fost însărcinat cu paza și cenzura Poștei centrale din oraș. La începutul anului 1919 a participat la înființarea Regimentelor de infanterie nr. 83 și 99 ale armatei române, fiind trimis pe frontul de vest unde a luat parte la luptele împotriva regimului bolșevic din Ungaria.

Cuvinte cheie: Primul Război Mondial, memorialistică, frontul din Galiția, ofensiva Brusilov, frontul italian, războiul împotriva Ungariei din 1919.

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In a continuing effort to restore manuscript documents for publication, such as war memoirs or diaries from the front, written by the Romanian soldiers who fought in the Great War,² we shall focus, in this study, on the memoirs of Lieutenant Marian Popu. These memoirs recount the events in which the author was involved after the onset of the Brusilov offensive on the front in Galicia (June 1916) and until his return to the country, after having participated in the offensive of the Romanian Army against Communist Hungary, led by Béla Kun (1919).

In what follows, based on the autobiographical notes published in the *Annex*, on personal documents, patents, administrative documents, war diaries and medals from the modern history collection of the Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei in Cluj-Napoca,³ we have reconstructed some biographical landmarks of the Romanian officer from the period of the war and the Great Union of 1918. With foresight, we can say that his path was exemplary and was often identical with the fates of the tens of thousands of Transylvanian Romanians who were fortunate enough to survive this tragedy that devastated the world more than a century ago and who, in challenging circumstances, returned to their homeland in the last months of 1918. His autobiographical notes, partially published in the *Annex*, were written later and refer to how the Great War left its mark on his career and personal life. They bear witness to the human experience of the Romanian officer on the front line, or outside it, and follow his destiny, his journeys from the trenches in the front line of Galicia to the military hospitals in Vienna, Dej, Cluj and Tășnad, where he was treated when he was gravely ill, in the autumn of 1914, and when he was wounded, twice, in 1915 and 1916.

Marian Popu was born in the village of Diviciorii Mici, located near Gherla, on 19 September 1889 and came from a Romanian family of intellectuals. His father, Vasile Popu, was an elementary school teacher and was active in the Association of Greek-Catholic Teachers around Gherla. The student Marian Popu attended secondary and high school in Gherla, from which he graduated in 1909 with a Baccalaureate diploma. In the same year he enrolled in the „Ludovica“ Honvéd Military Academy in Budapest and attended its courses for three years. In August 1912 he graduated from military school, being advanced to the rank of second lieutenant in the 1912 graduation ceremony of the class of active officers. He was originally assigned to Deva and, considering that in 1913 new Honvéd military units were established, including the 32nd Dej Infantry Regiment, he took this opportunity and asked to be transferred closer to home. The new infantry regiment in Dej had in its composition three battalions with recruitment areas in Dej, Bistrița, and Zalău. The command of this military unit was stationed in Dej and Lieutenant Marian Popu was incorporated as commander of the 3rd Company / the 1st Battalion of Dej.

In 1914, at the outbreak of the war, he was 25 years old. He was advanced to the rank of major lieutenant, being initially appointed officer in charge of the assignment of reservists who were to be mobilized in the war to the recruitment centres established in Dej, Bistrița,

² Muntean 2015, 149–189; Muntean 2018 a, 199–211.

³ Some of Marian Popu's documents and personal items were exhibited for the first time during the temporary exhibition *Remembering the Great War. 1914–2014*, which was opened at the museum's headquarters on 27 June 2014, and were published in the exhibition catalogue. See Muntean, Mitu 2014, 42–49, 74–76, 84–85.

and Zalău.⁴ Then, on August 18, 1914, Lt. Maj. Marian Popu was mobilized at the head of his subunit in Galicia, ending up directly on the front line. There he experienced, from the very beginning, the sordid reality of war and faced all its horrors (death, cold, hunger, squalor, exhaustion). He described those ordeals in his diary. Until the summer of 1916, Lt. Maj. Marian Popu reached the frontlines of Galicia three times, each and every time after a period of convalescence due to an illness, in the autumn of the year 1914 (followed by his evacuation to a military hospital in Vienna), and due to his being wounded in battle, in May 1915 and in July 1916.

In the spring of 1916, he was, together with the company he was leading, on the fortified battle positions in Doroshov Forest, south of Zalisicyki (Ukraine), on the bank of the Dniester, at a „distance of 1,500 steps from the Russian line”

“We also built shelters against the Russian artillery’s bombardment at a depth of seven meters under the ground. In front of the position, on the whole front of the brigade, a band of barbed wire obstacles was built, and in the middle of this band sat the obstacle in which high voltage electric current was circulating. We prepared for the stabilization war, improving and completing the position; this operation was done from October 1915 to June 1916, until Brussilov’s offensive,⁵ the Russian offensive, was launched. We had attrition confrontations throughout the time mentioned above.”

After the general attack of the Tsarist Army was launched, the unit led by the Romanian officer withdrew precipitously, with great losses, on an itinerary that he recorded in his diary and on a map (Figure no. 1). During this general withdrawal, on 1 July 1916, Lt. Maj. Marian Popu was shot in the right arm in Rungory (Galicia) and was immediately evacuated from the front, to a military hospital in Cluj.

The frontline did not necessarily mean an ongoing, ceaseless confrontation, on the contrary, in the conditions of manoeuvre warfare, battles alternated with occasional periods of calm, which often lasted for months on end. It seems that the Romanian officer took advantage of this apparent cessation of fighting in his sector. In February 1916, he got a two-week leave and came home to Dej. Without insisting on this period, it is worth mentioning that despite all the hardships caused by the progress of the war, the Romanian officer managed to get married in August 1916. In order to fulfil all the necessary formalities, during his leave of February 1916, he paid the marriage bail according to the regulations in force,⁶ and then the Royal Ministry of Defence approved his marriage to his fiancée, Katalin Kovásnai (Figure no. 2). For his courage, under the patent issued in Vienna on 24

⁴ It is worth mentioning that, at the same time, the soldier Mihai But from the Dej 32nd Infantry Regiment was mobilized at the Recruitment Center in Zalău. We have published his *Journal*, containing his memoirs of the war and of his captivity in Siberia (see Muntean 2015, 149–189).

⁵ The offensive led by Russian General Alexei Brusilov began on 4 June 1916 and represented a brave blow against positions occupied by the Austro-Hungarian army on a front of c. 300 km. At the end of the fighting, in September 1916, the armies of the Central Powers were pushed back 90 km, with enormous human and material losses for both warring camps.

⁶ Deák 2009, 169–173.

August 1916, he was awarded the Imperial Merit Cross, Class III, with the insignia of war (Figures no. 3–4).

However, a few days after this event took place, the Romanian army entered Transylvania, on the night of 27/28 August, 1916, with the outbreak of hostilities between Romania and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Therefore, in order to remove them from Transylvania, several Romanian officers, including Marian Popu, were immediately transferred to Trenčín (Slovakia) and assigned to the 15th Honvéd Regiment where, says the author, „there was a Slovak regiment and I could not speak to anyone because I could not speak their language.”

From this moment, having been wounded in both arms, the Romanian officer was no longer sent to the front line and was entrusted with the command of an Infantry Training Battalion for reservists who were dispatched successively to the front (February 1917). Then he was advanced to the rank of Captain (Figure no. 5). Marian Popu remained until June 1918 at the training centre of the „Russ“ Detachment (74th Honvéd Division). This detachment was under the direct command of Colonel Aurél Stromfeld and was active in the village of Száldobos (today Steblivka-Ukraine) and in the Hust region.

Thus, when he was sent to the Italian front in the summer of 1918, Captain Marian Popu had a first-hand experience on the battlefield, having fought in the Great War for almost four years, with all the suffering and deprivation that it entailed: his long-term removal from his family, the increasingly precarious food and hygienic conditions on the front line, the permanent danger of death, the injuries suffered and his experience in the military hospitals where he had been treated, the traumas he had suffered because of the new types of weaponry used (the bombings undertaken by the military aviation,⁷ the flame throwers, the nerve paralysing and asphyxiating toxic gases, bolt action firearms), etc.

Captain Marian Popu recalled that the moving of his unit to the Italian Front was due to the „truce with the Russians.”⁸ He was therefore entrusted with the command of a fully equipped battalion that was loaded onto a military train bound for Austria. Since a rumour had been launched regarding the rebellion of a military unit in Budapest (the sedentary part of the 32nd Dej Infantry Regiment), the train by which he was travelling was stopped at Szolnok station and pulled on a secondary line. The officer stayed there for six days and was mainly concerned with raising the morale of his soldiers but, as he passed through Budapest, he found out that some soldiers had deserted and left the train that was going to take them to the Italian Front. The disaster of war for the civilian population retained his attention when his train passed slowly through the outskirts of Vienna, where he saw children and women „running after the train, asking for bread.” In the railway node from the Austrian town of St. Johann in Tyrol, the Romanian officer handed over the battalion he had accompanied and, together with his staff, he established headquarters in the neighbouring village, Ellmau, where he continued to train the reservists who had been sent to the Italian Front.

