

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL CONSTANTIN APOSTOL, FROM GLORY TO UNFAIR HUMILIATION

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Abstract: *Constantin Apostol (1903-1995) was a prominent representative of the interwar Romanian horse riding [1]. He was born in Săgeata, Buzău County [2], attended primary school in his home town, high school in Buzău and military studies in Târgoviște and Sibiu. As far as his military career is concerned, C. Apostol advanced up to the rank of a lieutenant-colonel. He participated in various international competitions, winning many awards, including the first prize, in countries, such as: England, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Germany, France, Italy, Poland. He took part in the military operations of World War II, both in the East and in the West, being decorated for his actions on both war fields. After the establishment of the communist regime, Constantin Apostol was continuously humiliated, and finally imprisoned. In our work, the author aims to present, for the first time ever, precisely this final stage of his life.*

Keywords: Constantin Apostol, champion, political prisoner

1. Introduction

Constantin Apostol (1903-1995) was a prominent representative of the interwar Romanian horse riding [1]. He was born in Săgeata, Buzău County [2], attended primary school in his home town, high school in Buzău and military studies in Târgoviște and Sibiu. As far as his military career is concerned, C. Apostol advanced up to the rank of a lieutenant-colonel.

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2. An Unfair Humiliation

The continuous shaking and humiliation of Constantin Apostol took place gradually, starting with the political change in 1944 and continuing more dramatically after the establishment of the communist regime in Romania. Immediately after August 23, 1944, he participated in military operations against Germany, both on the territory of the country and abroad, up to the borders of Czechoslovakia. He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-colonel (1946), and he even became the commander of the Buzău Territorial Center (July 1945 - January 1948).

Nevertheless, after the last monarch of Romania, King Michael, had been

dethroned and the Communist Party had taken over the whole power, at the end of 1947 - when the change in the political regime of the country was complete -, the “carousel” of terror and degradation for Constantin Apostol’s life began.

In 1948, he was put in reserve, for the reason that he had a good physical condition and came from a family (like his wife, as well) with a good material state. For the communists, the “sin” of an “unwealthy” origin was more important than the medals and the honour paid to his country, his exemplary behaviour, the deeds of bravery on the front or the eulogistic characterizations of his hierarchical chiefs.

One of his neighbours, Gh. Ionescu, a war-invalid, attempted on April 10, 1951 to help him by offering the new organs of the Communist Power only positive information about Lieutenant-colonel Constantin C. Apostol. The references provided were correct and honest and had been solicited by the authorities. The signatory knew that his neighbour had been dismissed from the army and that his house on Democrației Street had been nationalized. Ionescu mentioned that Lieutenant-colonel Constantin C. Apostol had proved exemplary behaviour in the army, that he had participated in international competitions, taking care only to mention the socialist countries, that he was also a model in relations with all his neighbours, that he was the son of a peasant and worked his own land, that he had not been involved in politics, and that both Apostol and his family were acting as “true Democrats” [3].

In the following month, i.e. May 1951, a commission headed by a captain proposed the removal of Lieutenant-colonel Constantin C. Apostol from among the upper cadres of the army, as he was wealthy and couldn’t be trusted in: “He owns 8 hectares of vineyards and 9 hectares of arable land.

He was not and, still, is not involved in politics. Because of his material condition, he can not be with the working class.

He was part of the national horse riding team, participating in several competitions abroad, but he was not to be trusted in.

The Commission proposes for Apostol to be taken out of higher ranks cadres and demoted to troupes” [3].

Turmoil continues, as in the secret information sheet made by Lt. Ursache Ștefan on September 11, 1953, it was noted that Lieutenant-colonel Constantin C. Apostol, “was rich, of unwealthy social origin”, that “his father has 20 hectares of arable land and his wife 11 hectares of living and two houses in Buzău” and, therefore, could not be considered an element of trust for the new political power in Romania. Even though “during the war against the USSR he had been characterized as a very good officer, as one who had captured Soviet material and prisoners, being thus decorated”, even if “Apostol had been in Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Belgium with the team of the army”, or even though at that time he was working his land and vineyard”, one could not neglect the fact that “the material state of his parents and wife does not guarantee his attachment to the working class” [3].

According to the notes existing in his personal file, in Pitești Military Archives, we find out that on December 4, 1956, Constantin C. Apostol was working at the Central Committee of the Agricultural Workers’ Unions – “Recolta” Sports Association of Bucharest, as a riding technician (starting with January 1951). He was neither a candidate nor a member of the Romanian Communist Party (Communist Party), and he was considered fit for military service. He had not been involved in politics and therefore, he had not been registered in any political formation before 1944 and neither his parents [3].

