

ASSUMPTIONS ON THE SINK OF THE DESTROYER LEADER 'MOSKVA' IN THE AIR NAVAL BATTLE IN CONSTANȚA ON JUNE 26th, 1941.

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Abstract

On the evening on June 25, 1941 from Sevastopol harbor two groups of Soviet ships have left: a battle Group, consisting of the destroyers leader 'Harkov' and 'Moskva' (figure2) with the mission to strike Constanta harbor the next day at dawn (05.00 o'clock – Moscow time) and a naval Group of support, consisting of the cruiser 'Voroșilov' and the destroyers 'Soobrazitelinai' and 'Smâșlennai'. Simultaneously with the naval strike over Constanta harbor was developed an aerial attack, the aircrafts having also the role of directing the shooting on vessels. On June 26 in front of Constanta destroyer leader Moskva was sunk. In this file we will try to discover the circumstances of this event.

Key Words

destroyer leader Moskva, Constanta, battle, sunk.

1. The Air Naval Battle in Constanta on June 26th, 1941.

In the morning of June 26th, 1941 (figure 1), just four days after the entry of Romania in the Second World War, off Constanța took place the first air naval battle on the Black Sea.

One week before, more exactly in the period 14th–19th of June, the Royal Romanian Navy H.Q. had installed a sea mine barrage at a distance of about 12 naval miles (22 Km) between Capu Midia and Tuzla, in order to defense the main naval base that is Constanta. On the coast, there were already installed artillery batteries, including the high-caliber German battery 'Tirpitz' (280 mm).¹

The operational plans of the Soviet Fleet in Black Sea foresaw that at the initiation of hostilities 3 submarines should be sent to mission in the area of: Sfântu Gheorghe – Gura Portiței, Mangalia – Costinești and Caliacra. They occupied the battle area on June, 24th and had the mission to hit enemy ships on these naval communications.²

1 Damaschin, Ioan, Jipa Rotaru, Glorie și Dramă, Marina Regală Română, 1940 – 1945, Editura Ion Cristoiu, București, 2000, p. 34. L.
2 A. Emilianov, Podvodniki lodki vo vremia Velikoi Otecestvennoi Voină, Moskva, 1987, p. 96.

Considering the two submarines present on the Romanian seaside, the Red Fleet has developed the performance of an air-naval strike over Constanta for the morning of 26th of June, having as targets the basins and oil facilities on site.

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A day before the Romanian military ships (4 destroyers, three torpedo boats, 3 gunboats and the minelayer 'Amiral Murgescu') were taken out of sea between Mamaia – Cap Midia and Eforie – Tuzla.

At 04.00 o'clock in the morning of June 26, the naval Group 'Harkov' – 'Moskva' has reached the limit of the mine barrages that had crossed and opened immediately the fire over Constanța harbor. For 10 minutes (between 04.02 and 04.12) the two ships fired no less than 350 bombs, causing fire at oil installations and explosion of an ammunition train in Palas station. At the prompt intervention of coastal artillery and destroyers 'Regina Maria' and 'Mărăşti', which carried out a strong round, the Soviet ships have left the battle area, launching also a smoke screen for masking.⁴

³ Boris Banşaţ, Andrei Lubianov, Moskva, Sevastopol, 2006, p. 30 .

⁴ Damaschin, Ioan, Jipa Rotaru, Glorie şi Dramă, Marina Regală Română, 1940 – 1945, Editura Ion Cristoiu, Bucureşti, 2000, p. 48).

