

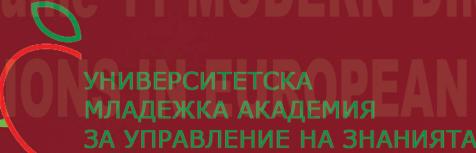
Volume

11

UNIVERSITY OF LIBRARY STUDIES  
AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

MODERN DIMENSIONS in EUROPEAN EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY YOUTH  
KNOWLEDGE ACADEMY



# MODERN DIMENSIONS

in EUROPEAN EDUCATION

AND RESEARCH AREA

PROCEEDINGS

Volume 11 MODERN DIMENSIONS in EUROPEAN EDUCATION

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С описанието

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IN  
EUROPEAN EDUCATION  
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# CONTENTS

WELCOMING ADDRESSES .....	9
---------------------------	---

## PLENARY SESSION. BULGARIAN-CYPRIOT CULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS

<b>Lambros Kaoullas.</b> LOOKING AT BULGARIA FROM CYPRUS: PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE, DIPLOMACY & SECURITY .....	21
---	----

<b>Sylvia Koukounidou, Flora Demetriou.</b> UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS LIBRARY: A KNOWLEDGE HUB FOR CYPRUS .....	29
--	----

<b>Vanya Dobreva, Boryana Buzhashka.</b> BULGARIAN-CYPRIOT DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS .....	38
---	----

<b>Svetlana Syarova, Samuel Petkov.</b> DIGITAL CYPRUS: THE NEW GLOBAL CENTER FOR TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION .....	42
---	----

## SECTION 1. LIBRARY SCIENCE, PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

<b>Polly Mukanova.</b> THE COLLECTION OF EARLY PRINTED CYRILLIC BOOKS AT THE LIBRARY OF THE RILA MONASTERY (RESEARCH AND SCIENTIFIC INVENTORY IN THE E-ENVIRONMENT) .....	53
---	----

<b>Veselin Chantov.</b> THE CONCEPT OF PRIMARY LANGUAGE PERSONALITY AND SECONDARY LANGUAGE PERSONALITY IN STUDYING FOREIGN LANGUAGES – CYPRUS.....	60
--	----

<b>Muymuyn Tahirov.</b> ONTOLOGY OF THE NECESSARY CONTINGENCY INNOVATION ASPECTS .....	64
--	----

<b>Sabina Eftimova, Evgeniya Vasileva.</b> THE TOPIC OF BIBLIOTHERAPY IN THE MA THESES OF STUDENTS MAJORING IN “LIBRARY, INFORMATION AND CULTURAL MANAGEMENT” .....	70
---	----

## SECTION 2. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE

<b>Vanya Dobreva, Boryana Buzhashka.</b> ON A POLITICAL CARICATURE AS AN ALARM ABOUT CYPRUS’ FATE.....	77
--	----

<b>Stoyan Denchev, Ivanka Pavlova.</b> PROMOTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE UNIVERSITY INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT .....	83
---	----

<b>Evelina Zdravkova, Tereza Trencheva, Ivan Trenchev.</b> CULTURAL IDENTITY AND MEDIA – MODERN ASPECTS OF INTERACTION .....	89
--	----

<b>Rumen Draganov.</b> COGNITIVE ANALYSIS FOR TOURISM BASED ON TOURISM STATISTICS DATA IN VIDIN REGION IN BULGARIA .....	94
--	----

<b>Svetla Shapkaloa.</b> THE ORTHODOX HOLIDAYS AS PART OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF CYPRUS ...	99
---	----

