



THE REPRESSION OF A DANGEROUS PHENOMENON. ABOUT *SELF-INFLECTED WOUNDS* IN WORLD WAR ONE

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Having the War for Romanian Reunification experience still fresh in the social memory, Constantin Kirişescu, invoking the respect for truth principle stated that: „not all our army's human material reached the peaks recognized by the foreigners and praised by us”. Some of those deployed, lacking moral resilience and being insufficiently instructed, had been however thrown into battle also demoralising their comrades, a possible explanation according to the great historian for cases of fleeing, mass surrender or self-inflicted wounds which, in some regions, brought upon themselves the most severe repression measures. We thereby aim to find answers to these aspects regarding our war during 1916-1920, such as: why did they appear, why was the repression of this phenomenon necessary and what other things were involved?

Keywords: self-inflicted wounds; repression; court martial; punishment; military justice.

Considering the Romanian Army's defeat in the 1916 campaign also on a matter of morale decrease, Constantin Kirişescu was amongst the first historians of the War of Reunification who also approached such delicate topics, in spite the fact that his renowned work has been completed when there was a current of glorification "no matter how", which began in the inter-war period and reached the climax after World War II.

Such a topic is *self-inflicted wounds*, phenomenon seemingly originating due to conditions of the controversial measure regarding troop-bolstering, adopted since Romania joined the WWI, when through mobilization, new units have been formed by diluting¹ the existent ones.

Thus, some of those mobilized, most devoid of physical or moral resilience, having poor military training, had been thrown in battle causing a decrease of the spirit among their comrades, a possible explanation, according to the cited historian, for the cases of fleeing, mass surrender or "self-inflicted wounds" which brought upon the most severe repression measures².

Along the following lines, we intend to provide details regarding the connection between self-inflicted wounds and, according to Constantin Kirişescu's assertion, the severe repression

measures adopted, attempting to find answers to questions from this work's brief.

First of all, we must outline, if still the case, that self-inflicted wounds did not appear only amongst Romanian soldiers, but it rather has a general and universal character, the phenomenon being detected in reports and statistical data ever since the beginning of World War One, the most industrialized and destructive war until then.

Secondly, viewed strictly as a clinical manifestation, self-inflicted wounds have been associated by specialists with extreme psychological conditions, regardless of the country or social environment from where the soldiers suffering such traumas were coming. About those we talk today using the PTSD acronyms (post-traumatic stress disorder) which were unknown to the medical practices of that time.

Due to the manifestation of those extreme psychological conditions, some soldiers, most of them youngsters, prematurely and violently reached a severe form of mental exhaustion, and also their physical limits, being capable of resorting to a wide array of desperate³ gestures, such as self-inflicting wounds, thinking, sometimes wishfully that they would get out alive.

Self-inflicted wounds in the British and French Army

According to some sources⁴, in the years of World War One, about 729 Canadian soldiers from the British army resorted to this extreme act wishing to avoid duty, although it is considered that their

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number is far from the real one, many cases being unrecorded, other declared as legitimate wounds, caused by enemy.

Unlike other crimes, such as *desertion* or *cowardice in front of the enemy*, in Her Majesty's Imperial Army, self-inflicted wounds were not deemed as a crime punishable by death⁵, except when was done in the first line of fire⁶.

Due to this reason, the deed itself, even though in some cases seems complementary, not a main act, does not appear in the official statistics concerning those British soldiers, regardless of nationality, who had been sentenced to death and executed in the years of World War One.

This is an explanation why some of the Canadian soldiers from the example quoted above⁷, although had been put on trial because they inflicted wounds upon themselves by shooting the upper limbs, hadn't been sentenced to death, but received between 7 and 42 days of body punishment, known within military regulations⁸ as *Field punishment no. 1*. Often applied to British soldiers in World War One, the punishment entailed binding the guilty soldier up till two hours a day, having his arms and legs cuffed to a fixed object, such as the wheel of an ammunition wagon or the gun carriage of an artillery cannon.

Back to topic, ever since the beginning of the war, cases have been reported⁹ concerning self-inflicted wounds among the British colonial troops of the Indian Army Corps, precisely between October 1914 and April 1915, when the number of cases of malingering¹⁰ and self-inflicted wounds among these soldiers has been significantly deemed.