⁷ Marian Popu recalled the air attack on the afternoon of September 24, 1915 when Russian military aircraft bombed the positions of his company, located west of the Dniester.

⁸ It was the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty, signed between Bolshevik Russia and the Central Powers on 3 March 1918, which enshrined Russia's exit from World War I.

In the autumn of 1918, the days of the two-headed Monarchy and its army were numbered. More and more military refused to obey orders from superiors. Anarchy was gradually installed and the civilian population revolted in the major cities of Austria and Hungary. Although he had a mission to train recruits, on September 30, 1918, Captain Marian Popu's unit was sent all the way to Salzburg to appease the city's revolting population. There the Romanian officer learned of the precarious situation on the Balkan Front caused by the surrender of Bulgaria (29 September) and the rapid advance of the French troops towards Serbia and Hungary.

After completing his mission in the city of Salzburg, in mid-October 1918 he returned to his headquarters in Ellmau, where he soon witnessed the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Army, meeting anarchy everywhere and „groups of soldiers singing and walking in the streets without weapons.“ Shortly after the end of the truce at Villa Giusti (3 November 1918), which ended the war on the Italian Front, in order to avoid the massive „exodus“ of soldiers coming by train from this front, Captain Marian Popu proposed to quickly form two trains necessary for the repatriation of his soldiers. The two trains were formed in the train station of St. Johann in Tyrol. The soldiers and military equipment were boarded and they left for Hungary. Along the way, in all the Austrian train stations they transited (Saalfelden am Steinernen Meer, Bischofshofen, Bruck an der Mur), the Romanian officer noticed that the famished civilian population had devastated and looted the trains carrying food packages to the front lines. Part of the war material on the train was seized by Austrian military authorities in Graz but, despite this incident, the train arrived safely at the Budapest train station, while the soldiers gradually left the train after entering Hungary.

At the end of November 1918, in Budapest, among the thousands of Transylvanian Romanians returning from all corners of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, was Captain Marian Popu of the 32nd Infantry Regiment (Honvéd) Dej, along with his wife, Katalin, and their one-and-a-half-year-old daughter. As mentioned above, Captain Marian Popu had come to the Hungarian capital by train, directly from the Italian Front, after the collapse of the Dualist Monarchy and the end of the war, and his family had arrived here coming from the city of Trenčín (Slovakia). For two weeks, in the eastern railway station of Budapest, the Romanian officer sought a seat in one of the trains packed with people that were going to Cluj, to take his wife and daughter home and put them to shelter in those troubled times in late 1918. Eventually, after a long wait, they found seats in a windowless wagon and, in those bad conditions, Marian Popu's family arrived in Cluj, and then in Dej, in mid-December 1918

“The whole capital of Hungary was on the move. I didn't notice signs of disorder. Those who were on the move were mainly former prisoners looking for stations and trains, for the possibility of returning to their country: the Russians to the east, the Serbs to the south, the Italians to the west. I went to the east station every day to try to get back to Transylvania. After two weeks, I found a seat in a windowless wagon in which, together with my wife and little girl, who were with me, I travelled all the way to Cluj, then to Dej, where the sedentary part of the 32nd Honvéd Regiment was, the officers having arrived in Dej before me.”

In mid-December 1918, against the background of the disaggregation of the Imperial-Royal Army, Captain Marian Popu returned home, initially to the town of Dej. There he placed himself in the service of the Romanian National Guard, which entrusted him with various missions, and then travelled to the Slovak town of Trenčín (Figure no. 6–8). Earlier, the news of the Great Union of Alba-Iulia, on December 1, 1918, had been celebrated in Dej with great joy. The National Romanian Guard of Dej entered the Greek-Catholic Church, with the tricolour flag, which was consecrated by Fr. George Mânzat. Subsequently, the Romanians gathered in the central square, where other festivities were held. The Hungarian Army left Dej on the night of 19/20 December, 1918, and on December 21, the vanguard of the Seventh Infantry Division of the Romanian Army entered the town, being received with great enthusiasm by the Romanian population.⁹

Marian Popu's notes show that he came to Cluj before the Romanian Army entered the city (December 24, 1918) and witnessed the enthusiastic reception offered by the Romanians to the soldiers of the Seventh Infantry Division commanded by Generals Constantin Neculcea and Anton Gherescu: „On 24 December 1918, before dinner, units of the Romanian Army entered Cluj, where they were received by the population in Union Square, in front of the Statue of King Matthias Corvinus. It was the Seventh Romanian Division.”

The first subunits of the Seventh Infantry Division, which had entered the city, coming from Apahida, were the 15th and 16th Infantry Dorobanți Regiments, the first two batteries of the 4th Artillery Roman Regiment, and the cavalry squadron of the division. Thus, on Tuesday, December 24, 1918, the Romanian Army entered Cluj, a historic moment of great resonance which ended the state of tension that had dominated life in the city during those tumultuous days after the National Assembly in Alba Iulia. The event was also recorded by Sidonia Docan, Secretary of the Romanian National Senate in Cluj, who wrote the following in her *Journal*¹⁰ on that day

“Young and old, everyone is running to Matthias Square to welcome the Romanian Army in Cluj. Is this not a dream? [...] The entry of the army, headed by Generals Neculcea and Gherescu, with a martial appearance, produces an indescribable emotion. Men are crying, women are crying, children, too, all are shaken by a holy emotion. Then they dance a hora around the square, around Matthias.”

At the end of December 1918, Captain Marian Popu enlisted in the Romanian Army and was part of the Command of the Sixth and Seventh Infantry Divisions (Intelligence Office) which authorized him to move armed on their territory of jurisdiction and entrusted him with important missions. For a short period of time, he was appointed Commander of the train station in Cluj and then, from mid-January 1919, he was assigned the supervision of the censorship service at the Central Post Office in the city (Figure no. 9), where, he says, „I organized and executed the discipline and censorship of correspondence, newspapers, telephone, telegraph communications, etc., until February 15, 1919, when I set up the Transylvanian regiment.”

⁹ Albinetz 2015, 63.

¹⁰ The *Journal* of Sidonia Docan was published in Muntean 2018 b, 68–87.

Next, he also contributed to the organization of the 83rd Infantry Regiment of Cluj, a unit that was integrated in the 18th Infantry Division and participated in the defence of the Great Union, after the outbreak of hostile ties with communist Hungary, in April 1919.¹¹ The war with Hungary determined the permanent reorganization of the Transylvanian troops and, in this respect, in Cluj, the 99th Infantry Regiment was founded. It belonged to the 20th Division of the Romanian Army, which was under General Mihai Darvari's command. Some of the troops of this newly established division were brought to the Tisa River to strategically cover the area between Csáp and Abádszalók.¹²

In this context, in June 1919, the Romanian officer was put in command of a subunit of the 99th Infantry Regiment in the town of Törökszentmiklós (on the banks of the Tisa River), where he was appointed commander of the garrison and immediately ensured that the power plants providing the power supply to the Military Command established here during the Battle of the Tisa River (20–26 July 1919) were put into operation. The Romanian officer also recalled that this locality had been visited by King Ferdinand on the eve of this battle.

After forcing and crossing the Tisa, the 99th Infantry Regiment occupied the town of Szolnok. He was transferred to the city of Debrecen (December 1919) and then entrusted with guarding the Tisa River, in the Nyíregyháza region. The company of Captain Marian Popu had a guard sector along the river of approx. 30 km, located between the villages of Vencsellő and Kisvárdá, the command post having been installed in the village of Bertzel (today Tiszabercel Hungary). On February 25, 1920, with the general withdrawal of the Romanian Army from in Hungary,¹³ the Romanian officer surrendered the administration of the village to the new Hungarian civil authorities, represented by Mayor Stefan Imre, and returned with his unit to the garrison in Cluj (Figure no. 10).

The journey of Romanian officer Marian Popu from dynastic to national loyalty was also the journey of tens of thousands of soldiers and officers from the former Austro-Hungarian Army. Once they were back in their native places, they put themselves unconditionally at the disposal of the new Romanian authorities, participated in the formation of the national guards and the removal of the old administration, and then, some of them joined the Royal Romanian Army, continuing their war against Hungary, in the spring and summer of 1919, and contributing, thus, to the overall effort of defending the Great Union consecrated in Alba Iulia on 1 December 1918. In the spring of 1920, after returning to the Cluj Garrison, Officer Marian Popu continued his military career, was awarded the War Memorial Cross and the „Victoria“ Medal and, exceptionally, was elevated, for his merits, to the rank of major, under a patent signed by King Ferdinand (Figures no. 11–16).

