MAJOR ALEXANDRU SOCEC'S DIPLOMATIC – MILITARY MISSION IN SWEDEN (II)

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Abstract: This abstract highlights a valuable contribution to military historiography by bringing to light, for the first time in Romanian historical studies, the diplomatic and military mission of Major Alexandru Socec in Sweden in 1901. The mission, undertaken under the patronage of King Carol I of Romania, took place during special Cavalry and Infantry maneuvers held in the Nordic kingdom in July and August of that year.
The memoir captivates readers with a fascinating description of the Swedish Cavalry's uniforms and equipment, especially notable as Socec himself served in this branch. Additionally, the text provides highly valuable information about the organization of the Swedish Army at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the defense and attack tactics of its Cavalry, which was considered one of the most elegant and well-organized in the world at the time.
Of particular interest are the observations of King Carol I's and Romania's representative regarding the character traits of Swedes and Norwegians, whose way of life was genuinely exemplary. In 1901, the two nations were part of the Swedish-Norwegian Union, which dissolved in 1905 following Norway's withdrawal due to dissatisfaction with Sweden's dominant role in the Union, especially in foreign policy. As in the first part, I have chosen to place a few words in square brackets and add some commas omitted by the author to make the text more appealing. Otherwise, I have reproduced, in its original form, a captivating excerpt that will be continued in the next issue of the journal.

Keywords: Sweden, diplomatic-military mission, Major Socec, uniform and equipment, military maneuvers, SVEA Guard Regiment Till Häst, Swedish political-military organization, Swedish Cavalry.

Introduction

The diplomatic-military mission of Alexandru Socec in Sweden, from the summer of 1901, represents - as I already assured the readers, in the previous issue of the magazine - a fascinating sequence of his "Journal", written between 1877-1928. Selected by King Carol I himself, in the greatest secrecy (no one from the Ministry of War knew about this decision of the Romanian monarch, the announcement being made even by Socec to his chiefs in the ministry, just a few days before departure), he will represent him admirably next to the Royal House of Sweden. In this second part, we continue to learn very valuable information about the political, military and social organization of the Nordic kingdom, in 1901, in union with Norway, the memorialist allocating a generous space to this chapter. The attention that Alexandru Socec, Cavalry Major at that time, gives to every military aspect (uniform, equipment military, logistics, defensive system), political and social, proves to us - if there was any more - that King Carol I knew the people very well, knowing whom to send, on his behalf, to one of the most powerful and respected kingdoms of Europe at that time. As we will see below, Major Socec did not disappoint him, acquitting himself, with honor and dignity, of the huge responsibility he had been entrusted with.

July 8, 1901. The uniform is made of beautiful, sky-blue cloth with silver, featuring a collar with "guard" insignia, and, on the sleeves, the so-called Swedish "wide" cuffs dating back to ancient times (1500). The ranks are shown on the cuff. The silver helmet resembles those of the Mounted Gendarmerie, with a service plume and ceremonial feathers. The harness is the most beautiful, practical, and finely crafted I've seen and tested so far, comparing it to the French (overly ornate), English (overloaded), Austrian (black, impractical), German (too heavy), Italian (ordinary), and Romanian styles. The saddle, as seen, is admirable; it weighs a complete 7 kilograms. The equipment is refined and practical; thus, officers use the same harness as the troops (except that first officers have a fine blue felt blanket instead of a regular one). The service cap is lightweight and practical, resistant to rain. The Guard and Dragoon tunics resemble the Hussars', adorned with golden and silver Brandenburgs. Outside of service, a very elegant frock coat (R), dating from 1745, is worn—blue with black trimmings. The golden cartridge pouches resemble ours but are shaped to fit the chest. Winters in Sweden (especially in Norway) are very harsh; hence, officers and troops wear fur coats (B) and white fur caps.