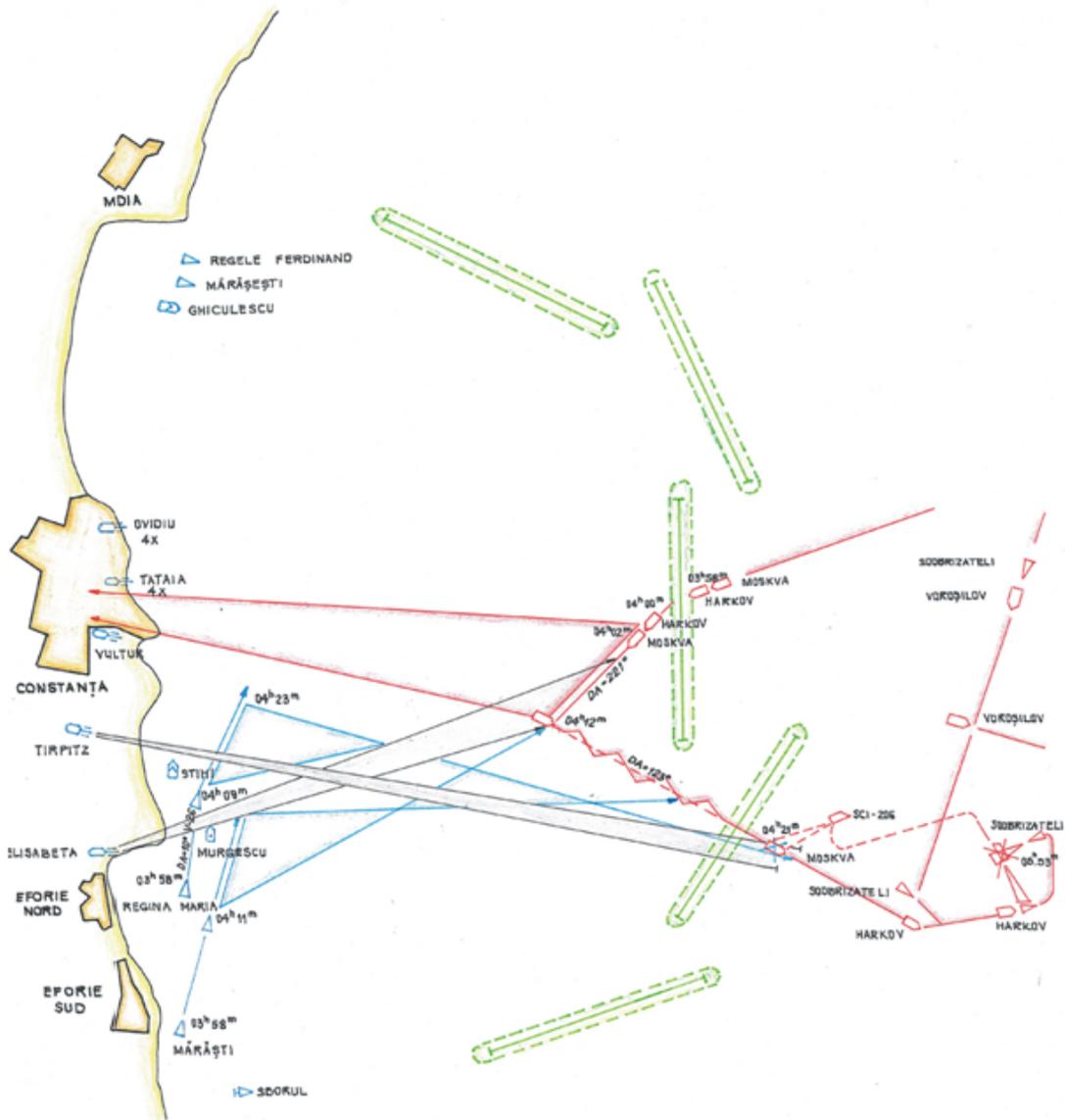
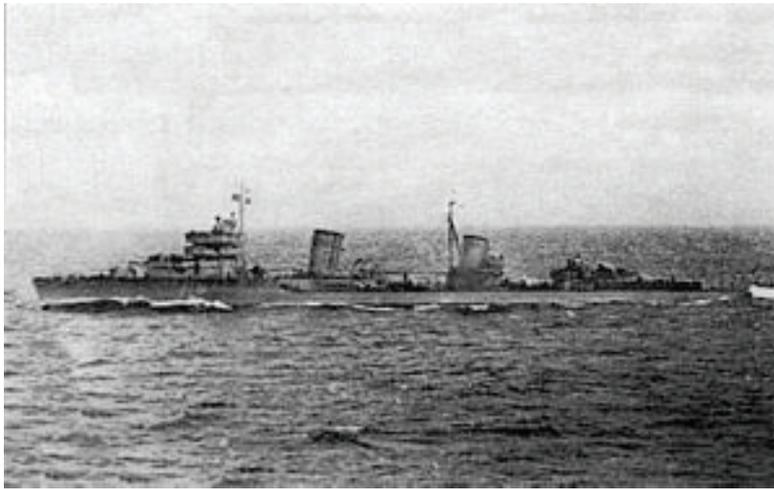


Figure 1: The air naval battle in Constanta on June 26th, 1941

2. At 000 o'clock did ŞCI-206 Submarine Attack Soviet Ships? How Did the Submarine Sink?

In our opinion, the fate of Soviet submarines in Black Sea during Second World War was very well analyzed and argued in 'Vo Imia Rossii - Martirolog cernomorskih podvodnikov otecestva 1909 – 1945', Moscow 2003, written by the Russian military historian K.V. Strelbičkii.