¹¹ Kirițescu 1925, 409.

¹² Tutula 2012, 185–188.

¹³ Kirițescu 1925, 500–502.

Annex

The biography of Colonel Popu Marian, Cluj, [1945].

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“[...] In the sector of my company, I had a cavalry platoon as a battalion reserve, under the command of a lieutenant. In front of the company, in the woods, I had a sentinel installed, to spare the company from surprise enemy attacks. In May 1916 time passed while we were harassed by the enemy. By the end of the month we had captured some Russians who were had been deployed in reconnaissance missions and provided with new equipment and weaponry. We were informed by them that they were preparing for the offensive. Indeed, on May 31 (on a Saturday afternoon), an intense artillery fire was unleashed.

Our regiment informed me that our Austrian artillery was firing on the squadrons of Russians to force them to launch the attack. This bombing lasted until Sunday evening, on June 1, 1916, when we were ordered to retreat, leaving behind our position, built during the winter. We occupied positions west of the Dupa creek, which flowed from north to south into the Dniester, at 3 km from the position deserted on the same evening (Sunday). By morning we had built temporary shelters and were waiting for the Russians to attack.

I had a sector up on a ridge between the Dniester and the Dupacreek, along which a road, from Zalesziesiky to Pradek, unfolded. On Monday morning, at dawn break, Lt. Col. Stromfeld came by car to the command post of my company, made a reconnaissance and then addressed me, saying, „You know, Popu, that it is very dangerous here?,” and he left. What was the situation like? To the south of our regiment, units of the 51st Honvéd Division had been pushed by the Russians west of the Dniester. The bridge head to the east of the Dniester had reduced, the right flank of our regiment drawing close to the Dniester, while the 51st Division was west of the Dniester. We remained in this position for six days. The Russians tried to attack our right flank, leaning against the Dniester, but they were stopped by our Austrian artillery, placed west of the Dniester. At the back of the front of my company was a farm, Muninov farm, from which we had brought some ploughs that we placed in front of my company across the road full of Russian armoured vehicles. In this position we had six casualties. On the sixth day, in the evening, we left in each company sector a group of soldiers to mark the ordinary front with gun shots, then we withdrew with all of our four battalions, marching in a column, under the shield of darkness, and crossed the bridge from Zalesziesiky to the west of the Dniester. There we spent the night – over 4000 people – in an old trench dug by the Turks. By morning, we were ordered to withdraw. The company retreated, along with the regiment, on the route, on the following dates and to the following locations: on 6, 7, 8, 9,10 June, to the town of Zarwha, on 11 June, to June to the villages Serafince, Tozefowka, Stefanowka, Serafince, Iasienow-Polny, Ghiszkow, Czeriatyn, on 11 June, to the village of Ohna, on 13 June to Balahorowka, on 14 June, via Obertyn, on 15 June, to Dzurkow and Hadrobant, from 14 to 20 June, via Obertyn. In Obertyn we were inspected by the commander of the Seventh Army, the general of the Pflanze-Balty Cavalry Division, and the regiment became the reserve of the Seventh Army.

From 21 to 24 June, we stayed in Jurko, from 25 to 26 in the evening, we stayed in Nobyler, then, on the same day, we passed through Zamnkme, crossing the Prut, Trojea, and on 27 June we arrived at Trasciamec while on 28 June we arrived at Solotwina and Tracz. On 29 June, we went through Korolowka, Mymin, and on 29 in the evening we passed through Rhunow.

On the morning of 29 June, the whole regiment arrived on a height where the regiment commander called us to order, leaving the men at rest. By the time we, the battalion and company commanders, had reached the hill top, Austrian soldiers of ours were retreating in disarray on the ridge in front of us. The Russians had advanced and crossed the ridge. The regiment commander gave the following order „Counterattack – direction: 2nd Battalion!” it was to this battalion that my company belonged and the battalion commander had given the order of attack in the direction of the 2nd Company, Lieutenant Popu.

After this, everyone went to their units and began the counterattack movement. My company was the first subunit to begin the attack. The company attacked on two lines of shooters, and each line had two platoons. After a heavy fire, we stopped the Russian line and stormed against them with the company.

In the first quarter of an hour, all four platoon commanders were wounded. I stayed at the company with a platoon leader. We crossed over the Russian line and those who were left alive surrendered, while I and my company continued our advance, crossing over the front ridge that the Russians had crossed towards us.

When we arrived on the ridge, on my right flank, a Russian company was advancing in a line of shooters towards our company, which was in a marching column. At that moment, Second Lieutenant Tritz arrived with the machine-gun section with which he had stopped the Russian advance. The company to my right had also deployed in a line of shooters and advanced across the Russian line. After lunch, I noticed that on my left flank, the Russians had driven back the neighbouring company and we had remained off-guard. I retreated with my company on the next slope behind me and gathered our fugitives from all the subunits that had dispersed. We formed two platoons of them and entrusted them to a lieutenant, ordering him to support our artillery battery until the last projectile was fired and then to retreat as well. We continued our retreat over another ridge and, in the evening, we reached a farm in the valley where I found the regiment commander. We spent the night there and continued our retreat at dawn.

Around 11 o'clock we made a stop with the retreating regiment. The resting place was next to a road and, as I was looking at the road, I noticed two Russian armoured cars. I informed the artillery battery, which fired a direct cannon, but missed them. So, the armoured vehicles retreated.

On 1 July 1916, we arrived in front of the village Rungory. There we installed surveillance posts. We lacked the manpower to build a continuous front, and we found that, because of the previous battles, we were left with only 23 out of 160 soldiers. In this position I walked along the line of the posts with the medical orderlies and the telephone operators. I was at the end of their line, about five steps away. The Russians hadn't shown up yet advancing. However, at one point, at the sound of a gun fire from their direction, a bullet passed by us. The second bullet went into my upper right arm and past my spine, the bullet coming from the flank. I took shelter immediately. I found that the wound was

not serious. The medical orderly dressed my wound and I went to the battalion doctor, who evacuated me to Cluj. I was admitted to the hospital in the Pasteur building, where I stayed for three weeks. After that I left for the 32nd Regiment, the sedentary part, in Tășnad, to the convalescence section. I was there when, on 16 August, Romania declared war on the Austrians. On the same day, I was ordered to leave with the 15th Honvéd Regiment for Trencsen, where I found three more Romanian officers who had been moved: Lt. Olariu, Second Lieutenant Miha and Second Lieutenant Munteanu. It was a regiment of Slovaks. I could not speak to anyone because I could not speak their language.

On August 2, 1916, I got married and moved my family to Trencsen. After a month of staying in Trencsen with the 15th Honvéd Regiment, the sedentary part, I was moved to the 20th Honvéd Regiment in Nagy Kanizsa, from where, after two weeks of training, I was sent to a marching battalion of the Seventh Army, in the region of Sighetul Marmăției (Maramureș). Here I was assigned as company commander to the Army Training Centre in the village of Herinese, in charge of the training battalion of the „Russ“ Detachment operating in Bukovina.

During the two weeks that I was in the 32nd Honvéd Regiment, the sedentary section, there was a rumour that on 29 June 1916, during the counteroffensive undertaken by the company, I had allegedly torn off my epaulettes and had thrown away the dragon from my bayonet, and, dressed like a soldier, had stormed with my company and fought toe to toe with the Russians, whom we had defeated. This rumour originated from the soldiers with whom, on the same day, I had carried out the counterattack. They were part of the 32nd Honvéd Regiment. Having been injured, they arrived at the unit before I was also moved to the sedentary part.

On February 2, 1917 I was appointed battalion commander, to the training battalion of the „Russ“ Detachment where I had the rank of Lieutenant [Major] and had a lieutenant as my adjutant. I received a captain's salary, and I also got a fully equipped service horse. I received the horse from an Army Centre in Sighetul Marmăției. In March 1917, we received the reserves of the 9th Cavalry Division of Hussars for infantry training. The division was in the Carpathians, around Cârlibaba in Bukovina. From the 9th Hussars Regiment Tg. Mureș, the 3rd Hussars Debrecen, the 4th Hussars Regiment Oradea and the 5th Hussars Regiment Nyiregyhaza, a training centre was established, in May 1917, for infantry training in the village of Szoldobos (Maramureș) and we handed these subunits to that centre. I stayed with the training battalion of the „Russ“ Detachment. At the training centre of the Seventh Army, to which the battalion I commanded belonged, I prepared and executed the battle position, which crystallized at Verdun in France.