Initially analyzing the period between October 22nd and November 3rd 1914, statistical data had shown a 57% higher hospital-admission rate among British soldiers, originating in India compared to their comrades originating in the British islands, concerning the upper limbs that suffered wounds, thus leaving room for suspicion that these wounds had been self-inflicted¹¹.

Lacking clear evidence to this matter, the report does not exclude that this type of manifestation could have been a possible illustration of an "allergic" psychological reaction among Indian soldiers, considering that they had been brought to another continent, to a different culture and had been thrown into a war, so different compared to anything some of them had already faced.

The report also mentions variations of recorded cases, concerning a decrease in the morale of the troops, another trait of this phenomenon, that seem directly proportional to the ongoing events on the battlefield. Therefore, an increase in cases of self-inflicted wounds has been registered as a manifested moral decrease subsequent to the involvement of the Indian Army Corps in the first Battle of Ypres (October 19th- November 22nd 1914), one of the fiercest clashes on the western front in the first part of the Great War. A sudden decrease in the cases registered after November 22nd 1914 followed, a single increase being recorded, again, in May 1915, but only among the troops freshly deployed on the French front, unaccustomed to the life in trench warfare.

Unlike the British, such accusations were severely handled in the French army. The late nineteenth century French legislation regarded self-inflicted wounds a conscription-specific phenomenon¹², which was related to malingering. Therefore, being regarded by soldiers as common practice among civilians, its repression fell under the jurisdiction of common law courts until 1914.

Special military courts—*les conseils de guerre*—established in 1914, at the beginning of the war, were meant, among other objectives, to discourage the soldiers from practicing self-infliction of wounds which could have kept them away from the first line, through clear examples, and more than 35 executions¹³ were conducted based on this assumption due to so called *mutilation*.

General Michel-Joseph Maunoury, former commander of the French 6th Army at the beginning of the war, especially known for "The taxis of the Marne" episode, due to the means by which the troops have been deployed to the front, transmitted his subordinates the following directive on February 8th, 1915:

"Some councils of war have shown an excessive indulgence regarding the accused ones and those proven guilty of committing very dangerous crimes such as robbery, abandon of post or self-inflicting of wounds. Such indulgence, which cannot be excused and which cannot be explained other way than blameful weakness, is one of the gravest dangers for army discipline. It leads to repeating the same mistakes and can become, if tolerated, a germ of defeat"¹⁴.



The self-infliction of wounds phenomenon in the Romanian army

In the Romanian army, the self-infliction of wounds was also regarded by military commanders as a *crime* (meaning a criminal act), an offence equal to desertion, and in order to stop this phenomenon, believed that could affect the military combat power itself, drastic measures had to be taken right away.

It seems that in the 1916 campaign, self-infliction of wounds became a real phenomenon among the Romanian regiments dislocated on the front, that being the reason why these dangerous deeds had to be punished accordingly. In accordance with some Romanian commanders, self-infliction of wounds was a "contagious" phenomenon diminishing the combat spirit while according to those involved, although painful, it was a certain way of escaping, at least temporary, from the horrors of the first line of fire.

The very first cases which occurred among the Romanian soldiers have been spotted at the beginning of the campaign, not on the main front – in the Carpathians or in Transylvania, where the recurring victories of Romanian troops were cherished by the public opinion, but on the Danube front and in Dobruja, where the Romanians suffered recurring defeats in the autumn of 1916.

The evacuation without fight of the Bazargic city on September 4th, the fall of the fortified stronghold of Turtucaia, on September 6th and the abandonment of Silistra, on September 8th, whose defence had become "useless and dangerous"¹⁵, have scared the public opinion and worried the General Staff, ensuing therefore changes in command of the great units involved.

Freshly appointed in command of the 9th Infantry Division, succeeding General Ion Basarabescu, who was relieved due to major command errors, General Nicolae Petala forwarded on September 7th 1916, a report registered as no.231 to the South Army Group commander, General Alexandru Averescu, informing him that: "two-thirds of the evacuated wounded soldiers suffered only hand wounds, especially the left hand or foot wounds. I believe that these people inflicted the wounds upon themselves in order to flee from the battlefield. I respectfully ask you to consider ordering a medical expertise and bringing justice upon these deserters from duty; because if they also go unpunished among the rest of others, who abandon their chief

and flag, evil shall spread to extents we don't even expect and with such troops we will soon lack of any combat power"¹⁶.