Şci-206 was the first lost Soviet submarine in the Black Sea, states the author (p. 43). It was under the command of Captain Lieutenant S. A. Karakai and was sunk on 09.07.1941 in the area of Mangalia, on the coordinates 430.53' N and 280.46',7E. 42 seamen died.



Fidar2: Destroyer leader 'Moskva' at its entry into war

On the first day of the war, the commander of 1st Brigade, 1st rang captain Boltunov received a directive from the War Council, signed by the commander of the Fleet, vice-admiral Oktiabrskii, the political commissioner of the Fleet and the Chief of Staff, rear admiral Eliseev.

The directive stated that each of the three submarines should occupy immediately a area of battle on the Romanian and Bulgarian coast, on a mission to monitor enemy naval communications, on the routes Constanța – Sulina and Constanța – Burgas, to intercept convoys and attack and sink the German, Italian and Romanian battleships and transport ships.

The 3 submarines were: 'ŞCI-205' under the command of captain lieutenant P. S. Dronin – Sulina area (no. 3), 'ŞCI-206' under the command of captain lieutenant S. A. Karakai – Mangalia area (no. 4), 'ŞCI-209' under the command of captain lieutenant I. N. Kiselev – Burgas area (no.5). 'ŞCI-206' was supposed to get to the area on 24th of June.

The battle area was joined by a strategy for radio links with each submarine. These links were usually made at night, while submarines were on the surface or at periscope depth, in an area next to the battle area so that it is able to charge the batteries for the immersion under cover of darkness.

Besides the precise delimitations of battle and reserve area it was also specified the use of munitions and the immersion for launching the torpedoes. The cannon on the deck could be used only for defense or if the torpedoes could not be launched.

The 'ŞCI-206' submarine had the battle area between Cap Tuzla and Mangalia or Cap Şabla. 'ŞCI-206' left the Base of Sevastopol on June 22, 17.30 o'clock, escorted by two submarine hunters; it was heading to Constanța. At midnight the submarine received from the base a first

radiogram by which it was informed that the Romanian Fleet was put out to sea in the area of Constanța.

The following radiogram was sent on June 27. The commander replied neither the first nor the second radiogram. Moreover he never showed up at the radio meeting according to keeping connected scheme. Annoyed by the lack of reaction of the submarine, the officers in charge from the brigade command sent other radiograms during the following days until the date the submarine should arrive at the base. All radiograms went unanswered. The fact that the submarine did not return to its base, neither on the fixed date nor on the following days, and after the application of specific procedures for such situations – sending research ships and aircrafts over the sea for possible aid have failed, determined the Fleet direction to declare it lost during mission and remove it from the record of vessels and staff.

At that time it was concluded that the disappearance of the submarine could be caused by probably reaching a mine in the barrage off Constanța, not excluding the possibility of having been attacked by a battleship, an anti-submarine aircraft or a technical failure.

After the war, the Soviets captured not only the Romanian military and civil ships, but also all the operational military documents. Linking known data on the action area of ‘ȘCI-206’ submarine with data from the battle actions log of Romanian ships, other conclusions were drawn regarding the fate of submarine and how it sank.

In 1996, at the Făt Frumos Publishing House in Bucharest appears a three-volume work of historians – Commander (r) Nicolae Koslinski and rear admiral (r) Raimond Stănescu, war veterans, participating in battles at sea on board since its early days, which gives in detail how a group of ships attacked and sunk a submarine on July 9, 1941 in Mangalia. Here are the main moments of this antisubmarine battle, as they result from the work of the two authors⁵

On 9th of July the Romanian submarine ‘Delfinul’, after completing the first battle mission and preparing necessary revisions, a new mission was being prepared on enemy communications. Since there was no doubt that a Soviet submarine was operating in Tuzla – Mangalia it was done a careful preparation to ensure the sea outlet for ‘Delfinul’ submarine.

