

TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO DEFY DEATH

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Abstract: May 31, 2024 marks the 165th anniversary of the historic decision by ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza to establish the first engineer unit in the Romanian Army. This decision was materialized by the annotation „it is agreed”, made by Alexandru Ioan Cuza, on the report of the Council of Ministers no. 1902, which was the basis for the establishment in Moldova of the first engineer battalion of the Romanian Army. This engineering battalion was made up of permanent workers, it was financed by public funds, and was commanded by engineer Panait Donici - the Moldovan Minister of Public Works, a prominent personality of the intellectual elite of the time, who, after his appointment to the military position, was also awarded the rank of captain. The fact that the maintenance of the battalion was carried out with public funds was a support of the civil society to the Romanian Army, which during the reign of Alexandru Ioan Cuza had entered a complex process of restructuring and modernization. The task of the battalion was not only to carry out missions aimed at making land communication routes to ensure economic and social links and trade within the country, but also the provision of supplies for the military combat structures. In this article, I would like to talk about this 165-year historical evolution of the Romanian Army’s engineering structures and the factors that determined this evolution.

Keywords: engineer battalion, Romanian Army, historical development, historical decision, security

1. Introduction

Romania’s Army, integrated in the most powerful political and military Alliance in the world, has in its composition engineering structures, organized, equipped and trained, based, among other things, on the lessons learned in a glorious existence of 165 years.

A career military man and a very good connoisseur of the French Army, Alexandru Ioan Cuza understood that it was impossible to build a modern army in Romania without also having engineering structures, in peacetime, to meet the growing demands of civil society for a network of communication routes to ensure

economic, social and trade links within the young state called Romania [1].

At the same time, Alexandru Ioan Cuza considered, when he took the historic decision to found the first battalion of engineers in the Romanian Army, the fact that the young state established after the Union of 24 January 1859, had near its territorial borders, as well as in the West, forces that did not look favorably on the union of the Romanian Principalities under a strong state, able to preserve its interests through its own forces. As a result, it was imperative that the new Romanian Army should also include engineering structures, which in times of crisis, mobilization and war would provide timely and efficient

engineering support, in accordance with the structure and equipment specific to the times in question.

Alexandru Ioan Cuza's decision to appoint engineer Panait Donici, former General Superintendant of Public Works in Moldova from 1857-1859 [2] and Minister of Public Works in Moldova from April 1859 to May 1860, to command the first engineer battalion of the Romanian Army, and to grant him the rank of captain, proved to be a wise one, since Panait Donici was already aware of the need to carry out the infrastructural works so necessary for the development of the young state resulting from the union of the three Romanian Principalities, and at the same time, he understood in a short time the needs of the Romanian Army, in terms of providing the necessary logistics, in crisis situations, during mobilization and war.

When Alexandru Ioan Cuza appointed engineer Panait Donici to command the battalion, he also took into account the fact that the latter had graduated with brilliant results from Academia Mihăileană in Iași and the Technical Faculty in Paris and was one of the first Romanian engineers in the field of construction in the second half of the 19th century.

The fact that Alexandru Ioan Cuza was not mistaken when he appointed engineer Panait Donici to command the battalion is also supported by the following arguments: he also founded the second engineer battalion in Muntenia [3], starting in December 1860; he demonstrated real scientific and organizational qualities, etc., as Minister of Agriculture, Commerce and Public Works from November 1867 to February 1868; he founded the National School of Bridges and Roads in Bucharest in 1864 [2]; as an engineer in various departments in Moldova, he worked to modernize objectives of national interest such as bridges, warehouses, public buildings, etc. [4]; he managed the construction activities of the bridges of Giurgeni and Horia [4]; as a deputy in the

Chamber of Legislators, he voted together with Leon Eraclide, at the proposal of Costin Brăescu, the establishment of the Roman Voda Gymnasium, which became operational on September 30, 1972 [2]; Romanians are proud of the fact that Panait Donici was a devoted son of the Romanian people, as shown by the monuments erected to honor his memory, the most imposing of which is the one in Bucharest, shown in figure no. 1, made by the Romanian sculptor Oscar Spathe, located next to the most important monument to the engineering branch soldiers in Bucharest - the Lion and inaugurated in 1914.