Nevertheless, what was in store for him, could not be avoided. Constantin Apostol was sent to court and, on July 20, 1959, he

was sentenced by the Bucharest Military Court to 6 years in correctional jails as he had been considered against social ordering and 3 years in correctional bans, along with the total confiscation of his personal property. The sentence remained final, after the appeal being rejected, and was voted unanimously. The culmination of communists' cynicism was that lieutenant-colonel Constantin Apostol was asked to pay the judgement costs amounting to 400 lei.

The signatories of the decision were: lieutenant-major Nistor Ioan (chairman), captain Ciobotaru Ion, Gementi Jacob (popular assessors) and Bălan Ștefan (clerk). It is worth mentioning that all the persons to have signed the decision had lower military ranks than lieutenant-colonel Constantin C. Apostol.

He did all these conviction years in Jilava, Peliprava and Grind prisons and was released from Jilava Penitentiary on April 15, 1964. From that moment, on the top of all his job records, there were mentioned "qualifiers" such as: "Inappropriate" or "Arrested" [3].

Constantin Apostol was retired for old age on January 3, 1964, and during his final years, he resided in Buzău [3].

In the autobiography lieutenant-colonel Apostol signed on April 7, 1951, he honestly described his life, accomplishments, and situation. This autobiography is a true exercise of honesty and dignity, and, in the same time, an invitation to reflection. Therefore, we wanted to quote several fragments Apostol wrote about his life after 1944: "On July 7, 1944 I was assigned, at request, to Regiment 3 Călărași with which I participated in the West-front war as a division commander, and ordered to destroy the last remnants of the Hitlerite troops.

On December 28 1944, I was brought back from the front, as stipulated by M. St. M. No. 10943, because the Special War School was to resume its courses.

I, the undersigned, declare that, prior to August 23, 1944, I was not involved in any

kind of politics and I was neither enrolled in any party. I did not hold any kind of administrative position, except for the army cadres, and I was not in the service of any ruler from the previous regime.

After August 23 1944, me, the undersigned, and my whole family, sympathized with the current regime. In November 1946, during the general elections, as the commander of C.T. Buzău, I was entrusted with the security of all electing committees in Buzău city and in the county.

The elections ended with the success of the Democratic Parties Block in the most perfect order.

I did not work against the Democratic parties, nor did I promote ideas against them.

I fought in the Soviet Union, up to Odessa, as a member of Group 5 Research, and I was detained in the country after that.

I fought on the Western front from August 23 1944 to December 31 of the same year near the Czechoslovak border.

I took part in the fights on Mureș, Tisza and Bodrog.

During the war I received as decorations the Crown of Romania in the rank of Knight, the Star of Romania and a medal on behalf of the Soviet Union, for the battles I participated in the West.

I do not have any other foreign medals or decorations. I was not hurt. I have never interrupted my military service [...].

I have not been tried by any kind of court.

I took part in the work of the Party as a member of the mass organization.

The career I have managed to accomplish so far is only due to my day and night work, to sacrifices and challenges I have overcome.

I am currently a farmer, working the land I own, as shown in this autobiography" [3].

A late and posthumous rehabilitation for the humiliation he endured during his final years was the decision that the authorities of Săgeata Commune Council, Buzău County, took in 2010, namely to give his name to the street from the vicinity of the house he was born in and where he lived his

childhood [4]. Obviously, this was a small gesture, if one considers the outstanding international results of this sportsman, but a symbolic one, as it is instructive and honourable for Constantin C. Apostol native commune.

3. Conclusions

Lieutenant-colonel Constantin C. Apostol was one of the most prominent representatives of the Romanian military horse riding in the interwar period. During the communist regime, he was marginalized, mocked, humiliated, shocked, terrorized and imprisoned for the only reason that he was a wealthy man, that he was born in a family of wealthy peasants and that he was married to a wealthy woman. For these reasons, he had become an undesirable element of the new socialist society. He had the glory of the past epoch (with a significant wealth, several awards and trips in Western democratic countries, he could speak French and German). Therefore, he was to be eliminated and stigmatized. Such “boils” (as they were called in the epoch) could not be “healed”

by mere “repentance” of the “quilty” one, nor by the adherence / sympathy commitments to the principles of the new socialist society, and not even by the fact that Constantin C. Apostol himself participated in the battles to defeat Hitlerism up close to Czechoslovakia, or by the Soviet medal granted to him. The fact that one of his brothers died on the battlefield for the liberation of Transylvania, or that one of his brothers who was a primary school teacher together with his wife became members of the Communist Party, after having been attentively “verified”, or that Apostol had positive references in the army and society did not matter either, as he had “unhealthy” origin, a good material state and, therefore, could not be “trusted”. As a result, he was fired from the army’s upper cadres, stigmatized, judged, condemned and his entire fortune was confiscated.

By assigning his name to one of the streets in his birthplace, Săgeata village fulfilled in 2010 a well-deserved rehabilitation of Constantin C. Apostol.

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