

A COMPARISON BETWEEN ROMANIAN AND SOVIET MILITARY INSIGNIA

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Rezumat: *Articolul de față se dorește un ghid util pentru a evita confuziile între insignele militare române din perioada comunistă și cele sovietice. De asemenea, este realizată și o comparație între rolul insinelor în sistemul militar sovietic și cel român. Deși armata română a copiat fidel numeroase aspecte de la cea sovietică (de la cele organizatorice la uniforme), în domeniul insinelor militare au existat diferențe majore. Principala diferență în cazul insinelor derivă din rolul lor. Dacă în armata roșie reprezentau un mijloc larg răspândit și apreciat de recompensare și stimulare, în cea română au avut un rol secundar, o dovadă clară în acest sens fiind relativa sub-dezvoltare a sistemului de insigne militare române, comparativ cu cel sovietic și raritatea cu care ele sunt purtate în fotografii de militarii români față de cei sovietici. Pentru a diferenția insignele române de cele sovietice există o serie de reguli general-valabile, principalele fiind următoarele: insignele române au fost confecționate doar din tombac sau alamă, niciodată din aluminiu, în timp ce în URSS aluminiul a fost folosit pe scară largă; la insignele române reversul este plan, în timp ce insignele sovietice redau pe revers în negativ modelul de pe avers, fiind concave. Din fericire riscul de confuzie este redus la un număr limitat de insigne, acestea fiind prezentate și explicate pentru fiecare caz în parte. Deși au existat și insigne identice din punct de vedere al aspectului, ele nu au fost purtate în aceeași perioadă, cele românești intrând în uz mai târziu. În fotografii, eventualele insigne sovietice identice cu cele românești purtate de militari români (mai ales în perioada RPR) pot fi identificate în general după neconcordanțele temporale dintre unele elemente ale uniforme, care nu corespund cu perioada în care insigna respectivă a fost în uz.*

Abstract: *This article is intended to be a guide useful to differentiate between Romanian military communist insignia and their Soviet equivalent. Also, we have realized an analysis between the Romanian and Soviet military insignia system. Although the Romanian army faithfully copied a lot of features from the Soviet one (from the structure to the uniforms), in the case of insignias there were major differences. The biggest is related to their importance. In the Soviet army they represented important and appreciated means to reward and stimulate, while in the Romanian one they had a secondary importance. A proof to this is the fact that the relative under development of Romanian insignia system compared to the Soviet one, and the very small number of insignias that the Romanian soldiers wear. In order to differentiate between Romanian and Soviet insignias there are some general rules, such as: the Romanian insignias have always been done in brass or tombak, while in the USSR aluminium was widely used, and the fact that the reverse of the Romanian insignias is plane, while their Soviet counterparts have it mirroring the obverse, being concave. Luckily the risks of confusion is limited to few insignias which we will analyse. Although some insignias were identical, they were never used in the same time, so in photos a Romanian insignia can be told apart from a Soviet one (it happened sometimes that the Romanian military personnel use Soviet insignias), if it does not correspond with the details of the uniforms that are used to date it.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *insigne militare, armata română, URSS, aviația militară.*

Key-words: *military insignia, Romanian army, USSR, military aviation.*

After 1948, when the monarchy was abolished and Romania became a popular republic, a process of copying almost everything from the Soviet Union was enforced. In the Romanian Army, this tendency reached its climax between 1952 (when a new regulation regarding the uniforms was introduced, that copied rather close the Soviet style) and 1957-1960 (when some slight changes of a more national type began to be introduced – e.g. the reintroduction in 1957 of the traditional arrow shaped collar patches). Between 1948 and 1952 a transition style was in use, which combined a lot of Soviet features, with some traditional Romanian ones.

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However, even between 1952 and 1957 there were some differences in the appearance of Romanian and Soviet soldiers. An example is the fact that Romania never introduced a parade uniform for the soldiers (only officers had one), while in the USSR, it existed.