Every ten weeks, I sent freshly trained forces to the „Russ“ Detachment. I also practiced the battle of the existing assault battalions in the Austrian army. I witnessed drills with real (war) ammunition. Lieutenant Colonel Stromfeld was my divisional training group commander.

In this region (the Hust region, by the Tisa), we stayed with the training groups until June 1918 when, after the armistice with the Russians, we moved in Austria onto the Western Front, the Italian front.

Upon departing for Austria, I was assigned a fully equipped battalion, ready to go to the front, which I had to transport by train to Austria.

This assignment of mine was a sign of the trust the commanders had in me. Arriving at the Szolnok train station in Hungary, we were stopped for five days, as a rumour had spread that the 32nd Regiment of the Romanian Army in Budapest, in the garrison (the sedentary part), had committed an act of rebellion, of disobedience. My train was pulled on a side line near Tisa, where I spent 5 days paying attention to the troop. Every day, in each wagon, I sent them a music band to entertain them, to distract them from bad thoughts, indiscipline (the music band consisted of twelve people and two cimbaloms).

After six days, we set off for Budapest and then crossed into Austria, but upon our departure from Szolnok, we closed the wagons on the outside so as to prevent the soldiers from deserting. However, in passing through Budapest, someone opened the last wagon from which soldiers who were from Szeged, Nyitra, etc. deserted. On our way through Vienna, on the outskirts, the train was going slowly. Children and women were running after the train, asking for bread. We reached St. Johann [in Tyrol], a village located on the Salzach River, where I handed over the battalion and, with my underlings, continued on foot to the village of Elmau, 10 km north of St. Johann, where we set up camp, waiting for new troops to train them.

We carried on training the soldiers and sending them to the front.

On 30 September 1918, I was ordered to meet six men at the St. Johann train station in Tyrol. I presented myself that same evening to the station, where I found a fully formed battalion and filled out its assignment with my officers. We boarded the battalion on the train and went to Salzburg, where, a few days before, there had been a rebellion of the population, and the soldiers from the sedentary section in the city had been unable to restore order. In the morning I arrived there, got off the train and introduced myself to the garrison commander, a brigadier general, then went to the provincial headquarters (Landes - Reghierung), where I installed the battalion, then took order measures, sent out patrols, installed posts. I stayed there for two weeks until order had been restored. During this time, we received news that the Bulgarians had surrendered to the French and the French were advancing towards Serbia and Hungary.

On October 15, 1918, after the spirits in the city had calmed down, I returned with the battalion to St. Johann in Tyrol, then went with my underlings to Elmau, where my headquarters were.

On November 1, 1918, in the morning, my adjunct lieutenant reported to me that there was a soldier in the village who had the emperor's emblem, on his cap, torn off. I gave orders and telephoned the training division in St. Johann, and from there I was told to let the soldier go. He was the batman of the commanding officer of the training battalion from the neighbouring village, Going. I immediately went to St. Johann, to the command of the training group, by carriage. As I passed through this village, I saw groups of soldiers singing and walking in the streets without weapons. Arriving at the command of the group, I found that the officers of the battalion of St. Johann and of the command group had gathered at the command headquarters. The deputy commanding officer was Captain Gabsovits. We discussed what we should do, as that same day an uprising had broken out in Austria-Hungary and fighting ceased on all fronts. Trains from the front to Hungary were packed with unarmed soldiers, hurrying towards the country.

Then I suggested we should take all the empty wagons from the trains going to the front, form trains, as many as necessary, load materials and people in them and leave before the exodus from the front reached us. We immediately took the necessary measures, helped by about 40 short-term youth and officers and formed two trains; we also boarded an artillery battery that was recovering in the village, and on the third day we left for Hungary.

Crossing the Alps in a train towed by four locomotives, we noticed, at the first larger station, Saalfelden, that the trains carrying packages and supplies to soldiers had already been devastated by the population, in the station. After a short stop, we continued our journey. At the next station, Bischofshofen, we encountered the same situation as above. The train station was full of soldiers without guns, returning from the Italian front. Trains were running regularly both to the front and to the country. From this station, our train was routed to the Austrian city of Graz and our next train was routed to Linz-Vienna. Before arriving in Graz, at the station of the Bruk Am-Mur railway, we found traces of the disorder caused by the civilian population, which had devastated several trains. We continued our journey to the station of the Graz Railway, where we found the station full of soldiers, without weapons, sailors from the Austrian Navy, from the Adriatic Sea (Pola, etc.). Machine guns had been installed on the roof of the train station.

In the station, armed Austrian officers were walking about to maintain order. At one point, an Austrian lieutenant came to our train and asked for half of all the materials we had brought with us to be surrendered, arguing that there was a convention between Austria and Hungary in this regard. I protested and refused to surrender them, since these were material brought from the front.

Not long afterwards, we put some guards on the last six wagons at the end of the train, under the command of a lieutenant, thirty of our men, to prevent the Austrians from taking the materials by force.

They used a trick, namely: they put a small locomotive at the end of the train and unfastened the six wagons, without us knowing about this operation. The train left and the car behind pushed the train forward. After a while, the small locomotive stopped and pulled the six wagons with the materials back to the big station, where the guards disarmed us, and sent it by tram to the railway station where our train had stopped after leaving Graz station.

We were notified by our soldiers at the end of the train that my wagons with materials had been taken. From this station, we protested by telephone to the military headquarters of the large train station, but two armed companies had come from the cadet school to intimidate us. We hadn't intended to cause disorder, and after the arrival of the lieutenant with the guard, we set off by train and arrived at the Hungarian border at the first stop, from whether the Austrian locomotive went back, and we continued our journey to Budapest, with a Hungarian locomotive. In the Hungarian train station of Szombathely, we handed over several of the materials brought with us and continued our way to Budapest, where we arrived in the city's triage station, Iosif. After entering Hungary, on the way from the border to Budapest, the soldiers who were from those regions got off in various regions and went home. At the arrival station, I ordered the soldier in charge of my horse to disembark it and the carriage, tied the horse to the trolley, and let him go home, too. We had horses and cattle with us on the train. They had to be fed until they were handed over to the authorities

in the station. Lieutenant Tzebe, a supply officer, asked me to help him hand over both the materials and the animals, which I did and, within three days, he handed over everything that was on the train.

The whole capital of Hungary was on the move. I didn't notice signs of disorder. Those who were on the move were mainly former prisoners looking for stations and trains, for the possibility of returning to their country: the Russians to the east, the Serbs to the south, the Italians to the west. I went to the east station every day to try to get back to Transylvania. After two weeks, I found a seat in a windowless wagon in which, together with my wife and little girl, who were with me, I travelled all the way to Cluj, then to Dej, where the sedentary part of the 32nd Honvéd Regiment was, the officers having arrived in Dej before me. I introduced myself to the regiment's commander, a colonel who was a General Staff officer, and after a few days of staying in Dej, on December 13, I asked for a leave of six weeks and came to Cluj. During the whole period of the revolution, nothing happened to me; no one bothered me with anything.

In Cluj I lived with my family at a sister-in-law's, on Bolyai Street. On 24 December 1918, before dinner, units of the Romanian Army entered Cluj, where they were received by the population in Union Square, in front of the Statue of King Matthias Corvinus. It was the Seventh Romanian Division.

On 27 December, I presented myself to the Command of the Romanian Division and was appointed commander of the train station in Cluj (I had the rank of captain). The Seventh Romanian Division left for Dej - Zalău after some time and the Sixth Romanian Division came to Cluj under the command of General Neculcea.¹⁴ In this division I was entrusted with the command of the Cluj post office, where I organized and executed the discipline and censorship of correspondence, newspapers, telephone, telegraph communications, etc., until February 15, 1919, when I set up the Transylvanian regiment.

In Cluj I set up the 83rd Infantry Regiment.

In November 1918, until 13 December, order and discipline in the towns of Transylvania were maintained by the Romanian national guards, made up of soldiers and officers who had returned from the front. I belonged to the Dej National Guard and, in this position I took a leave to bring my furniture from Trenčsen (Slovakia), which was occupied by the Czech army at that time. I was welcomed very warmly and received all the help I needed from the military authorities so that I could transport my furniture to Cluj.

The 83rd Infantry Regiment, a Romanian regiment, formed in Cluj on 15 February 1919, left for Hungary on Easter Day. I stayed with the sedentary part of the regiment, where I had 800 men in command for training.