The Norwegian army has similar tailoring, though in gray-black cloth, with only one regiment having guards. Royal adjutants wear gold epaulets. The King has 12 Swedish and 12 Norwegian adjutants who alternate monthly (two at a time) to serve at court, while the remaining 11 months are spent at their respective regiments. Unless summoned exceptionally to court service, Cavalry officers and troops wear boots; Artillery wears high boots with 35 cm cuffs, and Infantry wears 20 cm boots. The troops' cap resembles the Prussian style, without a visor. The King's Life Guard Regiment[1] has squadrons of 135 horses and a squadron of remounts with 120 horses, commanded by Baron Magnus von Mörnar, Colonel and regimental commander; Baron Karl von Rosenblad, Lieutenant; Baron Woldemar von Rosen, Major; seven captains, 14 lieutenants, and six sub-lieutenants (five of whom are counts). As seen, most members are from the highest and oldest aristocracy; even those without titles are from ancient aristocratic lines, though they have never held their noble titles. Reserve officers are also counts, barons, and nobles.

July 9, 1901. I spent the entire day visiting all the regiment officers. In the evening, we went to the National Theatre, where I understood nothing. My knowledge of Swedish is still modest, but I believe that with time, I will speak it, as it contains many words from "Platt-Deutsch."[2] Swedish also includes words of origins entirely foreign to Germanic languages. I learn languages easily, especially if I can deduce their origins. However, Swedish has many words of ancient, Nordic origin.

July 10, 1901. I left with Captain de Geer to Linköping to visit the Grenadier Regiment ("Lifgrenadjäi" infantry regiment). Sweden is the only country in Europe with an infantry organization similar to ours. We have "rotation troops," while Sweden has "Indelta", a semi-annual rotation, rather than weekly, as we do. My collection of photographs includes numerous images of regiments, formations, officers, instruction groups, barracks, etc. At Linköping, for example, over 2,600 soldiers are in "camp." We slept overnight in camp. At 3:00 a.m., there was an alarm, and within three minutes, the regiment was assembled in 12 companies. This was not staged; Swedes are too serious for play-acting—it was a real alarm.

[1] The King's Guard Regiment of Sweden - The most elegant regiment (Cavalry unit), exclusively composed of members of the Swedish aristocracy.

[2] Socec refers to "Low German", spoken in northern and eastern Germany. He knew it very well, as he attended the "Saint Nicholas" high school in Leipzig, which he graduated from in 1877.

July 12, 1901. Today, we practiced drills. The colonel advised me to trust my horse completely (I was officially given two horses from the Cavalry School). I am a strong swimmer and can swim continuously for at least an hour. The horses swim with their backs almost level with the water surface due to the deep trenches, which drop steeply from the bank to a width of 80-120 meters. As such, the animals do not try to find footing with their hind legs; thus, we crossed five trenches, each 80 to 120 meters wide. The squadrons crossed in loose, nearly aligned platoon columns—a magnificent sight! In the evening, I hosted a dinner for 12 at the hotel.

July 13, 1901. Sweden has eight cavalry regiments, each with four to ten squadrons (some regiments still follow the old battalion organization), 28 infantry regiments (with three to four battalions each), nine field artillery regiments, 28 attack artillery batteries, and six supply divisions (considered the best supply division in the world).

July 14, 1901. Today, I was received in an audience by HRH Crown Prince Gustaf[3], the heir to the Swedish throne, a scholar in uniform. When I handed him the package with the letter, he said, "I did not know of the beautiful surprise prepared for me by your gracious king; otherwise, I would have summoned you to Norway, where I was hunting. But today, I will telegraph my profound gratitude to His Majesty the King." He summoned a secretary and instructed him in Swedish to telegraph King Carol at Sinaia and to inform King Oscar [II] that he had received the Grand Cross with diamonds of the Star of Romania. Then he told me the Queen[4] could not receive me for another eight days, as she was unwell, though not dangerously ill. He shook my hand firmly and dismissed me with rare cordiality

July 15, 1901. Today I was summoned at 10 a.m. to the General Staff Headquarters, where all military attachés were gathered for the Infantry maneuvers and the special Cavalry maneuvers. A Japanese colonel and three Norwegian officers (a cavalry major from the General Staff with two captains) also joined. I noticed that although the Norwegian Army has the same supreme leader as Sweden [King Oscar II], they consider themselves independent. They speak the same language, with almost no differences; at most, they have some rare expressions. However, there are notable differences in character. The Swede is extravagant, aristocratic; the Norwegian is economical, calculating, and democratic. The Swede is cheerful and outgoing, while the Norwegian is serious, reserved, and taciturn. Norwegians love the King and the Royal Family but harbor a strong desire for complete independence from Sweden[5].

