British Clandestine Activities in Romania during the Second World War

Dennis Deletant



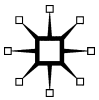
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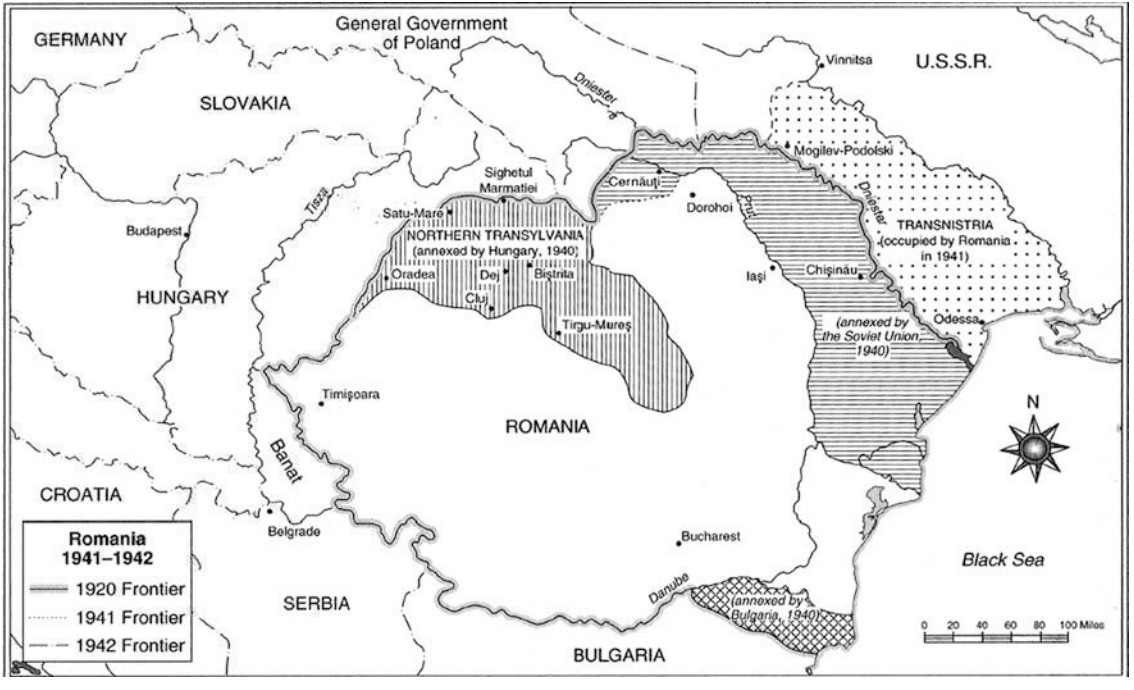
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Map of Romania



Map of Romania 1941–1942, showing national border changes from 1920
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For my wife Andrea I reserve my most profound thanks for her understanding and forbearance during frequent periods of self-imposed isolation in my study whilst writing this book.

Biographies of Key Figures

Ion Antonescu (born 15 June 1882, Piteşti; died 1 June 1946, Jilava prison, Bucharest). After the First World War, Antonescu served as military attaché in Paris and in London and, in 1934, as chief of the Romanian general staff. Named minister of defense in 1937 by King Carol II, he was dismissed in the following year. Antonescu was appointed prime minister with absolute powers on 5 September 1940, after Romania had one third of its territory partitioned amongst the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria (June–September 1940). He established a military dictatorship and aligned himself with the Axis powers. He won widespread popular support for his decision to join Hitler in his attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 in pursuit of recovering Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. As losses mounted on the Russian front his regime lost popular backing and he was removed by a coup d'état on 23 August 1944 led by King Michael. Antonescu was sentenced to death by a Romanian communist people's court and was executed as a war criminal by firing squad in June 1946.