On April 1, 1919, I organized, with Major Târziu, the 99th Regiment [as] the double of the 83rd Regiment, belonging to the 20th Division, which was based in Tg. Mureș. On April 1, delegates arrived, a group of Romanian officers, whom we assigned to the regiment. The commander was Lt. Colonel Rădulescu Toma.

We stayed in Cluj until June, when then we also left for Hungary, by train to Korczag station, where we alighted and continued on foot to Török Szent-Miklos. Here was General Mărdărescu, commander of the troops in Transylvania, and General Moșoiu, commander of a Romanian army group.

¹⁴ The commander of the Sixth Infantry Division was Brigadier General Anton Holban.

I was sent to the Hungarian village of Szajol, on the river Tisa, where the Hungarian front was in contact with the Romanian front. I was there as reserve, with the company, for this line, where I stayed for 48 hours, after which I was ordered to constitute, with my company and another regiment company, the garrison of Török Szent - Miklos, where I was the commander of the market.

Within three days, with the help of specialists, we put the power plant of the town into operation, providing our military commands with electricity. It was around time our troops were crossing the Tisa, embarking on an offensive against Budapest. On the eve of the offensive, King Ferdinand came to the command of the troops in Török Szent - Miklos. After crossing the river Tisa, the 99th Regiment entered the town of Szolnok, west of the Tisa, where I had been stationed for some time, after which I was withdrawn to Kecskemet. Then the Tisa flowed through Szentes and by December 1919 we were installed in Debrecen, but after about three weeks our regiment was sent to Nyiregyhaza. The regiment was entrusted with guarding the Tisa river, with a front stretching from the Tisa - Beő to Kissvarada (also on the Tisa), for a length of 80 km. I had a sector with the company from Venesellő to Kissvarada, about 30 km. My command post was at Bertzel (on the Tisa).

In February 1920 we withdrew, simultaneously with the advance of the Hungarian troops, and then we returned to the garrison in Cluj [...].”

*

Additional information regarding the events of 1918–1919 The attempt of Professor Apathi from the University of Cluj to form a Hungarian Governing Council in Cluj

“Professor Apathi convened a Hungarian general assembly in Cluj to reclaim and try to organize a Hungarian governing council. The meeting took place in Union Square, on the northern side of St. Michael’s Church. After the meeting, he settled in the student hostel on Avram Iancu St. with his organization.¹⁵ At one point, we received orders from the Sixth Romanian Division that, together with the Praetor of the Sixth Division, a major, we should search Apathi’s headquarters.

At the General Secretariat I found Secretary Kertes Hugo, Feldmann, son of the owner of the Gherla spirit factory, whom I had known since attending the state high school in Gherla. His younger brother was in the same class as me at the Hungarian high school in Gherla. I couldn’t find Professor Apathi there.

¹⁵ After the Great Assembly held in Alba Iulia on December 1, 1918, the Government of Budapest did not recognize the political-legal value of the Resolution of the Union and sought, at any cost, to counter the organizational activity of the Governing Council of Sibiu by establishing, in Cluj, a General Governmental Commissariat for Eastern Hungary. On December 8, 1918, Professor István Apáthy, who was also president of the Hungarian National Council in Transylvania, was appointed as its leader. On 22 December 1918, in the central square of Cluj, he organized the people’s assembly referred to here by Captain Marian Popu. The assembly was attended by several thousand people and was intended to be a counter-demonstration of the Assembly from Alba Iulia. During this protest of the Hungarian population, a motion read by Dr. Sándor Vincze (vice-president of the Hungarian Council in Cluj) was voted. It provided for the maintenance of the political and economic unity of historical Hungary and the non-recognition of the Alba Iulia resolution. See Muntean 2018 b, 41–42.

Secretary General Kertes, a Jew, protested, but we simulated a search in the offices, following which, a few days later, Apathi was arrested by the Romanian Army and sent to the prosecutor's office in Dej.¹⁶

The so-called Hungarian Governing Council, which was trying to establish itself in Cluj, was disbanded in early January 1919.”

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¹⁶ The Romanian officer took part in the search carried out at the administrative headquarters of the General Commissariat headed by Professor Apáthy, before his arrest by the Romanian military authorities (15 January 1919). Commissioner General Apáthy was arrested after his involvement in the incident from Crișeni (near Zalău) was proved. This incident had resulted in the killing and wounding of soldiers from the Romanian Army, some of them having gone missing. See Grad 2010, 71–72.

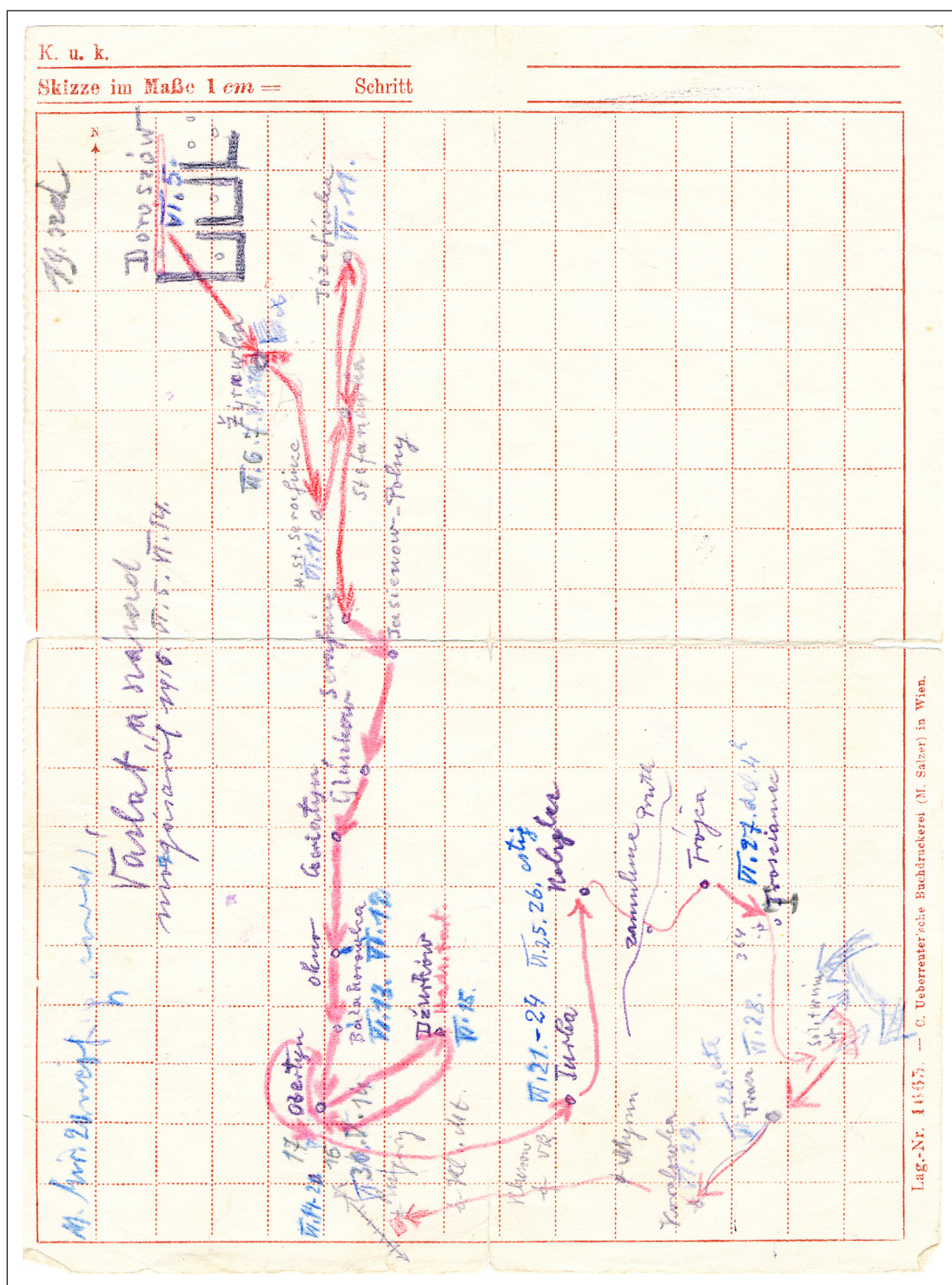


Figure no. 1: Plan for the retreat of the „Bekeşy“ Austro-Hungarian Brigade, 5–30 June 1916, Collections of MNIT, M 7340.



284900.szám.

15/b-916.I G A Z O L V Á N Y .