The Cavalry General Staff captain, Major d'Orange, son of the Minister of War, seeks my company often (and is eager for conversation), but I try to remain guarded, while learning as much as I can. He is also noble, though few nobles of Norwegian origin remain in Norway. I observed that there is significant common ground between these northern peoples—Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes—yet also an undercurrent of hidden rivalry, a kind of jealousy over the hegemony that each once held. Captain Baron Blixen F., from the "Malmo" Hussar Regiment[6] (an impressive figure, about 35 years old, of Swedish origin), has a brother who

[3] Crown Prince of Sweden and Norway (1872–1905), later Crown Prince of Sweden (1905–1907). He ascended to the throne after his father's death, taking the name Gustav V of Sweden (1907–1950). Like his father, he was married to a German princess, Victoria of Baden, who became Queen Victoria (1907–1930).

[4] Sophia of Nassau, a duchy that merged with Prussia in 1866. Queen of Sweden and Norway (1872–1905), then Queen of Sweden (1905–1907). She held the longest reign of any Swedish queen (35 years), a record surpassed in modern times by the current Queen of Sweden, Silvia.

[5] Socec correctly observed the political tension between the two states, present since 1901. The dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian Union (formed in 1814) was imminent and occurred in 1905.

[6] A light cavalry regiment, which existed in most European armies until 1914.

serves as a colonel in the Danish Royal Guard, with their entire family now loyal to Denmark. The Danish language differs very little from Swedish. During the maneuvers, I met all my foreign army colleagues. Tomorrow night, it's decided that we will hold a dinner for the Regiment Commander and the Chief of the General Staff. On July 18, we all have a rendezvous at Boden[7], where division-versus-division maneuvers will begin.

A grand gala dinner took place at Prince Gustaf's, who wore the Grand Cordon of the Order of the Star of Romania. Among the guests were the Foreign Minister and his wife; the Chief of the General Staff and his wife; the German Minister and his wife; Colonel von Mörnar and his wife; the Romanian Consul General[8], Müller, and his wife; Captain de Geer and his wife; and myself, with Susie. At the champagne toast, the Prince drank to the health of His Majesty the King [Carol] and the Queen of Romania [Elisabeta]. The dinner concluded at 9:30 p.m., and an opera singer performed two or three lieds. Later, we drank Swedish "punch" with ice, and Their Royal Highnesses retired at 11:30 p.m.

Boden, July 16, 1901. The Northern Division (in the Luleå-Piteå region[9]) and the Southern Division (in the Umeå region[10]) gathered.

July 18, 1901. We began approach marches. Each Division comprises two brigades, with two Infantry regiments each (three battalions per regiment, each with four companies of 165 men per company), two Artillery regiments (each with six battalions of six cannons), a cavalry squadron, a transport squadron, a telegraph company, and a pioneer company. The scenario: "AN ENEMY APPROACHING FROM HAPORANDA" (their bogeyman, the Russians!). The Swedish Army sends the Southern Division to confront the Northern Army, holding them back until reinforcements arrive from the south. The general consensus is that the troops performed admirably over the three days (July 19, 20, and 21). The soldiers are robust and tireless, and the pioneers worked with admirable skill. The artillery performed wonders, ascending the steepest slopes with astonishing ease. I can say that there are no obstacles for the Swedes' horses, and it's noteworthy that remounting is done in southern Sweden, where significant half-blood horse farms exist.

After the maneuvers, the King held a Cercle, and we departed for Umeå on the Royal Train, where an 80-person dinner was held. No toasts were given. The military missions departed, leaving only the French major, the English captain, two Germans, two Norwegians, and one Danish major to stay for the special Cavalry maneuvers, scheduled for August 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 in Götaland[11].

Stockholm, July 24, 1901. A grand dinner at the Foreign Ministry.