Another important difference was in the use of insignias as a means of reward. While the Soviet military system emphasized them a lot, being wildly popular and awarded, this was not the case in Romania, where they were not very common, neither popular. This can be easily seen by simply comparing some photos of Soviet military personnel, regardless of the rank, that sports a lot of insignias of various shapes and significances, with their Romanian counterparts that very rarely have more than a class insignia. This difference in terms of mentality had as a consequence the fact that the Romanian Army had a rather small number of insignias, compared with the Soviet Army, and the use of civilian insignias on military uniforms was rare, and usually seen only in the 1950.

Even in the 1950s, there were few other insignias used, the most common being that of membership to the Union of Youth Laborers (*Uniunea Tineretului Muncitor / UTM*), and some cultural or sport insignias. Their use was also limited to no more than two insignias, and in some cases could be worn only at events connected to the insignia, like sport events for sport insignias.

Another example is that even the regulations were sometimes vague in terms of how insignias should be worn. For example, it was never explained how insignias should be worn when a person had both an insignia of a Military Academy, and an aviation class insignia, as both of them should have been placed over the upper right pocket, but the class insignia took all the space.

When analyzing the aspect of the insignias, we decided to focus only on those that are very similar, and that can pose problems to those less familiar with this topic, not on all of them. We will only mention that usually in the 1950, Romanian insignias copied pretty close the shape and outline of their Soviet counterparts, but since the majority of them have texts, or at least a few words in Romanian, or the Romanian coat of arms, the risk is not that great.

The problems usually appear with the insignias that do not have words on them. In their case, the risk of confusion is even greater, because in some photos of the era, Romanian military personnel can be seen with Soviet insignias. This was generally the case with those that studied in Soviet military schools or participated in joint military exercises during which managed to obtain soviet insignias. Their use on Romanian uniforms was usually made easy by the fact that they were rather similar to the Romanian ones in order not to be too obvious, and probably because Romania had some problems in issuing enough of its insignias.

Luckily the risk of confusion is limited to a small number of class insignia used by the aviation (the first models of insignia for pilots, mechanics and navigators used between 1952 and 1957) and the first class insignia for tanks.

In order to avoid confusions, there is a set of general rules which help differentiate between Soviet and Romanian military insignia. It is important to pay attention to the following features:

- the first type of Romanian class insignia for pilots, technicians and navigators (model 1952-1957) was made of textile material not of metal (so far we have not identified one single insignia made of metal, although we do not exclude such a possibility);
- the wings of the Romanian aviation insignia (except type III for military pilots) are made of four segments each, while those of the Soviet insignia only have three segments;
- the reverse of the Romanian insignias is plain, while the Soviet ones have a hollow reverse, which mirrors the design of the obverse;
- the Romanian insignias are made exclusively of tombak or brass (both of them an alloy of copper and zinc, the difference being the concentration in copper, that is higher in the first), while in the USSR many insignia were made of aluminium (metal which was newer used in the Communist Romania for manufacturing military insignia);
- in the cases of photography, another clue is when an insignia does not correspond in terms of contemporaneity with the elements of the uniforms of the person that wears it (the most obvious

features are the collar patches, the presence or the absence of an upper right pocket in the case of the uniforms of the aviators, or the emblem worn on the head gear).

In the following pages we are going to present all the insignias that can pose problems, and the necessary explanations that will help to avoid confusions.

a) Insignia of the aviation technicians – model 1952-1957

Although we have not identified a Romanian model made of metal, we present some construction details, which differentiate the Romanian version from the Soviet one. For the Romanian version we used the drawing of an insignia taken from a military regulation, which illustrates it.

The Soviet Army used two types of insignia similar to the Romanian model. Both were identical as aspect, the difference being in their size. The 1949 model of the Soviet insignia for military technicians and engineers was 10 cm long and was used until 1958 (fig. 1.a.). The insignia issued in 1958 was only 7 cm long (fig. 1.b.).