General Nicolae Petala took a division affected especially in respect to morale since up till then it hadn't been involved in major confrontations out of which to have suffered considerable losses among personnel or military equipment¹⁷. However, as the report tells, apart from 75% of the wounded having self-inflicted wounds, there were the others, without specifying a number, who one way or another fled the battlefield unpunished, which is deemed as defying the commanding authority, a situation which confirms what historian Constantin Kirişescu was asserting.

In this report, one can find most of the military offences regarding morale, such as desertion, self-infliction of wounds, respectively, fleeing from battlefield, reason which at least in the current article may be regarded as an element of reference.

Firstly, it indicates how far this phenomenon could go and shows also a status quo, and on secondly, it displays a morale pattern of the Romanian troops in Dobruja, in the autumn of 1916.

Not only the 9th Infantry Division commander was fearing that this phenomenon could have become so "contagious" that it would irreversibly affect the units' combat power, but also the most unit commanders from Dobruja, and even, we can assert that the entire military hierarchy, the case not being unique.

According to an Order registered to no. 217, September 11th 1916, General Alexandru Hartel, commander of 5th Infantry Division, rapidly dislocated from Transylvania to Topraisar, was transmitting to his subordinates that most of the wounded from the front had only the upper limbs affected and was ordering that military medics to report all such cases, to figure out whether the wound was self-inflicted or not. If found guilty of such deed, they were about to undertake drastic measures in order to stop that state of things: "Also let the troops under your command know that these people will be brought in front of the war council, declared deserters and mercilessly executed"¹⁸.

The 2nd Infantry Division, commanded by General Alexandru Socec, also freshly brought in Dobruja from 1st Army's reserve, was encountering the same problems, requesting the subordinated



units through September 18th 1916 by Order no. 433, to report cases concerning soldiers with wounded left hands or feet, that might have been the cause of self-harm aiming to "escape" the front¹⁹.

A couple of weeks later, the phenomenon also appeared on the Transylvanian front in the second phase of the campaign, since the enhancement of enemy resistance, intensification of enemy contact and last but not least, decline in the number of Romanian victories, which resulted in retreating to initial starting-positions poised for offensive being about to defend the passes of the *Eastern* and *Southern* Carpathian mountains.

On October 15th 1916, within the Northern Army, General Ion Istrati, 7th Infantry Division commander, issued an Order classified as *personal-confidential*, registered to no. 560, which was stated: "The HQ is noticing that the number of soldiers with hand wounds is increasing dreadfully and believes that most of them mutilate themselves knowingly, intending to avoid enemy contact. I hereby order all those proven to have shot themselves on purpose to be immediately executed by the commanders in charge. The Ambulance medics will also recognize such wounded soldiers and will arrest them, responsible for non-performing the current order being the hierarchical supervisors. This order will be communicated to the troops"²⁰.

Analyzing issued orders and comparing those issued on the Dobruja front to "Order no.560" issued by 7th Infantry Division commander, similarities appeared, but there are also substantial differences, able of indicating that phenomenon evolution, which seemed widespread enough on both Romanian fronts, was directly proportional to the depreciation of soldier's morale and, in the meantime, a secondary effect of military situation worsening on the front.

First, we need to outline the contribution of the Ambulance medical personnel usually located in the near reach of the battlefield, who were interacting with the wounded, and were therefore receiving the order to identify and sort them according to criteria, this time other than strictly medical ones.

Probably, from here on division commanders referred to a necessary and mandatory medical expertise, without which thoroughly considered repression of recorded cases wouldn't have been possible.

According all division commanders with orders involved in the current analysis, medical

personnel played a key role identifying the culprits of such deeds. They had to identify suspicious wound types that could have been self-inflicted, to draw up nominal tables with wounded soldiers suspected of self-inflicting wounds, which were to be sent to the higher echelon, drastic measures to be taken in order to stop this state of things.

But how did such wounds look like? How could the military medics have figured out they are facing a soldier potentially guilty of malingering?

In a report forwarded to the Chief doctor of 3rd Regiment "Olt", of 2nd Infantry Division, the medic of 1st Battalion, 2nd lieutenant Dumitru Sfințescu, described some of these traits: "Locationally speaking their wounds are suspect and they represent characteristics of wounding through shooting from little range, which means perforating wound with large and irregular holes, with soft-tissue rupture and the surrounding area being partially burnt and darkened by smoke on a 2-3 cm radius circle"²¹.