July 25, 1901. In the morning, I visited the SVEA LIFGARDE Regiment, commanded by Colonel von Uggla, a former military attaché in Vienna who had visited Romania. This regiment has existed for 445 years. In the Hall of Honor, portraits of all regiment commanders are displayed. Among them is a portrait of officers who accompanied

[7] A city in northeastern Sweden, located in the Norrbotten region, 35 km from Luleå, the capital of this region.
[8] The Romanian consulates in Sweden were established between 1880 and 1901 in the following cities: Stockholm (1880); Gothenburg (Honorary Consulate, 1889); Malmö (Honorary Consulate, 1901).
[9] A city in Norrbotten County, approximately 45 km from Luleå.
[10] The capital of Västerbotten County, located at the mouth of the Ume River in the Gulf of Bothnia. Today, it is an important university and economic center in Sweden.
[11] The region is located in the southern part of the country, with the highest population density. Sweden's largest cities are located here: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö.

[King] Charles XII to Tighina[12]. It is uplifting to see the regiment's history, kept up to date since 1683, recounting its actions across all battlefields in Europe since its creation. The history was written and printed in 1683 by a captain, Toll, ancestor of the current Captain Eriksson Toll. This family has served for over 300 years in the SVEA GUARD. Such examples of "LOYALTY" can only be found in the Regiment of Chevaliers in Ulm, where families like the Gemminger and Röders served uninterruptedly for 300 years! There are also very old regiments in Austro-Hungary, such as the 8th Dragoon Regiment, but they do not have a history of service by the same noble families.

In the evening, we had a dinner hosted by the lieutenants of the Lifgardet Till Häst Regiment and the Guard Dragoons[13]. Married lieutenants brought their wives. The officers' wives presented Susie with a splendid bouquet of flowers in the colors of Romania and Sweden. The regiment's band played throughout the dinner. There are very curious customs here: for example, women shave men at the barbers; young and beautiful women do the massaging at the baths; in bars, cafes, pastry shops, restaurants (second class), and beer houses, women serve as waitresses. No one ever behaves inappropriately toward them. Another oddity: there are no conductors on the trams; passengers pay on their own. People leave their bicycles in improvised "garages" and go about their business (or enter gardens, restaurants, or summer theaters). No bicycle ever goes missing! Another: trains stop in open fields to pick up and drop off letters or packages for residents in open boxes until the postman (either on horseback or with a cart) arrives to collect or deposit more mail. The honesty of people here is remarkable. Since I arrived in Sweden, I have not encountered a single case of dishonesty!

July 27, 1901. Dinner with Prince Karl[14], the Inspector General of Cavalry. After dinner, many people joined us. The nights are growing extremely short. It barely gets dark by 9:30 p.m., and at 2:30 a.m., daylight returns. We have thick blinds and double-lined curtains to keep out the light.

July 28, 1901. Madame Bjorkman arrived with her two daughters to stay at the hotel for a few days, then take Susie to Linköping for the duration of the Cavalry Maneuvers.

July 29, 1901. Large "meeting" of the Cavalry officers. I am familiar with French, Italian, German, Austro-Hungarian, English, and Dutch riders; if the French have extraordinary trainers, the Italians jumpers, and the Austrians steeplechasers, the Swedes are all expert riders—possibly the best in the world—and all have splendid horses.

July 30, 1901. Dinner with the Governor of Stockholm. When we're not otherwise engaged in the evenings, we have 4-5 people over for dinner. A curious custom here is dining in restaurants! In winter, dinners are occasionally held at home, but in spring and summer, they're only at restaurants.

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[12] King Charles XII of Sweden (1697–1718) - An extraordinary military strategist. He contended with Tsar Peter the Great for dominance during the Great Northern War. After brilliant victories against the Russians at Narva (1700) and Fraustadt (1706), Charles XII decided to invade Russia, a decision that proved disastrous for him and Sweden. He was defeated at Poltava (1709) by Peter the Great's army and was forced to seek refuge in Tighina (Bender, the name given by the Turks to the old defensive fortress in 1538 when they turned it into a raia). He remained there until 1711. After a confrontation with the Turks, he was captured and sent to Constantinople. He returned to Sweden in 1714 and continued his expansionist policy, launching a war against Norway in 1718, during which he was killed in battle.