<b>Yasena Chantova.</b> FACEBOOK ENUNCIATION AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON: ESSAY OF MODELING .....	106
<b>Hristo Hristov, Vasil Zagorov.</b> IDEA, EXECUTION, INTERVENTION – OR HOW WORKS OF ART SLIP OUT OF THEIR AUTHORS' HANDS .....	113
<b>Arsini Kolev.</b> THE PEOPLE WENT TO BRING FREEDOM WHERE THERE WAS SLAVERY .....	119
<b>Antony Stanimirov.</b> IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SEVENTH RILA INFANTRY DIVISION 1912–1913 .....	126
<b>Krasimira Alexandrova.</b> METHODS FOR PRESENTING BOOK AND DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE IN THE DIGITIZATION PRACTICE OF THE “ST. ST. CYRIL AND METHODIUS” NATIONAL LIBRARY ....	131
<b>Hristiyan Atanasov.</b> NOTES ON THE DEMOGRAPHY, ECONOMY AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF LOVECH IN THE 1860S AND 1870S .....	137
<b>Evgeni Velev.</b> INNOVATIVE METHODS AND APPROACHES IN FORMING VISUAL CULTURE AND VISUAL LITERACY IN THE PROCESSES OF PERCEPTION AND UNDERSTANDING OF ART AND CULTURE .....	149
<b>SECTION 3.</b> <b>INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES AND INFORMING SCIENCE</b>	
<b>Ivan Trenchev, Irena Peteva.</b> APPLICATION FOR MIXED REALITY PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL HERITAGE .....	157
<b>Daniela Pavlova, Panayot Gindev.</b> USING INNOVATIONS BASED ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION .....	165
<b>Ivan Garvanov.</b> INFLUENCE OF SOLAR ACTIVITY ON LIFE ON EARTH .....	170
<b>Stoyan Denchev, Irena Peteva, Tereza Trencheva.</b> FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MIXED REALITY INFORMING ENVIRONMENT .....	176
<b>Evelina Zdravkova, Tereza Trencheva, Dimitar Velichkov.</b> INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND THE MEDIA: INFORMATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS .....	181
<b>Magdalena Garvanova.</b> ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF THE MOBILE PHONE ON THE HUMAN BRAIN ACTIVITY USING ELECTROENCEPHALOGRAPH .....	186
<b>Steliania Yordanova.</b> PUBLICITY AND TRANSPARENCY OF INFORMATION. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROCEDURES RELATED TO VIOLATIONS OF CITIZENS' RIGHTS FOR ACCESS TO INFORMATION .....	194
<b>Ruska Manolova.</b> BASIC PRINCIPLES AND MECHANISMS IN THE NORMATIVE REGULATION OF THE RIGHT FOR ACCESS TO INFORMATION .....	198
<b>Georgi Dimitrov.</b> STRUCTURE OF INTEGRATED INFORMATION SYSTEMS .....	205
<b>Mariana Buneva-Popova.</b> HUMAN RESOURCES IN AN ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT: NEW KNOWLEDGE, MANAGERIAL TASK DELEGATION SKILLS AND INNOVATIVE THINKING .....	210

**SECTION 4.  
SECURITY AND DEFENCE**

<b>Plamen Teodosiev.</b> THE TURKISH-GREEK CONTRADICTIONS AND THEIR REFLECTION UPON THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA.....	219
<b>Ralitsa Yotova.</b> RESEARCH OF MANIFESTATIONS AND DEVIATIONS OF INFORMATION AS A FACTOR FOR THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES .....	226
<b>Denislav Kanev.</b> DRONE DETECTION APPROACH BASED ON RF USING SDR .....	232

# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE SEVENTH RILA INFANTRY DIVISION 1912–1913

Antony Stanimirov

*University of Library Studies and Information Technologies*

**Abstract:** *The Bulgarian Seventh Rila Infantry Division formed by Decree No. 88 of Tsar Ferdinand I, received its baptism of fire during the Balkan War. Its units engaged in some of the most important strategic battles on their way to Thessaloniki. At the cost of many adversities on the muddy battlefields, the soldiers did their combat task. A large part of them also showed heroism during the battles of the First World War and the Second World War. Its commanders are famous throughout Europe as some of the best commanders of the 20th century. Today, in the city of Dupnitsa, a street is named after the glorious Seventh Infantry in honor of the division, as well as numerous memorial plaques, military monuments and other commemorative signs, symbols of the eternal memory and appreciation of the Bulgarian people.*

**Keywords:** 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Rila, military history, battles, Balkan War, Balkan Union

## Introduction

The infamous Seventh Rila Infantry Division was officially formed by Decree No. 88 of 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1903 of Tsar Ferdinand I of Bulgaria. The well-known colonel Stefan Toshev (1859–1924) was appointed as its commander. The Seventh Rila Infantry Division included the following subdivisions and has the following structure: headquarters in the town of Dupnitsa, three infantry brigades, two artillery regiments, one company, quartermaster company, a divisional infirmary, six field hospitals, etc. The combat staff of the Seventh Rila Infantry Division in September 1912 (officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers) numbered 37,355 people. During the Balkan War, Major General Georgi Todorov was appointed commander of the division. [1]

## Research methodology

The scientific paper aims to trace the historical events related to the Seventh Rila Infantry Division, to achieve this goal, various sources of information – books, publications, electronic sources and Internet resources – have been examined and analyzed to detail the facts as much as possible. This, in turn, made it possible to generate new perspectives on Bulgarian history and, in particular, the military actions during the Balkan and Inter-Allied Wars. To achieve this, the following methods were used – initial review of the sources, historical and general analysis, comment on the results.