POPU MARIÁN m.kir.dési 32.honvéd gyalogezredbeli főhadnagy és özv.IMREH LÁSZLÓNÉ szül.:Kovácsnai Katalin urnő között kötendő házasságra nézve az innen 1916.évi márczius hó 24-én 88614/15-b-916. szám alatt megadott nősülési engedélyben kikötött házassági óvadék-tőke szabályszerű biztosítása kimutatva lévén,ezennel igazolom,hogy a házasságkötésnek többé e tekintetben akadály utjában nem áll.

Budapest,1916.évi augusztus hó 18-án.

A minister rendeletéből:

tábornok-főhadbíró.

Figure no. 2: Certificate of marriage approval, 18 August 1916, Collections of MNIT, M 7335.

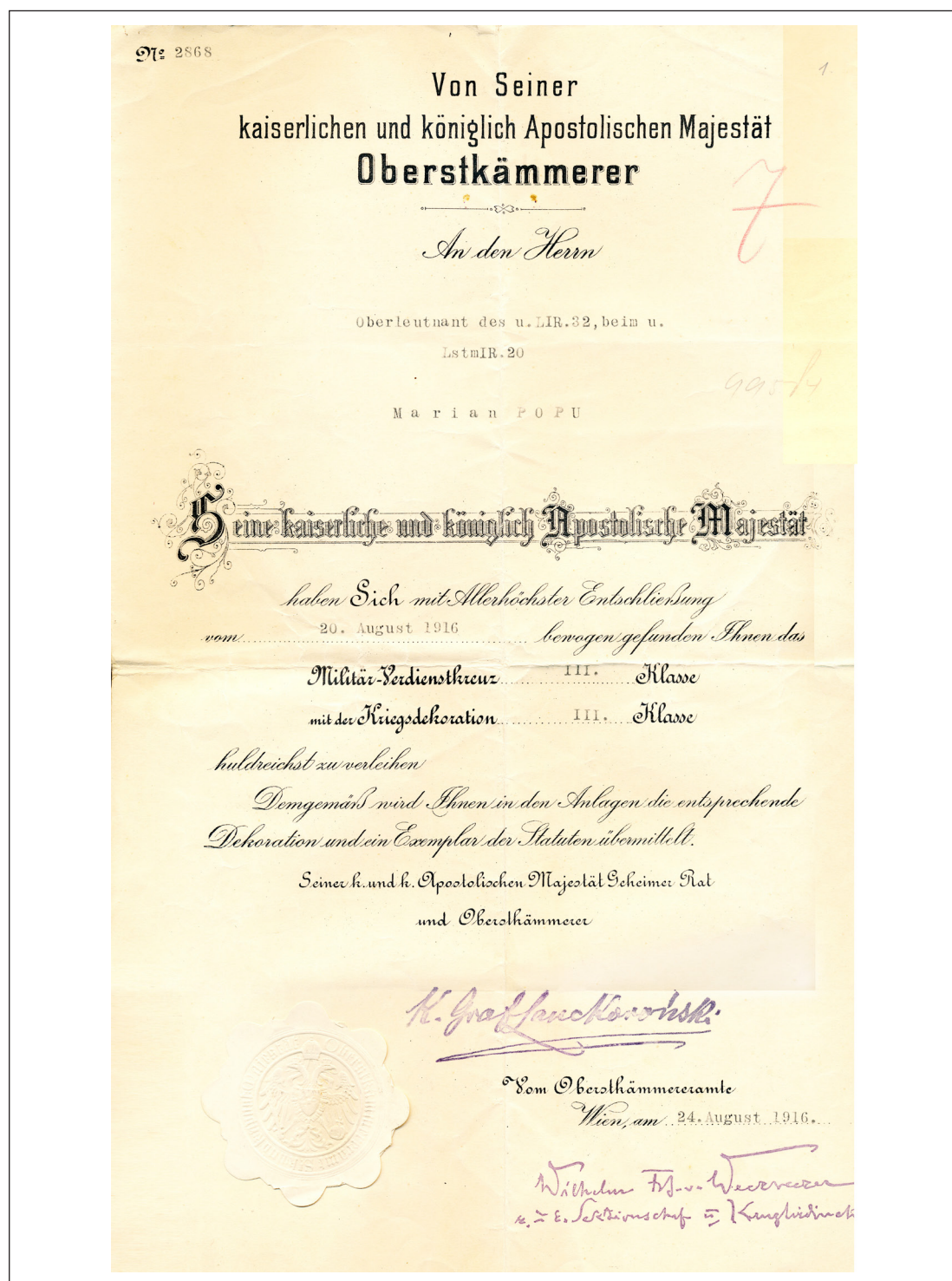


Figure no. 3: Patent for the Imperial Merit Cross, 24 August 1916, Collections of MNIT, M 7337.



Figure no. 4: Imperial Merit Cross with the insignia of war, Collections of MNIT, M 12645.

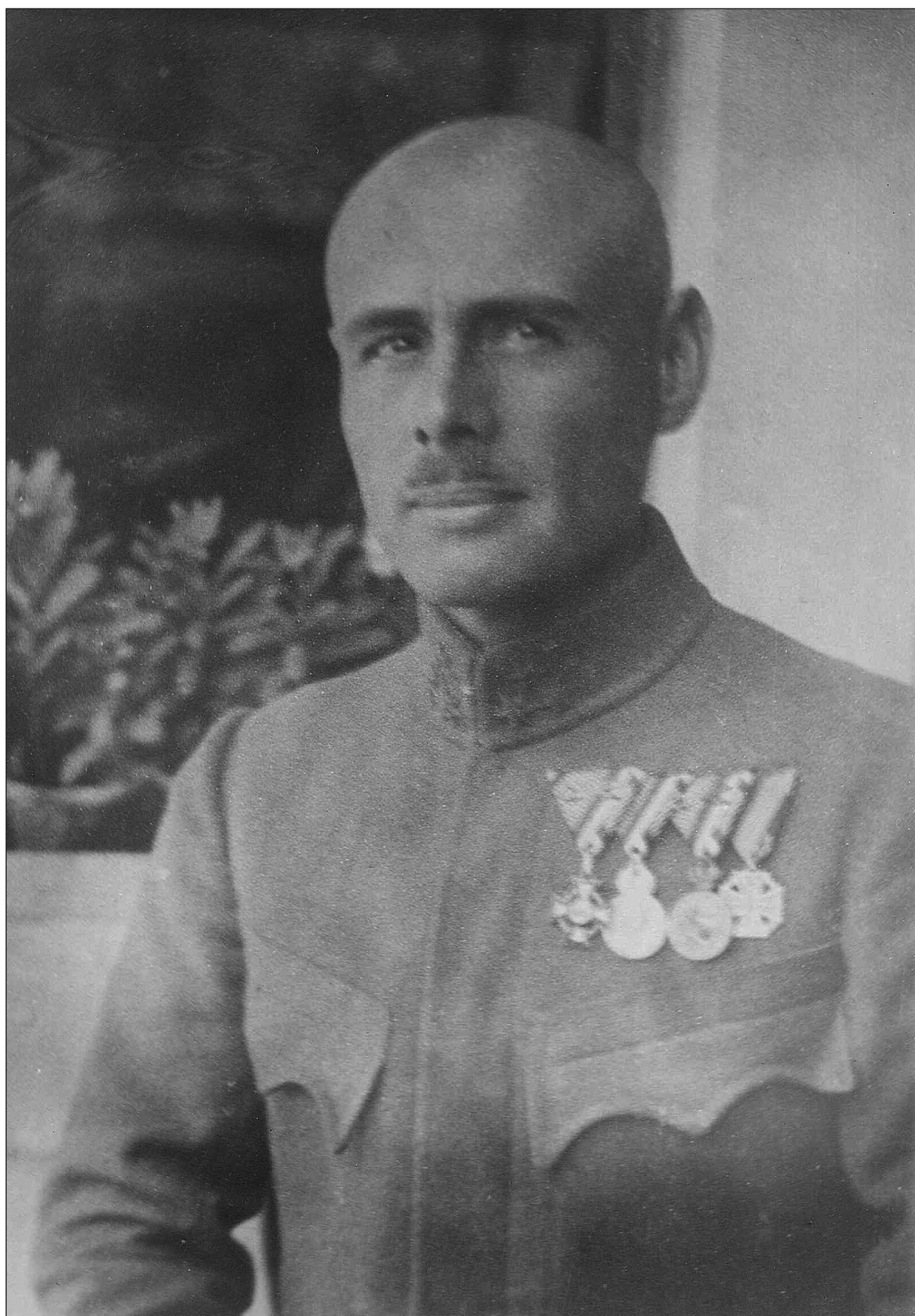


Figure no. 5: Photo of Captain Marian Popu, 1917, Collections of MNIT, C 3090.