[13] Soldiers who formed the Light Cavalry Corps.

[14] Prince Karl held this high military position between 1898 and 1912, a role introduced for the first time in Sweden. He was married to Princess Ingeborg of Denmark.

July 31, 1901. Dinner at Baron Rosen's, a major in the Cavalry Guard (Garde à Cheval). His wife is a Muslim, the sister of the Kheder[15], a very beautiful woman, but rather simple. It was the best dinner I've had in Sweden, though a bit heavy (12 courses). There were 26 people at the table. Out of all the guests, only Susie (who does not drink wine) and the Turkish woman (who also abstains) remained sober. The other 24 of us were seeing double. At 3 a.m., in full daylight, we finally parted ways.

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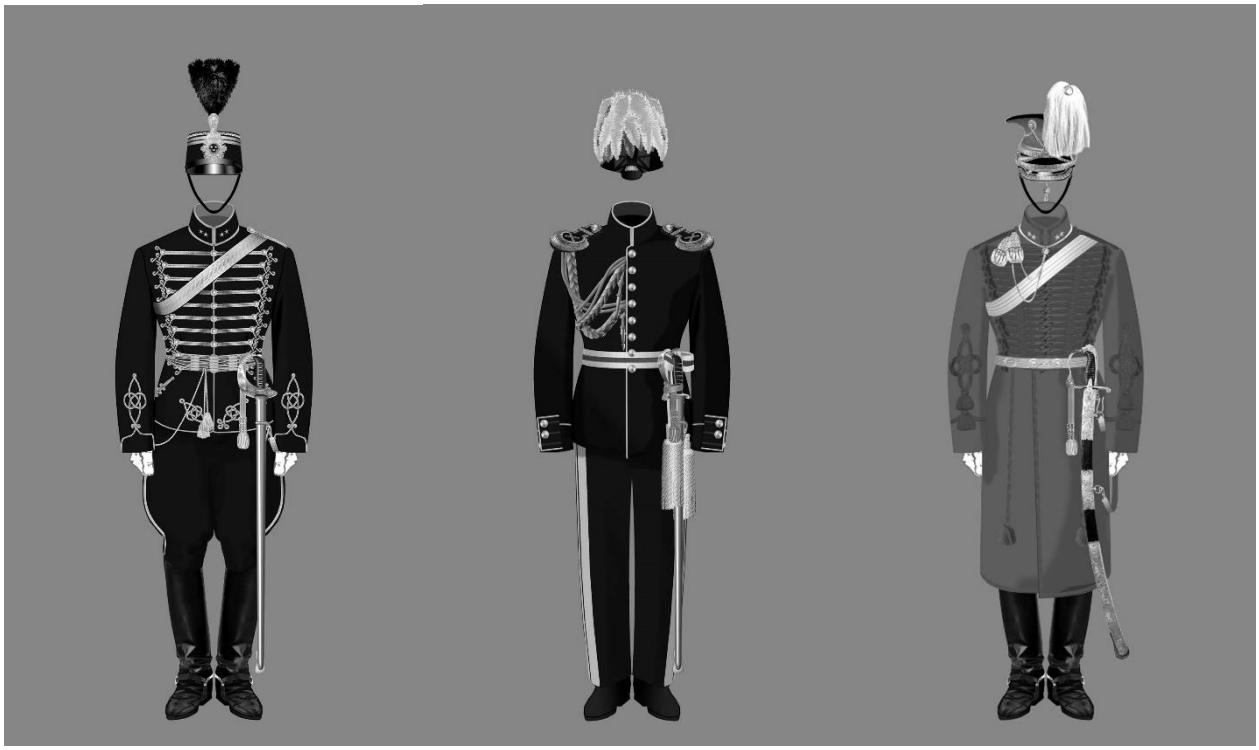

1. Uniforms of the SVEA LIFGARDE Regiment (1900).

[15] Kheder (Khadir) - In Islamic religion, he is a servant of Allah, a kind of prophet. The term originates from the Arabic language (al-Khadir).

2. Military accessories of the SVEA LIFGARDE Regiment (1900).