*Figure 1: Monument of Panait Donici in Bucharest, Iuliu Maniu Boulevard no. 1-3, district ** (Historical monument code LMI B - 20011 [5])*

2. Brief Historical Development of Engineering Structures between 1859 and 1989

The 1st Engineer Battalion was subordinated to the Military Ministry in terms of training and discipline and to the Ministry of Public Works, in terms of design, execution and maintenance of public works and had the following organizational structure: a) 1st Company of Workers, commanded by *Captain Nicolae Chinezu*, who on November 9th 1860, became for a short period the battalion commander; b) *Company 2 Workers*, commanded by *Lieutenant Nicolae Niculcea*; c) *Company 3 Workers*, commanded by *Second Lieutenant Dimitrie Gheorghiu*; d) *Company 4 Workers*, commanded by *Captain Enachi Leca*; e)

technical workshops; f) materials' warehouses.

Although the date of 31 May 1859 has remained inscribed in official documents and engraved in the collective memory, as the date marking the birth of the Army Engineering as a branch in the composition of the new Romanian Army, I should mention that the first official approach to include the Engineering military branch in the organizational structure of the Army of the Romanian Principalities, was mentioned in July 1848, in the "Instruction for the organization of national defense in Wallachia", a normative act, which stipulated that the army was to be composed of 106. 000 men, of which 2000 were destined for engineering [1] and the military school that was to be set up would also train "engineering staff officers", capable of executing plans and topographical surveys, carrying out field fortification works and building pontoons for floating bridges, so necessary for military forces to pass across waterways.

Since the establishment of the first engineer battalion in the Romanian Army and until today, the Engineering military branch has contributed fully to the *defense of the national interest*, and many times its soldiers, from private to general, have made the supreme sacrifice.

The history of the Engineering military branch in the Romanian Army during its 165 years of existence has been so complex that it would be impossible for me to faithfully recount it in the few pages of this article. That is why, I will further point out from the multitude of events in which the engineers were active participants, from soldier to marshal, only a few events, which by their relevance, constitute, in my opinion, arguments worthy of consideration.

From this perspective, I think it should be noted that one year after the first engineer battalion of the Romanian Army was established in Moldova, the second engineer battalion was established in

Wallachia, on the initiative and with the special involvement of Captain Panait Donici. The task of maintaining two engineering battalions, each with a capacity of one thousand men, with public funds, proved to be very difficult, but it was solved by the joint efforts of Captain Panait Donici, the Minister of Public Works and the Military Ministry. These efforts proved efficient until 1871, when the financial difficulties became more and more severe. Under those circumstances, Prince Carol I, instead of looking for measures to find financial resources to keep the two engineering battalions active, considered that the best way to solve the financial problem was to merge the two engineering battalions into a single battalion. Perhaps if he had been aware of the urgent need to obtain the national independence of the Romanian state, in a not too distant perspective, he would have thought more about the need to keep the two engineering battalions in activity, especially because the engineers had become quite known during the military conflicts in Europe and in the world.

On the eve of 1877, the Romanian army engineers answered favorably when they were called upon by the state, which considered that the time had come to gain independence from the Ottoman Empire and take its fate into its own hands. The Romanian history greatly honors the efforts and sacrifices made by the soldiers of the engineering branch to carry out fortification works on the banks of the Danube in the sectors of Calafat, Ciuperceni, Poiana Mare, Rast, Bechet, Corabia Izlaz etc., the building of the bridge over the Danube at Silistrioara-Măgura, from 14 to 31 August 1877, over which, on horseback, Prince Carol I himself had the courage to cross, who, unafraid of the Turkish artillery shells exploding near the bridge, found the strength to encourage his soldiers: "*That's the music I like!*", as well as for the heroism shown by the army engineers, *who defied bullets, fire, smoke and thousands of*

bayonets aimed at their chests by their enemies, conquering the redoubts of Plevna, Grivitsa, Rahova, Vidin, etc., arousing not only fear among their Turkish adversaries but also the admiration and respect of the allied Russian soldiers and even of the Turkish soldiers, although they were adversaries.

The colossal efforts made by the Romanian army engineers in the 1877-1878 campaign for the conquest of Romania's independence also generated numerous lessons learned, which were subsequently implemented, contributing to the increase of the role of the engineering forces both in terms of diversification of missions and specific tasks to be performed, and in terms of increasing the number of personnel.

As a result, on 7 April 1881, on the initiative of the Minister of War, Colonel Gheorghe Slăniceanu, with the approval of Prince Carol I, who signed the High Decree no. 998), the Special School of Artillery and Engineering was established in the premises of 28 Calea Griviței in Bucharest, where future artillery and engineering officers would receive theoretical and practical training in accordance with the real requirements of the artillery and engineering military branches [1]. At the same time, on the basis of Decree no. 960 of 1882, the first Engineering Regiment of the Romanian Army was established and the need to solve some of the pressing problems of the Engineering Army Branch made it necessary to set up the Engineering Inspectorate.