The main constructive differences between the Soviet version and the Romanian one are (to facilitate their identification, we marked them with arrows):

- the Soviet insignia have, in their central part, a crossed hammer and a wrench, while the Romanian version has two hammers;
- the tip of the hammer of the Soviet insignia is pointing downwards, while on the Romanian insignia both hammers have their tips pointing upwards;
- each wing of the Soviet insignia is made of three segments, while those of the Romanian insignia have four segments;
- the attaching system (fig. 1.a and 1.b), which was never produced/used in Romania (the Romanian part used mainly the screw and nut system and seldom the closed needle, but of a different model from the one presented in the images bellow);
- the reverse of the Romanian insignia is plain, while the Soviet one is hallow.

Only the first version of the Soviet insignia (fig. 1.a) corresponds in terms of size with those specified in the Romanian regulations, being 10 cm long. The 1958 model of the Soviet insignia (fig. 1.b) is too short, being only 7 cm long.

At this point we have to mention that according to the 1952 regulations, class insignia of the aviation could be made in cloth or in metal¹, although no Romanian insignia has been found yet, or been heard about. The only exception were the class insignia of the paratroopers, which were stated that should be made only in metal, although in the photos of the era cloth versions have also been seen. The paratroopers' class insignia has not been included in this article, as there is no Soviet insignia similar to it, so there should be no risk of confusion.

b) Insignia of the military pilots model 1952-1957

This model of the Soviet insignia was in use only between 1949-1950 so by the time Romania adopted it, it was no longer in use. In its case, to ease the comparison we took the image of an insignia from the 1952 Regulation regarding the military uniforms (fig. 4.a), and a detail from a textile insignia (fig. 4.b) that proves that the official model was followed in practice.

The main differences are:

- on the Soviet insignia the grip of the swords is oriented outwards, while on the Romanian one it faces inwards (red arrow and the detail in fig. 4.b);
- each wing of the Soviet insignia is made of three segments, while those of the Romanian insignia have four segments (orange arrow).

Although this Soviet insignia has a screw and nut as an attaching system, but any inscription in Russian on the nut or a hallow reverse are clear indications that it is not a Romanian military insignia.

c) The insignia of the military pilots (its period of use could not be clearly documented, but it should be between 1966-1968)

¹ Regulamentul 1952, art. 99.

In this case it is more difficult to differentiate between the Soviet and the Romanian insignia, as the two are quite similar, although used in different periods. Between the elements that can help to distinguish them we mention:

- on the Romanian insignias the coloured surface is always done with enamel (fig. 6), any insignia coloured with paint being a Soviet one. For the time being we discovered that only the 3rd class of the Romanian insignia was produced in a coloured variety, so any 1st and 2nd class coloured insignia is most likely Soviet;

- the Romanian insignia has a plain reverse and the attaching system consists of a screw and nut, so insignias with hollow reverse or catching systems that are not specific for Romania (fig. 5.b), are Soviet;

- there are two differences between the Soviet and Romanian insignias that have the central shield not coloured: the trench on the edge is coloured black on the Russian version (fig. 5.c), while the Romanian one has no colour (fig. 6.b); also, the shield of the Soviet 2nd class insignia is silver, while the Romanian 2nd class is gold (the colour of the metal the insignia was made of – fig. 6.b);

- for the Soviet insignia presented in fig. 5.e the differences are most obvious, the Romanian army not using insignias with oak leaves around the central shield.

d) Insignia of the military navigators model 1952-1957

As can be seen in the images, only one type of Soviet insignia (fig. 7.a) resembles the one used by the Romanian Army between 1952 and 1957.