For his part, lieutenant Gheorghe Franculescu, the medic of 3rd Battalion of the same regiment, reported similar characteristics of self-inflicted wounds: "For all these wounded the penetrating holes of the bullet were located in the palm area, irregular and all of them displayed a large area of 2-3 up to 6 cm, intensely black, surrounding the wound, more grayish towards the peripheral area. There, this black area could be erased; towards the center, precisely around the wound, the black color could not be erased, the epidermis being impregnated with gunpowder particles or cauterized"²².

Having analyzed the issued orders, but also from the description of these types of wounds, it stands out that medical expertise was crucial when separating those wounded in battle, from those with self-inflicted wounds. Considering that these, according to the assertions of "Order no. 560", weren't about to be exempted from justice in councils of war, but, at least in 7th Infantry Division units, were about to be executed on the spot by their commanders.

It is obvious that when identifying suspect cases of voluntary self-infliction of wounds, military medics had a crucial role, not only strictly through the medical act, which could decide life or death of those accused of having done such deeds. There are special workpapers when such an episode is being described, a medico-judicial error, we could say, which cost the life of some soldiers sentenced to



death and executed without the authorities having had the certainty that they had been guilty²³.

This is the case of a French military medic who with a simple issued document sent innocent people to their deaths. Thus, after a quick medical examination procedure undergone on the French front on the night of 10th/11th September, 1914, the Chief-medic of French 15th Army Corps has been presented 16 soldiers with wounded hands or forearms. After a quick examination he recognized six soldiers guilty of having self-inflicted wounds, eight soldiers with wounds caused by the enemy and two suspect cases.

On September 18th 1914, in Verdun, 29th Infantry Division council of war sentenced six soldiers to death according exclusively to the medical certificates filled up by that Chief-medic, and the following day two of them were executed, while the remaining four were sent to prison.

After a couple of weeks, out of the arm of an arrested soldier a piece of German shrapnel had been extracted, which caused the execution of him and the other three condemned to be suspended.

Although, the soldier's penalty had been changed to 25 years of service and subsequently cancelled forever by the Cassation Court, the case had been recorded as the first public row based on the topic regarding the errors of the French military justice.

Made by order investigation bodies, and having all the competencies of military police, including arresting and submitting to councils of war those suspected to have inflicted wounds upon themselves, Romanian military medics saw their vocational role to handle and cure those suffering modified.

Some of them were reserved, even without knowing about the example of the French confrere, eloquent being the case of 2nd lieutenant medic Dumitru Sfințescu who wrote in a recording report: "Nevertheless, I am mentioning that medical examination of wounds can only provide clues regarding small range, in this case of shooting and it falls upon the judicial investigation to determine the guilt of those suspected"²⁴.

However, if in the initial phenomenon phases, medics were about to give verdict according to expertise, after having drafted lists with the affected, which they would forward to upper echelon, later, in 7th Infantry Division's case, medics were granted

even the right to arrest those they considered being guilty of self-infliction of wounds.

Why did wounded soldiers have to be arrested, even if they inflicted the wounds upon themselves? A possible answer can be found in a report registered to no. 777, from September 29th 1916, of 2nd Infantry Division commander towards the General Staff, showing that once passing the sorting points organized by battalion ambulances, wounded soldiers were allocated to campaign hospitals and from there, depending on case seriousness, to internal hospitals, without accounting for any of them.

Better said, once through the sorting points of the military medics, soldiers accused of having inflicted wounds upon themselves in order to escape the front, were very difficult to identify and to be brought in front of the military courts: "Restrictions provided in confidential order could not be applied to these men", reported 2nd Infantry Division commander, General Alexandru Socec, "because they were already evacuated probably from Cerna-Voda or Fetești hospital (...). I kindly ask you to intervene so that right after they would be healed, they would be reassigned back on the front even though they would no longer be able to serve actively- being an example for the future noticing that self-infliction of wounds can be recognized and the culprits are sent to justice"²⁵.