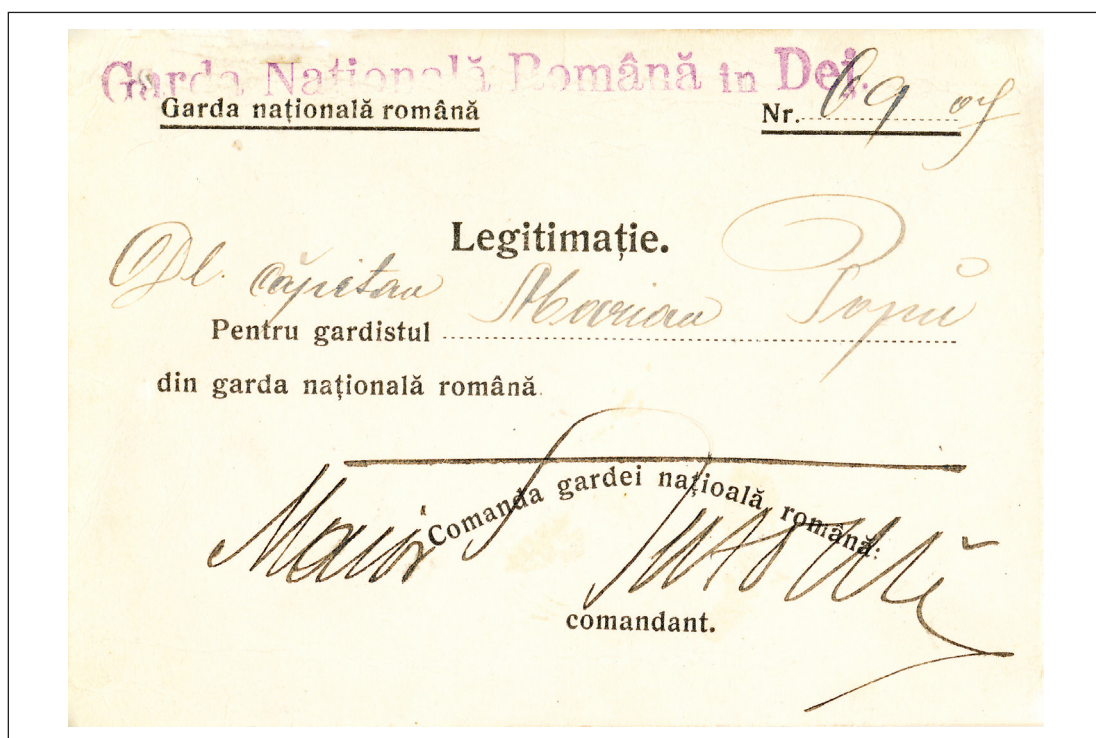


Figure no. 6: Badge of the Romanian National Guard in Dej, 1918, Collections of MNIT, M 7342.

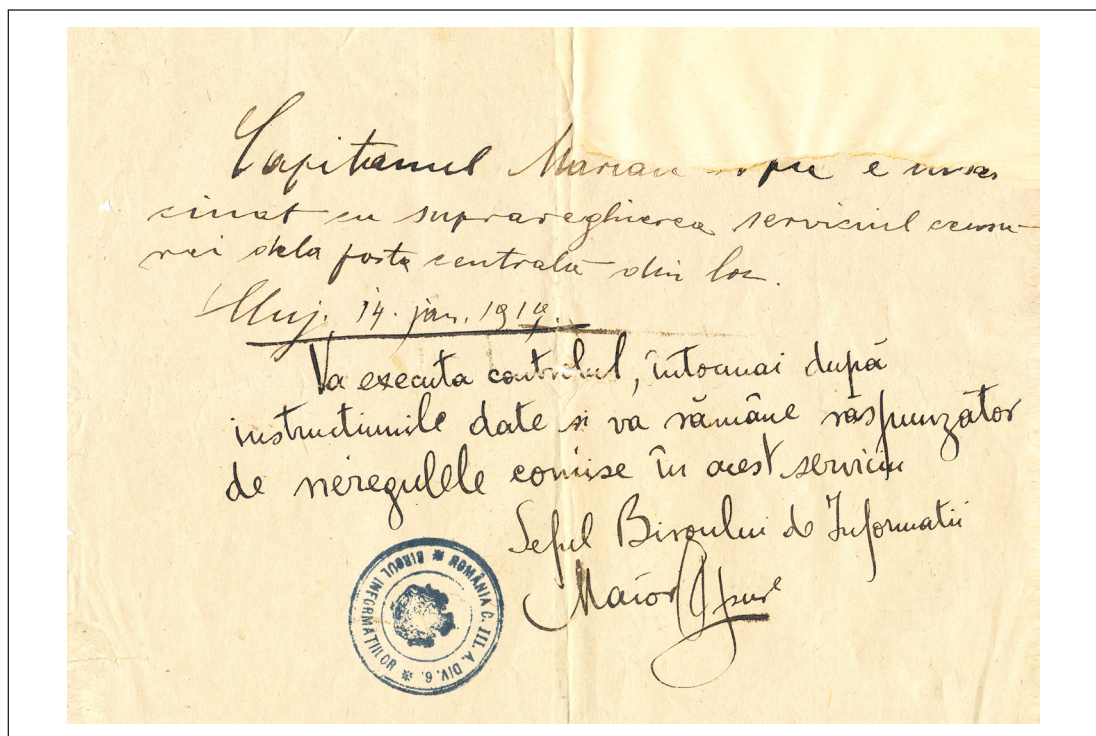


Figure no. 9: Service order, Cluj, 14 January 1919, Collections of MNIT, M 7348.

Figure no. 7: Travelling Order to Trenčín, 13 December 1918, Collections of MNIT, M 7343.

Garda Națională Română în Dej.	Garda Națională Română în Dej. Dési Román Nemzetőrség.
Nr. <i>20</i> /191 <i>8</i>	Sz. <i>20</i> /191 <i>8</i>
Bilet pe clasa <i>II</i> să cre- ditează.	<i>II</i> osztályu menetjegy hitelezendő.
Ordin deschis.	Nyílt parancs.
Pentru <i>Capitan Marian Popu</i>	<i>Popu Marian</i>
care din încredințarea susnumitei garde în cauză <i>oficiară</i> călătorește din Dej până în <i>Sibiu</i> <i>Sibiu</i> și îndărăpt.	részére, ki fenti parancsnokság engedélyé- vel <i>szolgálati</i> ügyben Désről <i>Szibiu, Nagybánya</i> utazik.
Rugăm toate oficiile și autoritățile să binevoiască ai sta întru ajutor susnumitu- lui și să-l ajute în călătorie.	Felkértnék az összes hatóságok, hogy fentnevezett utazásában támogatni szí- veskedjenek.
Dej, la <i>29 Decembrie</i> 191 <i>8</i>	Dés, 191 <i>8</i> <i>December</i> hó <i>29</i> n.
<i>Marian Popu</i> comandant.	<i>Popu Marian</i> parancsnok.
Subscrierea proprie a călătorului: <i>Marian Popu</i> <i>capitan</i>	A tulajdonos aláírása: <i>Popu Marian ms.</i>
Ordinul deschis are valoare până la ziua <i>15 ianuarie</i> 191 <i>9</i>	Ezen nyílt parancs érvényessége meg- szűnik 191 <i>9</i> <i>január</i> hó <i>15</i> n.
<i>16 îndreptățit de a</i> <i>prorota nume</i>	<i>Fegyelem viselkedés</i> <i>fogorint</i>
Garda Națională Română în Dej.	Garda Națională Română în Dej.
Medgyesi Lajos Dés, 1918.	

Figure no. 8: Travelling Order for the Trenčín-Sibiu route, 29 December 1918, Collections of MNIT, M 7344.

Proces Verbal.

Stăzi douăzeci și cinci Februarie anul unu mie nouă sute douăzeci. Noi Comandanțul postului de companie Căpitan Popu Marian din comuna Berczel la predare și Ștefan Iure primarul comunei Berczel la primirea comunei Berczel am procedat în modul următor.

- 1./ La predat și primit comuna Berczel în care în momentul predării s-a aflat cea mai mare ordine și liniște.
- 2./ La predat și primit tot mobilienul și materiale ce s-au luat pentru nevoile serviciului.
- 3./ Oara predării și primirii comunei s-a stabilit în ora 9

Pentru care s-a încheiat prezentul Proces Verbal în trei exemplare din care unul s-a predat primarului Berczel, unul s-a înaintat la Palatul Regal și unul s-a rămas la companie.

