

Brigadier General
VISARION NEAGOE, Ph.D.

185 days in Iraq
(Battlefield Journal, June-December 2007)

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Foreword

Romania's contribution to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq took place in a widely debated context, with approaches ranging from military, to journalistic and memoirist ones.

The work hereby published by Brigadier General Visarion Neagoie, however, confronts us with a different type of analysis of military operations: that of a dense and insightful war journal, recounting the stunning testimony of the events witnessed in Iraq between June-December 2007, as Deputy Chief of Staff for Coalition Operations within the Iraqi Multinational Coalition Force, acting under a UN Security Council mandate.

Readers should be aware of the fact that this was the first command position held by the Romanian Armed Forces within a major international war, following the end of the World War II. The management of coalition operations implies exceedingly high requirements to be fulfilled in order to be assigned with such position, coupled by utmost professionalism. Additionally, this position ensured the interface between the Romanian Armed Forces and the other armed forces taking part in the coalition.

The command position held by the author of this war journal within the Multinational Force Headquarters is an acknowledgement of the Romanian Armed Forces' significant contribution and consistent participation in various missions throughout different theaters of operations. It is equally a recognition of the command abilities exerted by Brigadier General Visarion and his staff, highly esteemed by such important figures as General David H. Petraeus, Commanding General of the Iraqi Multinational Force.

What made a Romanian general especially suitable for serving as Deputy Chief of Staff for Coalition Operations, however, apart

from high professional standing, was the relationship developed over time between Romania and Iraq. This nurtured a special sense of trust and goodwill among Iraqi military men taking part in various coalition operations, allowing for a constructive dialogue to be developed. Thus, in a sense, Romanians deployed in this theater of war were not solely members of a military force, but admirable diplomats and ambassadors of our country as well.

The unfolding of dynamic facts and events experienced by the author in the Iraqi theater of operations is frank, blunt and direct. It provides us with valuable details of the activities performed by the Romanian military, their cooperation with the other forces deployed, the overwhelming problems to be overcome throughout the mission, the frustration sometimes caused by procedures, bureaucracy and insufficient resources, and in the end, the pride of an accomplished mission.

Therefore, Brigadier General Visarion Neagoe's recount of his 185 days on the Iraqi battlefield is filled with lessons learned that need to be capitalised upon. It is thus a must read for all those willing to understand war and its effects, be they military commanders, political men or interested members of the civil society. We must all thank Brigadier General Visarion Neagoe for aiding us in better understanding that our country's security lies in good hands, and to recognise the significance of the special bond developed by comrades-in-arms, even at the cost of one's own life.

HEAD OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY DEPARTMENT
ADVISOR TO THE PRESIDENT OF ROMANIA

IULIAN FOTA

Author's note

To become the author of a battlefield journal you need to go to war, to be engaged in the battle. And, of course, you need to survive! I was one of the people who had the chance to do it...

Thanks to a Romanian Armed Forces significant participation in numerous military operations in the Western Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and as a sign of appreciation for this contribution, starting from October 2006, the Coalition Command in Iraq has offered Romania a command position –one for a general rank- in the Multinational Force Command. So, granting this important position, in the top of the chain of command – the Deputy of the Chief of Staff for the Coalition Operations- has been considered as an official appreciation of the Romanian Armed Forces merit in the theatres of operations, as well as of their command capability. And this is of course an honor for Romania, for our military, for our soldiers.

This is the feeling I experienced when I received the challenge/proposal from the Chief of General Staff, Admiral Gheorghe Marin, Ph.D., of being appointed to accomplish this mission in one of the hottest theaters of operations nowadays- Iraq. This is also the reason why, when I was asked, I promptly replied: "Sure! When do I have to leave?"

I am a man of action, I do not have any hesitations, I am willing to commit. Well, one might say, but in Iraq there is a war, there are dangers everywhere, the enemy is cruel, and they do not follow the common rules of armed conflicts! How can you not have any doubt in accepting this kind of mission? Moreover, one can bring into discussion the question that Moromete asked: "What do you rely on?"

I will give a simple, straightforward answer: I rely on the experience of the soldier who has taken part in missions in many theatres,

as well as on my experience as a command and staff officer, used to work in an international environment: NATO exercises, bilateral exercises, the permanent contact with the theatres of operations. If I haven't succeeded in being persuasive enough, I can also add that, as a military man, I have the duty of proving my professionalism, of proving myself capable to pass the most difficult exam in my career and the most difficult milestone in my lifetime.

I could also provide another reason: generations of military personnel have been trained at peace to be capable to fight a battle. Many of them haven't had the opportunity to apply at war the knowledge and skills they have acquired in famous military academies all over the world. So, I have been granted the opportunity of proving my skills and my knowledge. So, I have taken the mission of fighting in Iraq as a professional challenge, but also as the chance of proving myself.

So, there are enough reasons. Could they leave room for patriotism, which is considered by some to be already old fashioned? But in the countries with a long tradition in democracy, besides hard work and honor, patriotism is the very substance of the national fiber. I hope this will be your conclusion as well after you have read this book.

But, beyond any interpretations, any other assumptions, life is governed by some concrete laws. Moreover, the military life is governed by orders. As a result, from June 2nd 2007, in accordance with the order of the Ministry of Defense, I am deployed to Iraq, as the Deputy of the Chief of Staff of the Multinational Force for Coalition Operations. From this day on, I will follow the orders of my commanders and my chiefs, the Americans. I will be a Romanian soldier who has to adjust, integrate, and work for a staff who has to conduct clearly stated missions, within the mandate of the Security Council of the United Nations. This is what I have to do for six month and

even more, in accordance with the order signed by our Minister of Defense.

Nervousness, anxiousness, fear? It's only natural to experience all of these feelings... As I am leaving on a mission completely different from my previous missions, the only thing that makes me worried is the fact that there is no other way: I have the duty to represent and to honor Romania, our Armed Forces, and myself!

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