The insurance actions coordinated by lieutenant commander Victor Voinescu, commandment of Submarine and Torpedo Motor Boats consisted of the patrol, dredging and anti-submarine search in the district of Tuzla South. First the torpedo motor boats emerged south of Tuzla and between

⁵ Koslinski, Raimond Stănescu, *Marina Română în al doilea Război Mondial*, Vol. I, Editura Făt-Frumos, Bucharest 1996, p. 166.

02.00 and 07.00 o'clock inspected the area and then at east out of the mine barrage. In the morning it emerged the 'Heavy dredging group' consisting of the gunboats 'Stihi Eugen', 'Constantin Dumitrescu' which left the dredgers in water from Tuzla north to the south covering the way out band for the submarine. The anti-submarine insurance of dredging boats was performed by the torpedo boats 'Sborul' and 'Năluca' (Captain Horia Popovici).

The destroyer 'Mărășești' was patrolling the area of Eforie in order to support the entire operation. In the district the torpedo motor boats 'Viscolul' (Lieutenant Ion Zaharia) 'Vijelia' returned, having on board the leader of the action and 'Viforul'. The sea was calmly shrouded by fog. At noon 'Stihi' gives the anti-submarine alarm. Immediately 'Năluca' turns on attack and at 13.56 first it starts fire with the 20 mm and 66 mm cannons, after which it launches two anti-submarine bombs where the submarine was supposed to be. Soon in the same place where the periscope was noticed there appeared a patch of oil and air bubbles. After hearing the thundering of the cannons and the explosions of the anti-submarine bombs, the torpedo motor boats on north of Mangalia headed to the place of action.

3. The Attack of the Submarine

'Viforul' was in the center of the group. At 15.30 it began a concerted attack of the ships with anti-submarine bombs on the place where was noticed the trace of the enemy submarine periscope. Over the place bombed by 'Viscolul' 'a big black spot' appeared. It was on the coordinates 43051'5 N; 21045' E. Strelbițikii considers (p. 46) that the diving point of the submarine is 43045'6 N; 21045' E. The commander of the torpedo motor boat 'Viscolul' himself „attributed” the victory, noting it in the logbook of the vessel.

Although the arguments noted in the logbook are based only on clues that 'ȘCI-206' submarine was sunk on 09th of July, after the war, the Soviet military analysts appropriated their point of view and concluded that it disappeared in that time and at that point. For Soviet military analysts and not only for them, but also for the Soviet leadership at that time, it was the most comfortable thing to explain the disappearance of the submarine. Let us remember that on the first days of war, an operation designed without considering all possible risks resulted in two serious losses for the Red fleet – a modern destroyer leader and a submarine.

Strelbițikii⁶ quotes in his work on the fate of Soviet submarine other authors, such as the Soviet military historian M. Iu. Maksimov, the first one who comes with the idea of the sinking of 'ȘCI-206' by the destroyer 'Smâșlennâi' since 1956.

⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

Later there were more Russian or foreign authors who, after analyzing the circumstances of the events, seriously consider the possibility that Şci-206 be sunk by its own vessels during the naval battle in Constanța on June 26th, 1941. Moreover, before being sunk by itself, the submarine had sunk the leader 'Moskva' which participated in the naval battle.

The main mission of the submarine, according to the order of battle, was to sink any ship found off Constanța. When it was decided the invasion over Constanta of the two Soviet leaders 'Harkov' and 'Moskva', the submarines operating in the area i.e. 'ŞCI-206' and 'ŞCI-205' were not announced. In the early hours of June 26, 1941, 'ŞCI-206' was on surface in the district of charging batteries and it realized that a group of battleships was off Constanța (the Romanian battleships were outside the harbor, but close to the coast, under the protection of the mine barrage).

Analyzing the contemporary documents and the statements of sailors participating in the naval battle of June 26, 1941 the author says: 'It is not excluded that 'ŞCI-206' have been sunk by the destroyer 'Soobrazitelnâi'. Being uninformed about the action of the battleships in its district 'ŞCI-206' mistook the shapes of the Soviet ships for the Romanian destroyers and attacked them. Other elements should also be considered. First the submarine had been ordered to sink any surface ship in his area, which was only enemy. It is a plausible explanation for the attack and sink of the leader 'Moskva' at 05.21 (Moscow time). Second, 'Soobrazitelnâi', after the arrival in the battle district and the joining to the cover group, it has launched two series of bombs (a series of 4 large bombs and a series of six small bombs) from which there appeared a large patch of oil and shortly it came out the stern of the submarine which then sank. The sunken submarine could not be 'Delfinul', because as it has been noticed later it was 30-60 Mn. away, and then it arrived in the harbor of Constanța.