The second common trait of the analyzed reports is referral to repression measures themselves for those guilty of such deeds. These indicate different levels of action, ranging from them being sent to justice, how General Nicolae Petala proposed to General Alexandru Hartel's more severe approach, who was requesting the culprits to be sent before the councils of war, declared as deserters and shot mercilessly and even to the extreme measure of summary executions adopted by General Ion Istrati, who requested the subordinated units that the guilty should be immediately executed directly by their commanders.

What the three division commanders were not taking into account was the fact that when the reports were issued and the orders enacted through which the repression measures were to be established, there was no legal regulating framework, the deed not being foreseen by the *Code of military justice* at that time. As consequence, even if such case would have reached the war councils, they could not



incriminate the deed and could not assign criminal liability.

For this reason, in the "material inferiority and soul depression"²⁶ surroundings, the establishment of a legal regulation framework required "improvising" something in order to fill up this legal blank, taking into account the fact that it seemed completely devoid of solutions.

The whole commanding hierarchy was in favor of eradicating this phenomenon, in fact of every phenomenon that could have affected the combat power of first line units, their morale or the security of the state. Even the king Ferdinand, within the "Captainship Commandment Order no. 2263", dated October 11th 1916, requested: "In the current situation I won't admit talking about retreat. Every flaw, every idea towards retreating unmotivated by real enemy pressure, is to be immediately repressed by capital punishment"²⁷.

Judging by the date "Order no. 2263" was issued, we can assert that the situation king Ferdinand was referring to was difficult for Romania, not only in the 2nd Army, to which he was addressing and which back then had lost Brasov and the troops were retreating, following received order towards Predeal and Bran-Campulung pass. 1st Army was barely holding the line on the river Jiu Valley, in the Northern Army sector, the first battle of Oituz was completely underway, whereas on the Dobruja Front, Constanta had been occupied by the enemy. From here probably the steadfastness with which Captainship Commander of Romanian Army ordered repressing of every flaw by immediately applying of capital punishment.

We cannot conclude that by this order king Ferdinand would have vindicated the summary executions, or the discretionary implementation of death sentence, even though while expressing himself he failed mention the judicial phase of those deemed guilty and, subsequently, implementation of punishment, including capital punishment, only after the competent military courts had decided.

But the legislative framework providing commanders with compatible repression tools to fix the flaws the sovereign was referring to, was still not available. And even if available, the procedure of judging within council of war was hardly accessible, since some units were perpetually facing the enemy, or retreating, and the judiciaries, sometimes in great numbers, had

to be taken from the first line teams, which were weakened enough, or guarded in hospitals and sent, sometimes accompanied by an escort before the military courts.

Most likely due to these reasons, in order to provide commanders at all levels with an useful tool in order to reestablish military discipline, on November 1st 1916 "Circular Order no. 10913" was issued, an "improvisation" as we named it above.

The order was addressed to army headquarters and independent divisions and among other things, modified the sense of article no. 222 of the Code of military justice, regulating the offence of hitting a subordinate, which provided the following: "Every military that hits his subordinate, apart from cases of defence of self or another person, or rallying of fugitives, or being required to stop robberies or devastation, shall be punished by imprisonment from 2 months to 2 years".

Therefore, by "Circular Order no. 10913" of General Staff, radical modification has been brought upon provisions of article no. 222 from Code of military justice, the liabilities of the deed have been diminished to indistinction, and the worst, a crime has gained legal justification, which was transformed from criminal offence to punishment, eliminating at the same time, the boundaries of its jurisdiction.

For all these modifications, the explanation was the benefit of the country, and the order was clearly stating that punishment by hitting had been implemented for every misdemeanor meant to weaken discipline and combat eagerness, taking into account that, according to order signatories, in times of war the state of law had been always suspended. The order mentioned above, signed by General Dumitru Iliescu, countersigned by Chief of Military Justice Directorate, General Gheorghe Cereseanu, showed that: "This state entitles us to provide the given texts with the widest interpretation in order to be able to implement a quick and exemplary army repression, and even to create means in such circumstances, absolutely unprovided by the law-maker. We, therefore, ask you, to regulate the punishment by hitting the way you shall consider, without any other limit than the benefit of the country"²⁸.

It's obvious that by a completely administrative act, a law could not be modified, a norm which underwent the entire legislative procedure and

which had been voted by Parliament and published in the Official Gazette. Moreover, to explain why this order had been issued, it was claimed as a legal appearance, the repression done by our foes to whatever rules of law, as well as the requirement of our army's cohesion, among the necessity of some outstanding exertions.