The period 1884 - 1886 meant the proof of the professionalism of the Romanian army engineers of the 1st Engineering Regiment, commanded by Colonel Anton Berindei, who, through great efforts built the Bucharest Fortress, according to General Brialmont's projects [6]. The proof of the professionalism, abnegation and devotion of the Romanian army engineers also occurred during 1888-1893, when the soldiers of the 2nd Engineering Regiment, commanded by Colonel Zanfir Gheorghiu,

rebuilt the Focșani-Nămoloasa-Galați Battlefield Front, after the project of Major Army Engineer Shumann [6], from the Prussian army.

The appearance in 1914 of the dark clouds of the First World War led Romania to adopt the status of neutral country for the period 1914-1916. By adopting this position, Romania did not neglect to increase the combat capacity of its army and, implicitly, of its engineering forces. From this perspective, on 7 April 1914, the Pontoon Battalion of Brăila was transformed into the Pontoon Regiment, commanded by Colonel Nicolae Popovici [1].

The date of 15 August 1916 is remembered as the date when the Romanian Crown Council decided, as a result of the political-military agreements signed with Russia, England and France and under their pressure, to mobilize its armed forces and enter the war on the side of the Allied Powers against Austria-Hungary. This historic decision led to the implementation of the mobilization plans by the army engineering structures existing during peacetime, on the basis of which the 1-5 Pioneer Battalions / Army Corps were established [1]: the Fortress Pioneer Battalion, the Pontoneers Regiment, the Railway Regiment, the Specialty Battalion and the governing bodies of the army engineering services.

The operations carried out by the Romanian Army in Oltenia, Muntenia and Dobrogea were unsuccessful, and as a result, the decision was taken to set up on 25 September 1916, the Directorate of Fortification Works, headed by Brigadier General Gheorghe Văleanu, which was subordinated to work detachments, intended to carry out, in stages, sectors with fortification works and non-explosive barricades in north-eastern Wallachia, southern, central and northern Moldavia [1] as well as the inclusion of the Automobile Traction Regiment within the army engineers at the beginning of 1917.

The Order of the Grand General Headquarters no. 1734/08.02.1917, generated the constitution and operationalization until 10.03.1917, of the Sedentary Parts of the Engineering Troops, consisting of: [1] 1-5 Pioneers Battalions, Fortress Pioneers Battalion, Specialties Battalion, Pontoneers' Regiment, Railway Regiment, Automobile Traction Regiment. The great conflicts with the enemy, prompted the pioneers to carry out [1] 175 missions to scout the terrain in the enemy's territories, to set up successive alignments, sectors, positions and lines of defense, halting or for offensive missions, to demine areas of land and works of art seized from the enemy, to rebuild and maintain over 122 km of roads and highways, and 28,5 km temporary access roads, to build 19 improvised bridges, 53 bridges and 17 infantry bridges, repair and strengthen 14 bridges destroyed by the enemy, build and service 21 crossing points over waterways, including 5 on dories and fishing boats, 4 on small gates and 8 on bridges made of light floating vessels, destroy 15 road sectors, 45 bridges, etc., to prepare localities for defense and camp districts for the troops of the 2nd echelon, to guard over 68 important objectives and to participate in countless combat actions as infantrymen. The pontoneers proved themselves to be highly qualified, having built and serviced [1] over 36 bridges from ships and improvised bridges across inland waterways up to the retreat to Moldova, as well as 33 bridge crossings by ships and barges across the Prut, Siret and inner Danube. At the same time, in the 1917 campaign, the pontoneers supported the railway structures in repairing railway lines and bridges, organized and manned countless temporary crossings, organized and manned 4 mixed craft forcing points and a pontoon bridge crossing over the Danube River during the Flămânda Maneuver, ensured the continuity of communications between Moldova - Bessarabia and Wallachia-Dobrogea, with

the help of bridges from ships stretched across the Prut and Danube rivers, ensured the forcing of the Tisa river by the Romanian fighting forces that carried out military actions in Hungary, as well as the crossings over it until the end of the 1918-1919 campaign. For the successful accomplishment of these missions, the Romanian engineers paid a painful blood tribute, meaning 6720 dead, 560 wounded and mutilated and 1680 prisoners/disappeared [1].