Am predat
Comand. Comp. Căpitan Popu Marian
Căpitan Popu

Am primit
Primarul comunei Berczel
Ștefan Iure
Iure

Figure no. 10: Official report of the handing-over/taking-over of Berczel (Hungary), 25 February 1920, Collections of MNIT, M 7349.



Figure no. 11: Patent of awarding the War Memorial Cross medal, 1 November 1921, Collections of MNIT, C 3120 a.



Figure no. 12: War Memorial Cross medal, Collections of MNIT, M 12655.

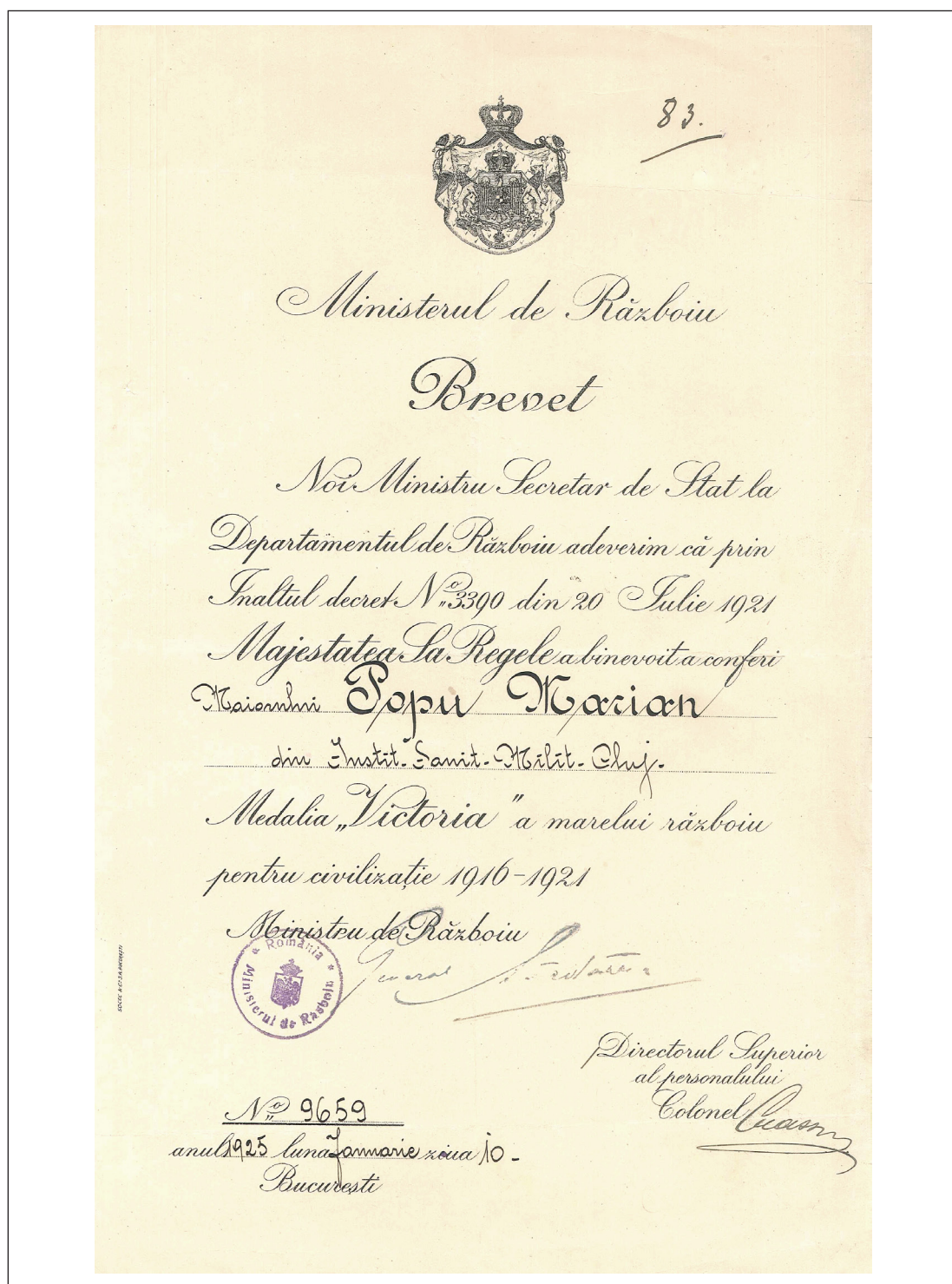


Figure no. 13: Patent of awarding the „Victoria” Medal, 10 January 1925, Collections of MNIT, C 3121 a.



Figure no. 14: The „Victoria“ Medal of the Great War for civilization 1916–1921, Collections of MNIT, M 12656.

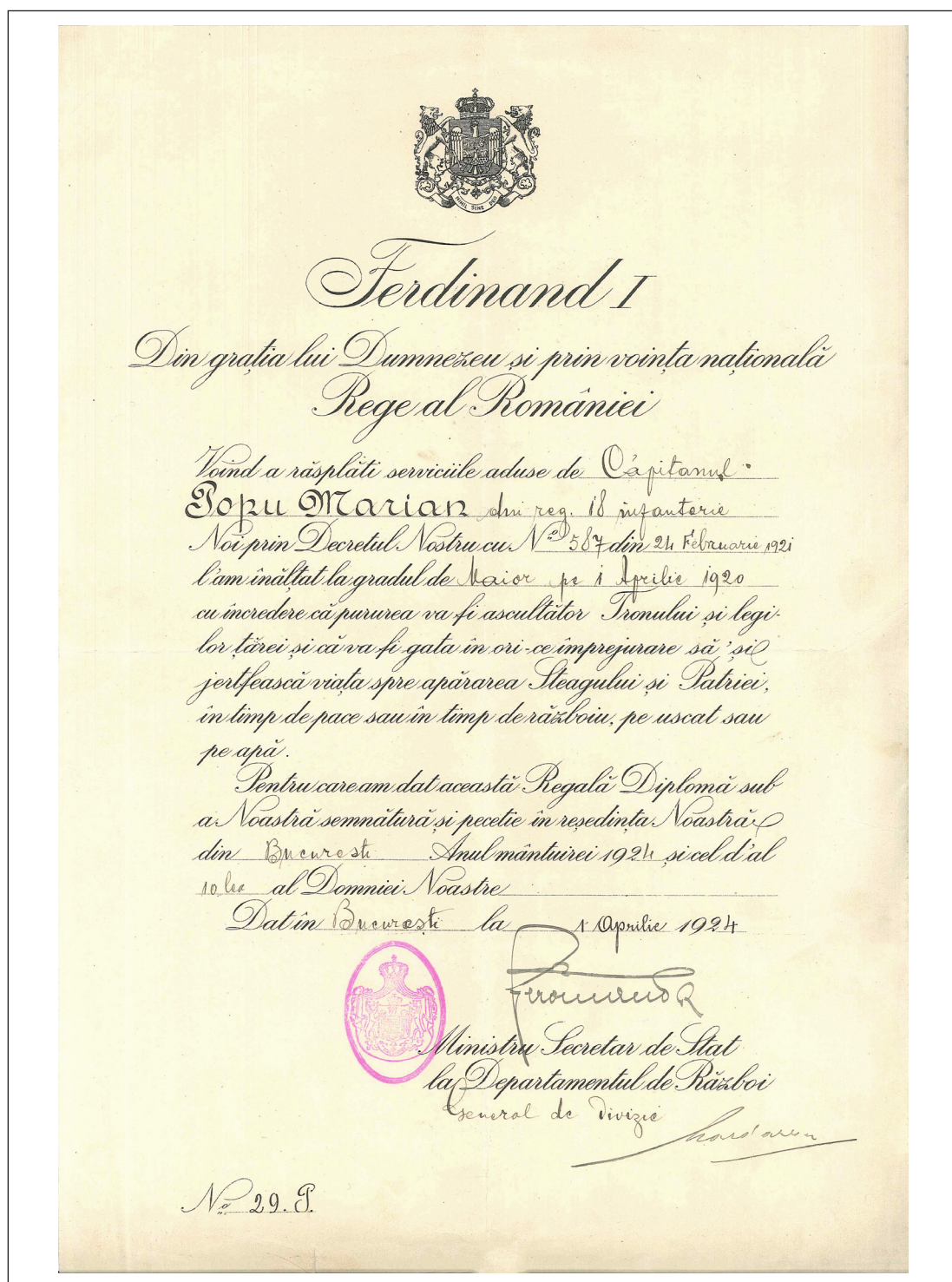


Figure no. 15: Patent for promotion to the rank of Major signed by King Ferdinand, 1 April 1920, Collection of MNIT, C 3134.



Figure no. 16: Photo of Major Marian Popu, 1921, Collections of MNIT, C 3092.