The main differences between the Romanian and Soviet insignia are:

- the Soviet insignia (fig. 7.a) has the wings consisting of only 3 segments, the reverse is hollow, and on the nut of the attaching system there are markings written with Cyrillic letters;

- the textile variety of the Soviet insignia (fig. 7.c), also has each wing consisting of three segments, and the general aspect is different from the Romanian one;

- on the Soviet insignia of fig. 7.d the red star is not in the central part, where the wings intersect, but on the tail of the bomb; on the bomb the class of the insignia is written, an element that is not present on the Romanian versions; further more the Soviet insignia for the 3rd class has the bomb coloured blue, for the 2nd silver and for the 1st gold (the Romanian insignias have all the same colour);

- regarding the Soviet insignia depicted in fig. 7.d, there is no risk of confusion, because the Romanian Army never used an insignia similar to it.

The Romanian insignia is also taken from an image published in the 1952 Regulation.

e) The first model of class insignia for mechanic-conductors (tank drivers)

The similarity is very big, as there is only one major element that can help to differentiate between Romanian (fig. 9) and Soviet (fig. 10) insignias. This is the emblem situated in the upper part, that in the case of Soviet insignias is a plane red five pointed star, while on the Romanian version we have a red five pointed star, in the middle of which in a blue circle there are the letters RPR, standing for Romania Popular Republic (this was the Romanian Army marking/emblem, that was painted on army vehicles and planes).

Another smaller difference is the way the oak leaves in the upper part are represented: on the Romanian insignias they are placed on three rows, while on the soviet ones, they are arranged on two rows.

Also, the Soviet insignias are produced in one piece, while the Romanian ones consist of two pieces (the wings are a piece, and the shield, the star and the laurels are another piece riveted to the wings);

The differences are more obvious on the reverse, as on the Romanian version is plane, while on the other it concave, reflecting the negative of the obverse.

e) Other insignias

In the case of this insignias (fig. 11-12), there are some features that can be used to differentiate between Romanian and Soviet ones:

- the Soviet insignias (fig. 11.a) are bigger than the Romanian ones (fig. 12): 7.3 cm, compared to 6.7 cm;
- the Soviet insignias have in the upper part a red star, which on the Romanian versions is replaced by the emblem of the Romanian Army (a red star, with a blue circle and the letters RPR – standing for Romanian Popular Republic, in its middle). The Romanian insignia depicted in fig. 12 is atypical from this point of view (being probably a test), but it was presented because it is the closest in terms of general aspect;
- the Soviet insignias are coloured using paint, while the Romanian ones are coloured using enamel;
- the Soviet insignias are produced in one piece, while the Romanian ones consist of two pieces (the wings are a piece, and the shield, the star, the vehicles and the leaves are another piece riveted to the wings);
- the reverse of the Soviet insignias is hollow, that of the Romanian ones is plain;
- the attaching system presented in fig. 11.b was never used on Romanian insignias.

It is likely that the Romanian insignia presented here was never officially instituted, this being just a sample. We reach this conclusion taking into consideration the fact that it can not be found in any regulations regarding the uniforms, and despite our best efforts we could find no other example in any private or public collection. Taking into consideration its shape and design we can suppose that it was intended as a class insignia for the mechanic-conductors of artillery tractors (big trucks, usually with tracks, used in order to move towed artillery). This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that at the time when we suppose it was created (somewhere between 1953 and 1960, taking into consideration that it is similar in terms of design with the tank drivers insignia presented above) corresponds to a period when the Romanian army made serious efforts to modernise its motor pool, especially with artillery tractors².

Means to recognize Soviet from Romanian insignias according to the details of the uniform of the person that wears them

The first image (fig. 13), represents lieutenant major Mihai Virag, one of the most famous Romanian pilots in the first years of the communist era, wearing a Soviet military pilot class insignia on the upper right part of his uniform. When analyzing it, we can figure that the insignia does not match the uniform that can be dated between 1952 and 1957 taking into consideration the following features:

- he has on his epaulets the branch insignia of the aviation introduced in 1952 (two wings with a star in the middle);
- between 1952 and 1957 the aviation had a distinctive tunic, with only one pocket on the left side;
- the type of collar patches that he wears were replaced in 1957 with the arrow shaped type³ (this was in use between 1948 and 1957). Also, his collar patches are piped with yellow (technical personnel had white piping).