When the world was beginning to get used to the echoes produced by the bombs and shells used by the belligerents on the battlefields of the First World War, the politico-military situation in Europe became inflamed again, so that on 22 June 1941, the Romanian Army was mobilized in accordance with the provisions of RD (Royal Decree) no. 1798 / 21 June 1941. The situation for the Romanian people and its army was unprecedentedly complex, given the consequences of the Vienna Diktat.

Following the mobilization and the measures ordered before it, the fighting forces of the Romanian Army had at their disposal army engineering units and subunits, organic and reinforced, highly trained, which allowed them to carry out difficult specific missions, in the ongoing campaign east of the Prut river, making an important contribution to the success of the fighting forces for [1] the forcing/crossing of the Prut river and the liberation of Bessarabia and northern Bucovina in the period 2 - 27 July 1941; the forcing/crossing of the Dniester river between July 17 and August 9, 1941; forcing/crossing the Bug and Dnieper rivers and defense in the Nogai steppe, between August 1 and October 3; the conquest of the Crimea and the northern coast of the Sea of Azov between October 4 and July 4, 1942; supporting the offensive actions towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus, between May 12 and November 18, 1942; stopping the counteroffensive of the Soviet troops in the

Stalingrad area, between November 19 and February 2, 1943; ensuring the withdrawal from the Caucasus and the Crimea, between April 14 and May 13, 1944; preparing and leading the defense in Bessarabia and Moldova, between April 2 and August 20, 1944.

At the same time, they demonstrated their skill and bravery, contributing to [1] the reconnaissance of the enemy's fortifications, minefields and fire system, both during the day and at night, carrying out actions within the framework of mixed groups intended executing the assault in waves in order to conquer heavily fortified objectives, ensuring smoke masking; conducting close combat actions as infantrymen, marking minefields and widening lanes; road and bridge demining; the arrangement of defense positions and the execution of explosive and non-explosive dams, the opening of communication routes in hard-to-reach areas; the repair, consolidation or construction of permanent bridges and roads for the maneuver of own forces, the discovery and neutralization of destruction devices installed by the enemy at bridges and roads, as well as anti-tank and anti-infantry mines, the rapid execution of explosive and non-explosive barrages to stop the enemy's counterattacks, identifying and neutralizing catacombs, participating in actions as tank hunters, closing with dams the vulnerable flanks and directions, destroying important bridges on the retreat directions, setting up and servicing more than 72 crew bridges, hatches and walking bridges for the forcing/crossing of 25 water courses, of which 5 are large and the rest small, the construction of more than 94 improvised or semi-permanent wooden bridges to double crossings over water courses or obstacles or to replace floating bridges, ensuring the protection of points of crossing watercourses against ice sheets, snow, etc.

The events of August 23, 1944 represented a turning point in the history of the

Romanian people and its army, generating a radical change in the conditions for the participation of Romanian soldiers in the actions of the Second World War, the old co-belligerents becoming adversaries. In those dramatic moments, generated by the arrest of Marshal Ion Antonescu, the head of state, considered by the Romanian soldiers to be the personality with the greatest authority over the Romanian Army and the return of arms against the German co-belligerents, did not determine the Romanian soldiers and their commanders from all levels of the hierarchy military to lose their temper, they quickly adapted to the new situation, as the fate of the homeland was at stake. Whole files in the history of the Romanians contain documents about the military successes of the Romanian soldiers, among whom were also the army engineers, on the territories of Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, in support of the Romanian operations armies, which consisted in [1] the research and removal of mine dams, mining survey of more than 145 Km of roads, rapid opening of communications and crossings over watercourses, development, repair and maintenance of more than 3,100 Km of main, access and diverse roads, snow removal of 800 Km of the road and a gorge with a length of 17 km, the plugging of more than 400 tunnels executed by the enemy on the land communication routes, to thwart the mobility of the Romanian fighting forces, the construction of more than 730 temporary bridges and footbridges, the arrangement of 6.2 km of column road in wooded terrain, the execution of passenger fortification works, the coverage with explosive and non-explosive dams of the border in front of the defense device of the own forces and the directions favorable for their execution of offensive countermeasures, the interception of the withdrawal routes of enemy columns, execution of 74 minefields and preparation for destruction of 28 road and railway bridges, demining of more than 500