Logically, if the Chief of General Staff arguments, general Dumitru Iliescu's, had been really truthful, which we can't debate, the counter-measure would have eventually needed to be poised against the enemy, not his own soldiers. According to order's logic, due to rules of law repression done by our foes, hitting one's own soldiers was being thus justified, expecting that this measure would have as effect the strengthening of army cohesion.

The effects of these "liberalization" in combating the self-infliction of wounds phenomenon is difficult, if not impossible to quantify. No data had been collected and there is no statistical analysis regarding this topic during the period analyzed by us to indicate whether the measure lead to positive results or not.

It is certain that, once officialized, hitting as disciplinary method seems to have become in time a current practice, described in memorial papers concerning the period referred to. One case is described, not necessarily as a measure against the self-infliction of wounds, by an officer from the French Military Mission: "When unsatisfied, the colonel, the commander and the captain would unleash their full rage on the sergeants, corporals and soldiers, hitting them in the face with the baton or by fist. If such thing were to have happened to us (within the French army), they would have been shred to pieces"²⁹.

Enacting of legal framework regarding self-infliction of wounds

The legal framework which allowed the repression of self-infliction of wounds had been adopted, however, within an assembly of issued judicial norms as a consequence to the urge of legislative back-up concerning war efforts, the modification of the Code of military justice being required. The bill being enacted ever since the beginning of 1916, during the premier and ministry of war office of liberal Ion I.C. Brătianu, and came to fruition by *Law no. 3245, of December 21st 1916*, concerning repressions, modifications and addenda

needed to be performed to the Code of military justice for times of mobilization and war³⁰.

This modification has brought additional Title II, deemed as one of the most important legislative measures adopted in that period, a judicial act based on elements of military psychology³¹. Suffice it to say, the entire special matter regarding military justice had been modified taking into account the requirements of mandatory repression of deeds, based on the principle according to which the way military justice is organized has a crucial role in strengthening and developing military discipline.

Chapter V of Additional Title II established aggravating circumstances if concerned deeds would have been committed during mobilization or war, and the enhancement of implementable punishment limits to some criminal offences, compared to previously established limits, available in times of peace. In the same context provisions regarding the self-infliction of wounds offence had been added.

Therefore, according to art. 55 introduced by Additional Title II, self-inflicting wounds willingly, or inflicting wounds to another, with his consent, respectively, willingly aggravating own or other's wounds, was punishable by death in times of war and by *confinement* in times of mobilization.

In order to correctly understand the phenomenon, we need to mention the fact that *confinement* was a punishment regulated by art.15 and following of the Criminal Code (1864), the second as importance after *hard labor* (for life or for a determined period of time). *Confinement* consisted the condemned to undergo a mandatory work regime, less severe than *hard labor*, the one in cause being cuffed, confined in a "workhouse" and used for various tasks for which in return the paid sum he earned had to be shared with the state.

Certain is that, a legal framework for combating self-infliction of wounds became available only with December 21st 1916, once art. 55 from Additional Title II had been introduced, thus eligible to judge such deeds were *courts martial*, military courts which had replaced councils of war, and details regarding the way of implementing this law appeared later, on January 24th 1917, when Circular Order no. 15574 was issued. This was signed by the Chief of Army General Staff, general Constantin Prezan, contained collocation: "Issued from Superior Order", which showed that it was



also met king Ferdinand's consent, as Captainship Commander of the Army, and was mentioning the way of implementing of death penalty for self-infliction of wounds with one's own will, or infliction of wounds upon another with his will, and the willingly aggravation of one's wounds or another's.

The order came with instructions for judicial panel members of courts martial, and segregated the ones guilty of committing these deeds in three categories, of which those in case had to respect when applying the law. Therefore, when those condemned for having committed such deeds were requesting pardon, commutation or punishment reduction, one had to take into account whether those who through self-infliction of wounds had become unfit for military service, as well as those who through punishment sentence from court martial had met voting unanimity for condemnation, regardless of being fit or unfit for military service, were to be executed.

The only category of condemned a priori benefiting from clemency were those who received as verdict from courts martial with vote majority, thus meeting the requirement that the performance of the court decision had to be suspended by military commanders of echelons where the structures that had heard the cause were operating, according to art. 144 of Code of military justice.