Based on this we can even conclude that the Soviet insignia that he wears is a non regulation one, as its Romanian equivalent was different at that time. This one has a shield in the middle, and the red star above it, between the handles of the swords, while on the Romanian model used between 1952 and 1957 the star was at the intersection of the wings, and no shield was present. An insignia similar to the Soviet one that he wears was used by the Romanian army for a brief period in the middle of the 1960s, but by that time the uniform had different features than the one in the photo. On the left side he has the fifth grade of the order of the "Star of Romania", that he was awarded in 1954.

It is very likely that he obtained that insignia during some training sessions or studies that he took in the USSR, and he was allowed to wear them because he had the statute of a legend, being

² For further details see Sămușan, 2014, pp. 187-209.

³ Hotărârea Consiliului de Miniștri nr. 821/1957, art. 5.

the first Romanian military pilot to execute a supersonic interception in difficult meteorological conditions. His military career is typical for the personnel that studied in the Soviet Union, being sidelined after 1965, when Romania began to distance itself from Moscow: in 9 years he reached the rank of major, but was promoted to lieutenant colonel only after another 11 years, in 1972, and he retired with this rank after another 10 years, without being promoted to colonel⁴.

In the second image (fig. 14) the insignia that the aviation major wears on the right side of his chest, although was used at a point by the Romanian Army, does not match the details of the uniform of the time when it was in use, that means, that it is a Soviet insignia of a different model from the Romanian one that he should have worn. The most obvious detail of the uniform are the collar patches that were in use until 1957, while the insignia he has was in use almost 10 years later. On the left side he probably (taking into consideration that he is a major) has the Military Order 3rd class, awarded for 15 years of military service.

Conclusions

Despite the Soviet army having a very big influence on the Romanian one, this influence was not visible in the field of military insignias, probably because Romania had a different tradition that never emphasised them as means to reward or to stimulate. The risk of taking Soviet military insignias for Romanian ones is relatively limited to just five insignias, as the sixth one presented in this article did not entered in use. In the case of three of them (class insignia for aviation technicians, military pilots and military navigators, all of them model 1952-1957) the risk is relatively limited, because although rather similar in design, it is highly likely that the Romanian versions were never produced in metal, but only in cloth versions (no metal insignia has been found yet, and in all the photos the Romanian military personnel entitled to wear them has only textile versions; in the case of those having metal ones for every single example it was possible to proof that they were Soviet versions). In the fourth case, the insignia for tank drivers, although rather similar, there are some obvious clues to differentiate between the versions issued in Romania and USSR. So we are left with only one insignia that is almost identical, that of the military pilots used probably between 1966 and 1968. In its case a more thorough inspection must be conducted in order to differentiate them, but it is newer impossible to do it.

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⁴ The photo and informations about his career have been taken from <http://www.aripi-argintii.ro/om.php?p=5> (18.08.2016).

⁵ The Regulation of 1952 sometimes creates confusion, because it was printed in 1953, this year being on its cover. We have to mention that its correct name is the „1952 Regulation”, when it came into force, not the „1953 Regulation”, when it was printed, operation that was delayed. Also, all the legislation that appeared after 1952 regarding the military uniforms refer to it as the „1952 Regulation”.



Fig. 1.a



Fig. 1.b



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4.a



Fig. 4.b



Fig. 5.a



Fig. 5.b



Fig. 5.c



Fig. 5.d



Fig. 5.e



Fig. 6.a



Fig. 6.b



Fig. 6.c



Fig. 7.a



Fig. 7.b



Fig. 7.c



Fig. 7.d



Fig. 7.e



Fig. 8



Fig. 9.a



Fig. 9.b



Fig. 10.a



Fig. 10.b



Fig. 11.a



Fig. 11.b



Fig. 12.a



Fig. 12.b



Fig. 13



Fig. 14