Mihai Antonescu (born 18 November 1904, Dâmboviţa county; died 1 June 1946, Jilava prison, Bucharest), a very distant relative of Ion Antonescu; deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs from 29 June 1941 to 23 August 1944. He was tried alongside Ion Antonescu as a war criminal, found guilty and executed.

Traian Borcescu (born 22 November 1899, Cireşanu, Prahova county; died 1997 (?), Bucharest) was head of counter-intelligence from 1942 until the 23 August coup of 1944. He was arrested on 26 March 1945 at the home of Emil Bodnăraş, a GRU agent who after 23 August 1944 effectively became head of the Romanian security service. Bodnăraş had invited him to lunch there. After turning down a proposal from the latter that he work with the Soviets, represented at the meal by Colonel Timofteiv, the NKVD advisor in Bucharest, he was given blacked-out glasses and taken by car to an airfield and flown to Moscow where he was interrogated about his wartime activity by Viktor Abamukov, Beria's deputy. After two weeks he was returned to Bucharest and taken into custody on Bodnăraş' orders and held, first in Jilava prison, and then in Malmaison, where he was interrogated on several occasions by Bodnăraş. He was released on 23 December 1945 but re-arrested on 26 May 1949, tried for his role under the Antonescu regime, and sentenced to hard labour for life. In January 1963 his sentence was reduced to 25 years and he was amnestied on 13 April 1964 (author's interview with Traian Borcescu, 8 March 1995). I am also grateful to Ioan Ciupea of the

Museum of National History in Cluj who allowed me to consult his own research on Borcescu.

Edwin George Boxshall (born 4 February 1897, Bucharest; died 26 January 1984, London). Boxshall was born in Bucharest where his father William ran a small business importing tractors. His mother, Marie Meyer, was of German background. Following the occupation of Bucharest by German forces in 1916, he moved with the British Military Mission under Captain Thomas Laycock to the temporary northern capital of Iaşi with the rank of second lieutenant. Tasked with gathering intelligence on events in Bessarabia and southern Russia, he was detained by Bolshevik forces and held at Hotin on the Dniester River. Released by allied forces, he returned to Iaşi in autumn 1918 and together with other members of the Military Mission was evacuated by train via Murmansk to Britain. Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Boxshall, Edwin George (1897–1984)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn., January 2008, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45718 (accessed 6 August 2014).

In 1919 he returned to Bucharest as representative of Vickers and Nobel Industries (later ICI) and was instrumental in selling submarine equipment to the Romanian Navy (CNSAS, Fond I, 937812, Vol. 2, f.14). His marriage on 25 April 1920 in Bucharest to Elise 'Madie', the third daughter of Prince Barbu Stirbey (1872–1936), administrator of the royal domains, lover of Queen Marie, and prime minister for a month in June 1927, gave him unique access to the seats of power in Romania and he was to use these to assist him in his commercial activities. Although in some sources it is stated that he was station chief of MI6 in Bucharest for most of the interwar period this is not the case. In 1940 he came back to London to work in the Romania section of SOE under George Taylor. When his father-in-law came to Cairo in March 1944 to discuss armistice terms with the allies, Boxshall went to meet him. Boxshall and his wife divorced in November 1947 and he remarried. Boxshall remained in Britain where in 1959 he became adviser to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with responsibility for the SOE archives. He retired in 1982.

Constantin (Dinu) Brătianu (born 13 January 1866, Bucharest; died 23 August 1953 (?), Sighet prison). Second son of Ion C. Brătianu (1821–1891), appointed leader of the National Liberal Party in 1934. Constantin (Dinu) Brătianu was arrested by the Communist authorities during the night of 5–6 May 1950, and imprisoned at Sighet without trial. The date of his death is unclear, one source giving 20 August 1950, another 23 August 1953 (see Florian Tănăsescu and Nicolae Tănăsescu (2005), *Constantin (Bebe) I. C. Brătianu – Istoria P.N.L. la interogatoriu* (Bucharest: Editura Paralela 45), p. 179).