This category were about to be deployed on the front, allowing them that within active service to be able to benefit from pardon, at the proposal of hierarchical superiors, therefore redeeming committed errors in times of great inner pressure.

Conclusions

In those presented within this essay, some traits of the self-infliction of wounds phenomenon result: its universal character, human nature of attitude, lack of national, social origin or race element. Self-infliction of wounds unfolded based on the subjects' psychic traumas, within military structures with gravely affected morale, and regarding consequences for military action, the phenomenon is dangerous due to its contagiousness potential within combat units, especially within those that during the era were considered as being part of the "lower ranks".

Self-infliction of wounds involves painful actions, physically and psychologically

traumatizing, but which don't jeopardize life, selfishly aiming to escape first line, and as secondary effect supposedly weakening of army combat capacity.

Against all appearances, officially, during the Reunification War, within the Romanian army, self-infliction of wounds did not represent a phenomenon, or at least this is what we understand from General Gheorghe Cereseanu's synthesis entitled: *Monography of military justice during our war*³².

This work entails the description of activities unfolding in the field of military justice, of legal modifications occurred since 15th of August 1916, when Romania joined war and until June 1st 1918, as well as statistics regarding court martial activities, having several tables annexed.

The first table, entitled "Numerical statistical table of criminals condemned by Court Martials and Councils of war near the great units of operational armies, during the 1916-1918 campaign, until June 1st 1918"³³ presents the sentences given by every court martial, allocated to incriminated deeds.

From the information contained in this table, according to official data, the proportions of this criminal phenomenon specific to the military institution are being outlined, from the 6628 sentences, given between 15th of august 1916 until June 1st 1918, when according to provisions of the Peace Treaty signed in Bucharest army demobilization took place, most of them, 4324 sentences, had been given for *desertion*, which with a really significant percentage, of 65.24% out of the total sentences, can be deemed as a dreadful phenomenon.

The other incriminated deeds, counting 31, for which sentences had also been given, have split the remaining percentage, recording significantly reduced figures. Among these, there were 59 recorded cases of self-inflicted wounds, which stands for a really insignificant percentage of 0.89% out of the total sentences.

The second table, entitled "Numerical statistical table on ranks and deeds punishable by death by the military criminal courts during the war of 1916-1918 executed until June 1st 1918"³⁴, presents the performed death sentences, allocated to incriminated deeds, respectively, to councils of war, court martials. Thus, from the 10 death sentences for cases of self-infliction of wounds,



that had been performed, one of them is assigned to 1st Army court martial, 4 are assigned to 15th Division court martial, and 5, half of the number of those performed to 7th Infantry Division.

However, judging by the spread of phenomenon, the data above can only serve as a guide, taking into account, firstly, the fact that at the beginning of the analyzed period, a number of 11085 cases remained unfinished³⁵, in briefing, under trial, or suspended. Secondly, according to the Law-decree no. 1547 of April 9th 1920, self-infliction wounds belonged to the deeds for which clemency was granted at the end of the war, this assembly of such gestures aiming, more or less declared, to attain a social reconciliation³⁶.

Finally, comparing self-infliction of wounds to desertion, taking to account the seriousness and the consequences of the two, as it was deemed by some commanders of that time, has no real base to rely on, the percentage of the former being truly insignificant.

On the other hand, it is very likely that not all these deeds had been reported or instrumented according to regulatory and legal provisions, the difference between the real number of these cases, impossible to quantify, and the official figures, are given by the worries, "the personal touch" and justice initiative of some of the commanders, among different levels of the chain of command.

NOTES:

1 Alexandru Averescu, *Notițe zilnice din război*, vol. II, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992, p. 15.

2 Constantin Kirițescu, *op.cit.*, p. 581.

3 Teresa Iacobelli, *Death or deliverance. Canadian courts martial in the Great War*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 2013, p. 44.

4 Sir Andrew MacPhail, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919: The Medical Services*, Ottawa, 1925, p. 279.

5 Julian Putkowski, Julian Sykes, *Shot at dawn, Executions in World War One by authority of the British Army Act*, Pen & Sword Books Ltd., South Yorkshire, England, 2006, p. 48.

6 *Cases of malingering by troops*, October 1914 to March 1915 (catalogue reference WO 154/14), <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/loyalty-dissent/self-harm-hand-wounding/>, accessed on 03.01.2021.

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