

The Romanian Army of World War II

Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 246 (1992)

Text by Mark Axworthy; colour plates by Horia Serbanescu

Review by Rob Morgan

The Romanian army was the third largest Axis army for most of the war, and when Romania changed sides in 1944, it became the fourth largest Allied army, with a million and a quarter men in the field. This is one of the better Osprey titles on armies of the war, and contains a tremendous amount of material valuable to the wargamer, and at the outset I'd recommend it highly.

The country was re-equipping and re-arming with, largely, French and Czech equipment in the late 1930s, but both suppliers fell into German hands, of course, and the range of gear found in the army throughout the war was sometimes astonishing! The materiel available, the mechanised problems and the even greater problem of creating and sustaining an armoured component, are well dealt with in the text. Axworthy goes on to cover Unit Organisation, the infantry, cavalry and mountain divisions in particular, as well as unusual structures like the Fortress Division. Orders of Battle for the war period are provided.

Romania's war was in the east, of course, and some of the *OstFront's* hardest struggles involved the 27 divisions of the Romanians. The author deals with the Campaign for Odessa in 1941, and with the role of Romania's troops in Crimea, which was probably their greatest success of the war. Plenty of different and often overlooked room for a campaign and wargames there! Of course, Romania suffered greatly at Stalingrad, many of her divisions were completely overrun by powerful Red Army forces, and as Axworthy records, Romania lost some two thirds of its army as a consequence of this strategic disaster!

There were other campaigns which involved the Romanians, of course, around the Black Sea in particular from 1942 to 1944, and here the role played by captured Soviet equipment in Romanian hands becomes apparent. Without this booty, the Romanians couldn't have functioned as a fighting force. The Romanians were involved in the futile, hard fought defence of the Kuban bridgehead, and morale amongst the Romanian infantry was deteriorating, though the Mountain troops and remarkably the cavalry, still largely horsed, remained strong and were held to be good fighting troops by the German commanders. They played, as might be expected, a role in anti-partisan work and coastal defence. The Axis debacle in Crimea is viewed from a slightly different perspective in this Osprey, and the Romanian navy and air force evacuated the majority of the army's troops through Sebastopol in April 1944, but this disaster coming on top of Stalingrad, led to the loss of the entire equipment of some 24 Romanian divisions!

In this brief section of the work, Axworthy mentions the 24th Division, created during the Summer of 1943 and consisting of open units and I'd like to have heard more of this organisation. The 1944 Campaign which ultimately led to the August defection of Romania to the Allied cause, was one in which German and Romanian units were patchworked, and might prove an interesting wargame option. The actual defection was a nightmare of fighting, involving action against the German garrisons, especially around Ploesti's oilfields. Romania already had plans in place to resist possible invasions from Bulgaria and from Hungary, her

sworn enemy. In fact there had been border fighting, sporadic but bitter, between Romanian and Hungarian troops for several years!

Romania's change of allegiance rapidly accelerated the end for the Third Reich, the loss of the oil fields in particular. The account of the Romanian army's actions during the last months of the year is short, but the hard fighting against old enemies cost many casualties, especially in storming Budapest. By this time, the Romanians were under Soviet command, and there was a Soviet organised Romanian division in the field, and at the war's end, the country vanished under Soviet control.

The plates accompany the text very well, and are very much oriented to the military under arms, rather than dress uniforms and officers. All possible groups are illustrated, cavalry, ski-troops (among the best available to the Axis) marine infantry, and tank-killers. There are some useful figures too, like the Frontier Guards who fought the Hungarians and the rough-and-ready kit of the infantryman in action in 1945 (Plate D1). The Soviet *Tudor Vladimirescu* Division soldier (H3) offers a differently appointed Red Army kit, and the Iron Guard officer of 1941 (Plate H2) gives another internal conflict option. Excellent plates, and the photographs are every bit as good. Take particular note of the photo on page 39, of the Romanians fighting in August 1944 with German helmets, they also wore the well known *öDutcö* and old French Adrian helmets, and the armband in national colours. This is an army with plenty of chances to ring the changes from the basic field kit.

As for wargames figures, well, 20/25mm remains the best, I won't say the only, option. Two plastic sets exist which are useful and the HaT WWII Romanian Infantry is a good bet to start with. Basic with a ZB54 hmg, unusual weapon, and a 60mm Brandt mortar, and a very unusual flamethrower (Plate F2 shows this). The second pack, from Strelets is *öwintry,ö* and intended for the Steppes and Stalingrad. Good sturdy figures though, and useful for the foul weather of 1944-45 and Romania's last battles. There are no heavy weapons in this set, but plenty of the figures wear the almost universal Caciula woollen cap. The two combined will give what you need.

A company to look at is Raventhorpe Miniatures. Their Romanian list in metal provides numerous add-ons, with separate heads. A lovely tank crew (Plate C3) is pack PR22, and there are cyclists and a Bohler 47mm gun (see page 42) as well as a Skoda mountain gun and various alternative Soviet and German pieces of weaponry. Supply wagons too, and pack mules (Plate D2). For the *Tudor Vladimirescu* troops, almost any Red Army figure with differentiated detail, and Soviet equipment of course! Romania used so much captured materiel that a few T34's and other Soviet armour and vehicles will fit in well enough. Guns too. Some items of German and Italian gear, staff cars perhaps. But do remember that after the Autumn of 1944, the Red Army re-possessed all the captured items, and this left the Romanians as a largely infantry force, with very little armour, vehicles or support.

Men-at-Arms

OSPREY
PUBLISHING

The Romanian Army of World War II



Mark Axworthy • Illustrated by Horia Serbanescu