minefields made by the enemy and more than 86 works of art, execution of 52 color through the minefields executed by the enemy, the removal of 240 barricades, and 32 different obstacles, the engineering assurance of the forcing of 13 water courses, the arrangement and servicing of 32 crew bridges, 11 light bridges, 34 crossings on mobile boats and hatches, 12 on infantry decks and 2 on ice and through fords, etc. Likewise, the efforts and sacrifices of the Romanian army engineers, made in support of the Soviet commands, on the territories of Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, have remained and will forever be remembered, among which we can mention [1] demining, repair and maintenance of the roads intended for the main forces, the construction of 18 improvised wooden bridges, with $Q=25-60$ tf, the construction and servicing of 15 pontoon bridges over the Danube River, of which 11 in the Romanian sector and 4 in the Hungarian sector, repair, restoration and maintenance in operating condition of 13 airports, of which 7 in Romania, 2 in Hungary and 4 in Czechoslovakia, mine inspection, demining and rehabilitation of operational airports, restoration and consolidation of more than 62 railway bridges, etc.

In order to be able to appreciate, as close as possible to reality, what efforts and what sacrifices were made by the Romanian engineering branch soldiers, during the Second World War, we must mention that from the total of the Romanian Army fighting forces at the outbreak of hostilities during the Second World War, which totaled 684,414 soldiers to which were added 538,536 soldiers [1] participating in the western campaign, 220,000 soldiers [1], were from the engineering branch, 160,000 of them were used in the Eastern campaign (60%), and 60,000 in the Western campaign (40%). Of the 220,000 engineering soldiers, 3,348 were dead, 1,296 wounded/mutilated and 6,905 missing.

At the same time, we cannot fail to state that during the Second World War, Romanian army engineers, due to the lack of technical means of travel, crossed plain, hill and plateau areas on foot, 16 mountainous massifs, passed 34 watercourses and crossed more than 2,700 localities, of which 39 are urban, large and medium-sized.

Certainly, other aspects could be highlighted that bring to life the efforts and sacrifices of Romanian army engineers, within the two campaigns of the Second World War, but I only mention the previously stated aspects, which entitle us to express our admiration, respect and gratitude to the Romanian noblemen and to pay a devoutly tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice, on the occasion of the 165th anniversary of engineering army branch's glorious existence, on May 31, 2024.

Normally, the end of World War II was supposed to bring well-deserved retribution and peace to the surviving army engineers. Unfortunately, the Soviet occupier unleashed persecution and terror with the support of the communist force on the generals and officers of the engineering branch, who had fought in the eastern campaign, many of whom ended up in the horrible communist prisons, for doing their duty to the motherland.

The communist regime imposed in Romania under the pressure of Soviet tanks, did not improve the working and living conditions for the army engineers, on the contrary, it turned them into "Slaves on Uranus" (metaphorical expression used by an author, who had the courage to show the humiliation and mockery to which army engineers were subjected during the "*Golden and Enlightened Era*"). From this perspective, the construction of permanent fortifications in Banat, Oltenia and Dobrogea, the construction of Neptun resort, Govora, Turnu Măgurele, Tulcea, Craiova, Pitești, Galați, Călărași, Făgăraș and the large companies from Iași,

Timișoara, Brazi, Copșa Mică, Turnu - Severin, Slobozia, Aleșd, Bucharest, Craiova, the Cernavodă nuclear power plant, the heavy water plant from Drobeta-Turnu-Severin, the expansion of the Constanța, Galați shipyards, Mangalia and Tulcea; the construction of 220,000 apartments in Bucharest and Zimnicea; the construction of over 8,000 km of national roads and 23,500 bridges/road bridges in all areas of the country; the modernization of the traffic arteries in Bucharest, through the “Unirii”, “Lujerului” passageways, the heavy traffic sector, Geniului Boulevard, Valea Cascadelor and the Bucharest-Pitești and Fetești-Cernavodă highway sectors; the provision of crossings over the Danube River on a TMP pontoon bridge, in the Giurgeni-Vadu Oii sector, executed by the 2nd Pontoneers Regiment “Eftimie Croitoru”, the execution of a pontoon bridge over the Danube River at Gura Văii, by the 2nd and 72nd Pontoneers Regiments; the construction and modernization of the runways of Bucharest-Otopeni, Mihail Kobălniceanu, Târgu Mureș, Timișoara, Sibiu and Oradea airports, the construction of more than 16 railway tunnels on the Prahova valley, the Olt valley and the Jiului valley, the construction of 3450 permanent and temporary bridges between that the railway bridges from Giurgeni-Ruse and Fetești-Cernavodă, the participation in the construction of the 1 metro line, the House of the Republic (today the Palace of the Parliament), the offices of the Ministry of National Defense, the National Library, the Radio House, the ensemble of buildings and public institutions on Unirii Boulevard; regularization and urban development of the Dâmbovița river; the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canals, Porta Albă-Midia-Năvodari, 25 km out of the 74 of the Danube-București Canal, the construction of the Transfăgărășan road with a length of more than 90 km, participation in the exploitation of coal deposits in the Jiului Valley and in Oltenia, participation in the prevention and removal of the effects of