Alexandru Creţianu (1895–1979) was the nephew of Prince Barbu Ştirbey. After studying law at the University of Iaşi, he entered the Romanian diplomatic service in September 1918 and held posts in London (1918–22), Rome (1923–6) and Berne (1926–9). He served as head of the League of Nations section of the Foreign Ministry (1929–32), as head of the political department (1933–8), and as secretary-general (December 1938–October 1941) but resigned in protest at Marshal Antonescu's policies. In September 1943 he was appointed minister in Turkey at the suggestion of Maniu and with the acquiescence of Mihai Antonescu with instructions to contact the Allies about armistice conditions. In March 1945 he refused to accept the authority of the Groza government and remained in Turkey until June 1946 when he left for Switzerland. He was tried and sentenced to life imprisonment *in absentia* in the trial of Iuliu Maniu and other National Peasant Party officials in autumn 1947. He settled later in the United States and became a US citizen in 1954. He died in Florida.

Alfred George Gardyne de Chastelain (born 28 February 1906, London; died Calgary, 1974) studied engineering at London University. On 4 November 1927 he joined Unirea (Phoenix Oil and Transport Company) in Bucharest with a salary of £80 per month (Arhiva Consiliului Naţional pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii, henceforth CNSAS, Fond I, 937873, f.1). His expertise led to his recruitment by MI(R) in operations to sabotage the oil wells in Ploieşti but attacks by the Iron Guard on the British engineers involved in these plans forced him to leave Romania in October 1940. In 1941 he took over from Colonel Bill Bailey as head of SOE in Istanbul (his code symbol was DH/13 and designation 'Field Commander Turkey'; see The National Archives, hereafter TNA, HS 8/971). Parachuted into Romania in December 1943 as head of the *Autonomous* mission (see Chapter 7), he was captured and interned in Bucharest until 23 August 1944. On the following day he flew to Istanbul. Refused permission by the Foreign Office to return to Romania, he settled ultimately in Canada where he died in 1974.

Valeriu (Rică) Constantin Simion Georgescu (SOE code name 'Jockey') (born 3 February 1904, Brăila; died 31 October 1993, Switzerland). He studied engineering at Birmingham University and worked for the Unirea Company – where he met de Chastelain – before joining the Româno-Americană (Standard Oil) company. He married Ligia Bocu, daughter of Sever Bocu, the head of the National Peasant Party in the Banat; his 'godfather' at the wedding was Iuliu Maniu. He was a member of a group of National Peasant Party activists in Banat who, in January 1938, were besieged by the police in their local party headquarters in Timişoara after violent clashes with the Iron Guard. The siege was lifted at the intervention of Maniu. After the Vienna Award of August 1940, Georgescu helped to establish the association 'Pro Transylvania' and with the support of SOE and Maniu set up a radio link

with London in spring 1941. Arrested with his associates on 15 August by the Germans and handed over to the Romanian authorities, he was treated leniently in prison and released on 23 August 1944 after the King's coup against Antonescu.

He served as Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Mines from 1 September until 4 November 1944 and was Director-General of Româno-Americană between September 1944 and 1946. In 1947 he and his wife left Romania without their two sons to visit the United States and did not return. They became US citizens in 1952. Efforts to persuade the Romanian authorities to allow their children to join them proved unsuccessful until the direct intervention of President Eisenhower. In 1954 Eisenhower wrote to Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej asking him to investigate the case and, in order to remove one cause of friction between the two countries, 'expedite a satisfactory solution' (Eisenhower to Gheorghiu-Dej, 25 February 1954, AWF/D. Eisenhower, Dwight D. to Valeriu C. Georgescu, 23 July 1953. In *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, ed. L. Galambos and D. van Ee, doc. 339, World Wide Web facsimile by The Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial Commission of the print edition (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/presidential-papers/first-term/documents/339.cfm). The Romanian leader agreed to the release, 'considering that the elimination of any misunderstanding cannot but be useful' (Gheorghiu-Dej to Eisenhower, March 12 1954, *ibid*.) The family was reunited in New York City on April 13 1954 (*New York Times*, April 14 1954). Georgescu later moved to Switzerland where he died on 31 October 1993.

