



REPORT ON THE 29TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MILITARY HISTORY

‘War, Military and Media from Gutenberg to the Present’

The XXIXth International Congress of Military History took place in Bucharest, Romania, Sunday 10 August – Friday 15 August 2003. It was hosted by Brigadier General Dr Mihail E Ionescu, Director of the Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History in Belgrade, assisted by Colonel Dr Petre Otu, President of the Romanian Commission of Military History. The theme of the Congress was ‘War, Military and Media from Gutenberg to the Present’. A large audience including over 200 overseas delegates from 33 countries, ranging from Argentina to Japan to South Africa, attended the Congress, which was held at the National Military Centre Palace in the city centre. The sole British national and BCMH delegate was Dr Stephen Badsey, who delivered his paper ‘The Impact of the Media on the Art of War in the Western World 1792-1975’ on Monday 11 August and acted as co-moderator with Dr William Hammond of the USA for a round-table discussion on ‘War and the Mass Media: A Case Study on the Campaign in Iraq 2003’ on Thursday 14 August, at which Romanian reporters who had covered the recent war began the discussion.

The Congress used the ‘two-track’ approach seen at last year’s Congress in Norfolk, Virginia, USA. Altogether 53 papers were delivered in English, French, German or Romanian, covering a wide range of topics within the theme. Our hosts provided simultaneous translation through headsets; according to a Brazilian delegate, Romanian has entire phrases in common with Portuguese, and it is not too hard to puzzle out in written form. Notable papers included an account of Swedish government propaganda directed at its own peasantry in the 17th Century; depictions of the military police in French trench newspapers in the First World War; the impact of reporting on UN peacekeeping in Lebanon; and an assessment of modes ‘Cyber-Jihad’ strategies.

Romania is recovering slowly from the fall of Ceausescu in 1989, and our hosts were lavish in their keenness to show us the country’s best side, driving us everywhere under escort in army coaches. The National Military Centre (designated a ‘palace’ like many buildings in Romania) is an amazing piece of architecture, with gilded columns and marble staircases. On the first evening we were given a reception at an officers’ club outside Bucharest. On Monday evening we were taken to the National Military Museum; this had an exhibition to accompany the Congress, which also rated a special supplement in that week’s Romanian Army official newspaper the *Observatorul Militar* (although the picture of me speaking is not flattering!). On Tuesday evening the Romanian Armed Forces Representative Orchestra entertained us in the concert hall of the Ministry of National Defence building, including western jazz, Mexican music and Romanian folk music. Wednesday was an entire day out to the Carpathians, including a demonstration by Romanian Army mountain troops, and a tour round the former residences of King Carol I and King Ferdinand I. On Thursday evening we had a film show including a fascinating account of depictions of the First World War in German feature films of the Weimar period. Friday was the final Congress dinner held at Snagou Palace, an architecturally unusual banqueting hall in the middle of the countryside, again built for Ceausescu. The Congress allowed for considerable free time, either between papers or while various committees were meeting. Apart from making several new friends and discussing much military history, I also got to fulfil a long-standing ambition by having a



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quiet drink in the English Bar of the (now Hilton) Athenée Palace Hotel, reconstructed since the fall of Ceausescu from the original bar, which was the centre of espionage and intrigue in the Balkan region 1910-1940, and is mentioned in several accounts by British travellers and novelists.

Next year's XXXth Congress is in Morocco, on the theme of 'War and Economics' and a substantial Moroccan contingent was present to see how things were done. Professor Luc De Vos of Belgium, President of the International Commission of Military History, expressed the hope that a large BCMH contingent would come to Morocco.

Stephen Badsey