natural calamities, participation in agricultural campaigns, etc. Army engineering soldiers from the lowest ranks to generals did not shy away from carrying out the tasks aimed at achieving the previously mentioned objectives, although their mission was to train and defend homeland in case of external and internal danger. They considered that they are making special efforts for their beloved homeland Romania and not for the temporary leaders of the Romanian communist state.

3. Brief Historical Outline of the Army Engineering Branch after the December 1989 Revolution

After the Revolution of December 1989, the army engineering branch went through several stages of evolution, as follows [7]: the stage of transition and preparation of the military reform (1990-1993); the stage of the initial reform of the military body (1993-1996); the stage of the progressive realization of the operational capacity of the operative and tactical level commands (1996-2000); the stage of fundamental reorganization and restructuring of the Romanian Army (2000-2003); the stage of continuing the process of restructuring and modernization of the Romanian Army after joining NATO (2004-2019). Even though each stage of the reform process was supposed to bring fundamental improvements to the army engineering structures, unfortunately, major endowment plans could not be operationalized as a result of austerity budgets allocated below 2% of GDP. Hopes began to revive after the allocation of 2% of GDP for endowment in the period 2026-2028, envisioning the possibility of ensuring interoperability between our genius forces and those of modern NATO member states, especially in terms of technical-material endowment. Unfortunately, the new concept of modernization of the endowment of genius structures in the Romanian Army, foresees the fulfilment of the desired interoperability

assurance not in the period 2026-2028, as previously established, but at the level of 2040, benefiting from the increase of the army budget from 2 % to 2.5% of GDP.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the 165 years of glorious existence of the Engineering branch in the Romanian Army, highlights the fact that despite all the difficulties encountered on all levels, the Romanian engineering soldiers did their duty to their beloved homeland Romania and obtained the respect and the gratitude of all Romanians and NATO partners.

The fact that in its 165 years of existence, the Engineering branch gave the Romanian nation personalities of an esteemed value, such as [7]: a marshal (Constantin Prezan); a prime minister (General Arthur Văitoianu); 8 Ministers of War; 5 ministers of public works; 10 chiefs of the General Staff; more than 30 military attachés; 7 members of the Romanian Academy, including Constantin N. Hârjeu, whose main work was the History of the Engineering army branch (1859-1902) [8]; a member of the Royal Society of Science in London, and several members of the academies of science or arts in the United States, Italy, France, and Germany, prove that the engineers did their duty to their country, no matter what position they held in the Romanian Army or in the civil society.

Personally, as a general coming from the engineering branch, as a former commander of military and engineering education structures, as an inspector for the engineering branch and as a university professor with attributions in the training of future engineering officers, I have not and will not underestimate the efforts to write

about and speak of the importance of army engineering officers who made the ultimate sacrifice, so that we can live today in a sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible state. The books I wrote, *Onor la Comandanți* [n.t. *Honor to the Commanders*], *Omagiu pentru cei care sfidează moartea* [n.t. *Tribute to those who defy death*], *Brigada de la Ibrail* [n.t. *The Brigade at Ibrail*], *Râmnicul – Kilometrul zero al Armei Geniu* [n.t. *Râmnicul – Zero Kilometer of the Army Engineering Branch*], *Oastea Dodului* [n.t. *The Troops at Dodu*], *Cine uita, nu merita* [n.t. *Those who forget are not worth it*] - vol.1 and vol.2 etc., are testimonies of my respect, admiration and gratitude towards those who have borne and bear with dignity the title of army engineers. A pious tribute to the army engineers who defied death and who are no longer among us, led by Panait Donici and a warm “Happy Birthday” to those who are proud to be active, reservists and retired engineers and who, at any time, if called upon by the motherland, they are ready to defy death. We pay gratitude to those who do make continuous efforts so that the great heroes are not forgotten, the images in the figure below, being edifying in this sense.



Figure 2: The commemorative plaque and the grave of Panait Donici from Valea Ursului village

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