Julius Hanau (born April 1885, South Africa; died May 1943, Cairo). He held a British commission in the First World War and after fighting on the Salonika front he remained in Belgrade where he became a successful businessman. He was recruited into MI6 and played a role in organizing resistance in Yugoslavia following the outbreak of war. He was withdrawn from the Balkans to London in June 1940 prior to the German invasion of Yugoslavia, when his activities had become so well-known to the Germans that it was feared that he would be murdered. In London, Hanau was put in charge of SOE's West African mission, where he was responsible for operation 'Postmaster', the cutting out of ships from Santa Isabel in Fernando Po, and the acquisition of the ship 'Gascon' and its cargo, both notable coups at a time when SOE was not enjoying much success. Hanau was crucial in planning the occupation of Madagascar and overcoming elements of Vichy French resistance there. In October 1942 Hanau was sent (after a period of sick leave having contracted malaria in West Africa) to Cairo to plan actions in the Balkans, but he died of a heart attack in May 1943 (TNA, HS 9/653/2; Nick van der Bijl (2013), *Sharing the Secret: The History of the Intelligence Corps, 1940–2010* (Barnsley: Pen

and Sword), p. 74 and http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/releases/2003/may12/selectedagents.htm (accessed 30 March 2015)).

William Harris-Burland (1902–1985). After qualifying as a chartered accountant, Harris-Burland worked in Poland, Romania and Germany in the interwar years. In 1939 he returned to Britain and offered his services to the War Office which recruited him into MI(R) and sent him to Poland with a small party under the command of Colin Gubbins. Following the fall of Poland the party escaped to Romania where Harris-Burland was placed in charge of the Anglo-Danubian Shipping Company in Bucharest and given responsibility for chartering barges on the Danube to prevent them falling into German hands. He continued this activity as General Manager of the Goeland Transport and Trading Company, created specifically for this purpose in February 1940.

After the entry of German troops into Romania Harris-Burland paid off the Goeland staff and in February 1941 joined SOE's Belgrade office. He was captured with other members of the mission, including Tom Masterson, George Taylor (who was Mediterranean section head of MI6) and Hugh Seton-Watson, by Italian forces while withdrawing to the Adriatic coast. Held at Ciancino in the Apennines, the group was exchanged for some Italian prisoners and returned to England via Spain in June 1941. Harris-Burland was then posted to Istanbul as head of the SOE office with responsibility for chartering Turkish shipping, partly to keep it out of German hands, and partly to divert materials useful to the Germans such as chrome ore. In September 1944 he was appointed to the British Military Mission to Romania in charge of transport. He held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He was recalled to London in March 1946 to work on the reorganization of the German iron and steel industry and posted to Germany where he remained until 1953 when he returned to England and became Director of Accounts and Statistics in the British Transport Commission.

Iuliu Maniu (born 8 January 1873, Şimleu Silvaniei, Transylvania, Hungary [now in Romania]; died 5 February 1953, Sighet prison, Romania). Maniu attended elementary school in Blaj and secondary school in Zalău, and went on to study in Vienna and Budapest where he took a degree in law. On his return to Transylvania he became a professor of law at the Greek-Catholic seminary in Blaj and legal advisor to the metropolitan bishop. He joined the Romanian National Party of Transylvania whose programme focused on the establishment of Transylvanian autonomy and the assertion of Romanian rights commensurate with the Romanians demographic majority in the province. In 1909 he was elected a deputy in the Hungarian parliament where he was a powerful advocate of Romanian aspirations. After being called up into the Austro-Hungarian army in 1915 he emerged from military academy with the rank of second lieutenant and was despatched, first to the Russian front, and then to Italy.