From the starboard of the leader 'Harkov' in bearing of 70 degrees 25–30 ratlines away, it was noticed at 06.38 (Moscow time) the periscope of a submarine and at 06.40 the trace of two torpedoes and air bubbles. 'Harkov' avoided one torpedo but the second exploded near the helm and damaged the submarine. It shot series of missiles in the direction of the torpedoes and 12 minutes later it launched 3 anti-submarine depth bombs of M-1 type. With regard to these torpedoes, the historian authorized to write about this operation in Constanța stated that at that moment a Romanian 'Savoia' seaplane was flying over the area and it launched the torpedoes over the leader 'Harkov'. At 07.00 (Moscow time) when 'Soobrazitelnâi', under the command of Lieutenant Vorkov, has arrived near 'Harkov', the leader warned it about the presence of a submarine in the area. The division commander has ordered to the destroyer commander to find and attack that submarine. At that moment they noticed torpedo slipstream. 'Soobrazitelnâi' avoided the torpedoes and at 07.07 (Moscow time) launched two series of anti-submarine bombs (four large and six small) over the location of the submarine. Immediately, at the surface appeared a large patch

of oil and the stern of the submarine which then sunk. It is very interesting that from the board of the leader 'Harkov' no one saw no patch of oil, no stern of the submarine sinking.

In order to complete the confusion the official historian of the operation wrote that at 10.21 (Moscow time) 'Smâşlennâi' (commander captain rank III V. M. Şegula-Tihomirov) noticed the periscope of a submarine which attacked with 29 artillery missiles and then launched 4 anti-submarine depth bombs – a large one and 3 small, but that the result of this attack is unknown⁷

To support the version of the sinking of the submarine by the Romanian battle ships, in the log-book at the group headquarters appears an entry-report of Şci-206 dated June 28: 'I turned to position no. 4. I have not seen the enemy'.

In this context it is also recorded the report of a survivor of 'Moskva' who managed to escape from Romanian captivity. Shortly before the vessel sunk, it was noticed the trace of two torpedoes directed to the ship. The Commander ordered to helm hard a starboard and the torpedoes did not strike the ship. When the leader was still deviating, a strong explosion occurred. The Commander shouted that the ship went into the mine barrage and would sink.

Analyzing the aspect of the explosion it can be assumed that the explosion took place inside the ship between the ribs 70 - 75, as a result of striking a mine, torpedo or a medium caliber missile (over 130 mm) that hit the ammunition store.

The analysts considered also the option that 'Moskva' had been hit by a torpedo launched from a seaside plant, by a torpedo launched from a Romanian destroyer or from the submarine 'Delfinul'. As we know, there were no such facilities on shore, the Romanian destroyers were too far away to launch torpedoes; there remains the version of launching by a submarine. I have also noted that the Romanian submarine 'Delfinul' was on cruise in another district and it is impossible that The Royal Romanian Navy has planned the cruise of the submarine 'Delfinul' near their own mine barrage.

The battle area of the Soviet submarine 'ŞCI-206' was 10 Nm south of Constanţa and the off corner was 4 navy miles south of sinister place. But there were cases, especially at the beginning of the war, when the submarines went beyond the district with 5 to 10 Nm, so it is possibly that this time it was the same thing. For those less familiar with the operating manner of submarines, it must be mentioned that they were emerging by night to load the batteries in a district joined to the patrol one. It is not excluded that the submarine had a loading district exactly in the explosion area.

⁷ Strelbičkii, Vo Imia Rossii - Martirolog cernomorskih podvodnikov otecestva 1909 – 1945”, Moskva, 2003., p.

The Soviet submarine, due to its operating near the Romanian destroyers got used to their noise and shape and, losing contact with them it discovered the Soviet ones, even before they have bombed Constanța. It is likely that it remained in the district and attacked with the torpedo from the port side of the ships. In this case, it is reasonable why the torpedoes were noticed in the port side, according to the Soviet prisoner's statement above while the action district of the submarine was south to the starboard side of the Soviet ships.

By avoiding torpedoes, the Soviet vessel turned to the right and therefore it struck a mine. The commander of the group, Romanov supposes that ‚Moskva’ deviated to the right at his order to stop zigzagging and went straight to the barrage of mines. Other officers state that the vessel was handled to the right to remain in the smoke curtain which was narrower and narrower because of the NE wind.

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