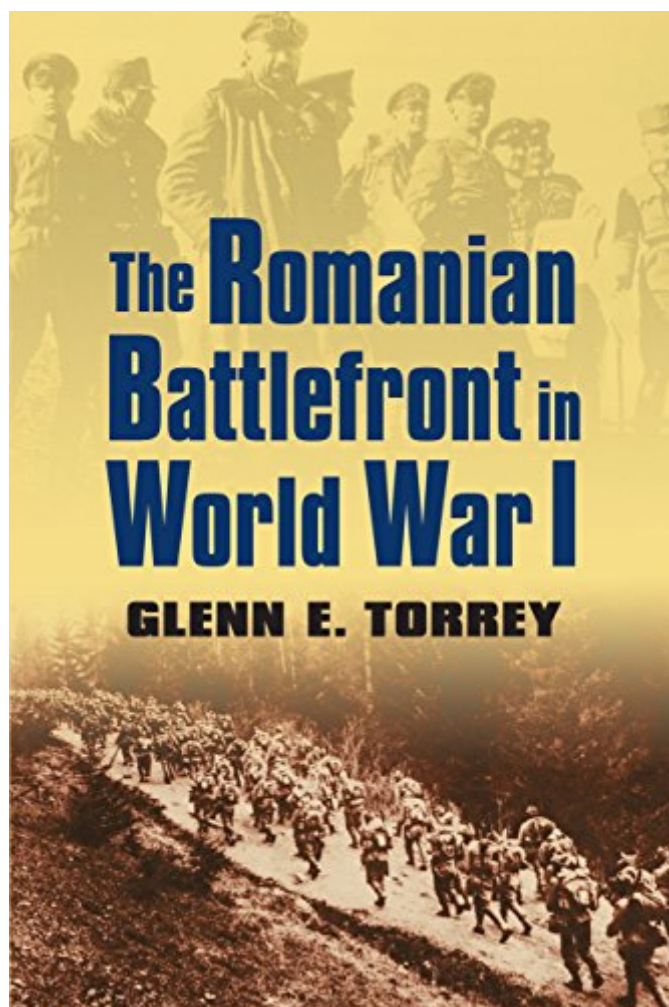


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The Romanian Battlefront In World War I



Synopsis

Despite a strategically vulnerable position, an ill-prepared army, and questionable promises of military support from the Allied Powers, Romania intervened in World War I in August 1916. In return, it received the Allies' formal sanction for the annexation of the Romanian-inhabited regions of Austria-Hungary. As Glenn Torrey reveals in his pathbreaking study, this soon appeared to have been an impulsive and risky decision for both parties. Torrey details how, by the end of 1916, the armies of the Central Powers, led by German generals Falkenhayn and Mackensen, had administered a crushing defeat and occupied two-thirds of Romanian territory, but at the cost of diverting substantial military forces they needed on other fronts. The Allies, especially the Russians, were forced to do likewise in order to prevent Romania from collapsing completely. Torrey presents the most authoritative account yet of the heavy fighting during the 1916 campaign and of the renewed attempt by Austro-German forces, including the elite Alpine Corps, to subdue the Romanian Army in the summer of 1917. This latter campaign, highlighted here but ignored in non-Romanian accounts, witnessed reorganized and rearmed Romanian soldiers, with help from a disintegrating Russian Army, administer a stunning defeat of their enemies. However, as Torrey also shows, amidst the chaos of the Russian Revolution the Central Powers forced Romania to sign a separate peace early in 1918. Ultimately, this allowed the Romanian Army to reenter the war and occupy the majority of the territory promised in 1916. Torrey's unparalleled familiarity with archival and secondary sources and his long experience with the subject give authority and balance to his account of the military, strategic, diplomatic, and political events on both sides of the battlefield. In addition, his use of personal memoirs provides vivid insights into the human side of the war. Major military leaders in the Second World War, especially Ion Antonescu and Erwin Rommel, made their careers during the First World War and play a prominent role in his book. Torrey's study fosters a genuinely new appreciation and understanding of a long-neglected aspect of World War I that influenced not only the war itself but the peace settlement that followed and, in fact, continues today.

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Customer Reviews

"The Romanian Battlefront in WW I" is not just the one of the few English-language books on its subject, but it stands comparison with the best English-language studies of any individual country's armed forces in WWI. Mr. Torrey has remedied this situation, his book being an excellent study to a subject unjustly ignored by many English-speaking historians; to date, I believe it is one of the few comprehensive accounts of Romania's military involvement in WW I in English. Very well written and organized, containing 17 comprehensive chapters on (mainly) military operations (plus Conclusions and an Epilogue) and illustrated with many maps and photos, it is invaluable for anyone interested in operations on the Eastern Front in WW I. Based not only on access to Romanian military archives but also on additional studies provided by German, Austrian, Italian archives etc, Mr. Torrey's book contains an detailed, chronological account of military operations on Romanian Front during 1916-1918 and even immediate postwar actions in 1919 in Hungary. Additionally, the author inspired from relevant Romanian and non-Romanian secondary sources such as published documents, memoirs, specialized studies etc. After a short preface, the first two chapters describe the Romania's political (leaders, geopolitical factors, alliances, etc) and military (war plans, strengths, etc) situation at the beginning of the war. This short, balanced background information about the country and its political and military leaders is useful, since most readers are unlikely to have detailed knowledge of Romania in that period of time. It also provides a helpful context for Romania's two years of negotiation with the Entente countries.

"The Romanian Battlefront..." is Glenn Torrey's crowning achievement, in a career spanning five decades dedicated to the diplomatic and military aspects of Romania's participation in World War I.

While he wrote a biography of General H. Berthelot, commander of the French Military Mission in Romania and also published a few years back a collection of his studies on the topic, this is a work of synthesis. Torrey has researched thoroughly the archives and libraries in Bucharest, Vienna, Berlin, Moscow, Paris, London and the United States, exhausting them; only the Bulgarian and Turkish sources are not consulted and this is the only serious methodological problem of the work. One wished he engaged more with them, especially the Bulgarians and maybe the author should have also consulted IR literature on Romania in World War I. Otherwise the writing is excellent; Torrey writes well and compelling about military organization, equipment, tactics and the politics of command. Less represented are civil-military relations and the level of human experience of war. While military and diplomatic historians will rejoice, there is little in this work that might be interesting for cultural historians and sociologists. But Torrey never claims that he intended to write more than a military history and the result is very good. One of the most interesting aspects is his ability to move from the Romanian to the Austrian and from the Russian to the German position in what regards a particular military action or a specific moment of the conflict. The author provides top-class narratives of the battles and operations and the maps - though adapted from older works - are good and sufficient.

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