## Exposition

### Historical prerequisites

Initially, the idea of the Balkan Union, respectively the Balkan War, was the highlight of the aspiration for the final consolidation and distribution of the former territories until recently part of the Ottoman Empire on the Balkan Peninsula. The Balkan Union (Kingdom of Bulgaria, Kingdom of Serbia, Kingdom of Greece and Kingdom of Montenegro) was created precisely for this purpose – final push of the Ottoman Empire from the territory of the Balkan Peninsula. The occasion is well-known – the Balkan crisis of 1908–1909. On 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1908, Prince Ferdinand I announced the following with a manifesto in the city of Tarnovo: [...] “WE PROCLAIM THE UNION ON 6<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1885. BULGARIA FOR AN INDEPENDENT KINGDOM”. [2] The manifesto declared the independence of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, practically any political, economic and financial dependence on the Ottoman Empire was rejected, sharply violating the agreements fixed in

the Treaty of Berlin, drastically harming the interests of the Great Powers. Austria-Hungary used the occasion quite skillfully and annexed the Ottoman possessions on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This caused an extremely unstable political situation in the Balkans.

The situation in the Balkans in 1912 was pre-war. In the same year, the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbia signed a secret<sup>1</sup> treaty (Bulgarian-Serbian Treaty, 1912) for mutual military assistance between the two countries. Ivan E. Geshov, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bulgaria and Milovan Milovanovic, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Serbia put their signatures on the contract, the intermediary during the signing was the Russian Empire. This act marked the beginning of the Balkan Union, which subsequently became a military anti-Ottoman coalition that led to the achievement of some of the greatest military victories in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The declaration of the Balkan war caused a wide public resonance not only in the Balkans, but also throughout Europe. [3]

### **The feats of the Seventh Rila Infantry Division in 1912**

The 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry, directly commanded by Major-General Georgi Todorov, also fell into the combat maneuvers that the Bulgarian army began on the extreme right flank. According to the agreed maneuvers, the division acted as a combat part of the composition of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Union Army, whose commander was General Stepan Stepanovich, which included the Timoshka Division, in order to block the Ottoman Western Army. [4]

In the period 5<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1912, the Seventh Infantry was assigned a combat task to control the area around the town of Kyustendil. That is why General Todorov divided the division into three separate columns. The distribution is as follows: The left column consists of two companies belonging to the 26<sup>th</sup> Pernish Infantry Regiment with commander Atila Zafirov, who had to conquer Mount Povien Kamen (1181 m above sea level) [5] in Osogov mountain and to head towards Kochani. For this purpose, the regiment had to maintain contact with the 14<sup>th</sup> Serbian regiment, which was to head towards Sultan Tepe peak. The second brigade, commanded by colonel (then) Spas Chilingirov, was supposed to capture the village of Tsarevo (now Delchevo, North Macedonia). The 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade with the commander, Major General Georgiev, was supposed to capture Gorna Dzumaya (now the city of Blagoevgrad). The 13<sup>th</sup> Rila Infantry Regiment and the remaining two companies from the 26<sup>th</sup> Pernish Regiment were left in reserve. [6]

The other companies from the right and middle columns engaged in battle with the Ottoman border guard, liberating Tsarevo Selo. On this day (5<sup>th</sup> October) the main combat duty was that of the left column. With measured and accurate artillery fire, our warriors managed to break the Ottoman resistance at the village of Barakovo. In 1912, the Rila River was the border between the Principality of Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. The two columns made a flank attack and quickly overran both flanks of the Ottomans and they left their positions, retreating quickly. The Bulgarian squads head towards Gorna Dzumaya and at the end of the day they took control of it. For the next few days, the division stood still. On 6<sup>th</sup> October, the Thirteenth Infantry Regiment crossed the border. On 9<sup>th</sup> October, the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment occupied Mount Povien (elevation 1181). The Timoshenko division attacked the Ottoman units and captured Stracin. Several bloody battles ensued as part of the Ottoman forces attempted to stabilize their positions. The Bulgarian units carried out a counterattack and forced the enemy to retreat to Krupnik. [7]

The attempt of the Ottoman forces to force the left bank of the Struma river ended in failure as it was stopped by artillery fire and they were forced to retreat to the village of Serbinovo and as General Spepanović was in command he issued an order to General Todorov to continue the attack and captured Kochani. On 9<sup>th</sup> October, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade engaged the Ottoman Strum Corps and quickly captured the Oran Gorge, although Ottoman forces briefly captured Simitli. As a result of artillery fire and a successful counteroffensive by the Bulgarian units, the Ottoman forces' attempt to advance to the city of Dupnitsa was foiled. [8] On 11<sup>th</sup> October, in the battle for Kočani, the units of the Seventh Rila Division engaged in direct combat with the Ottoman 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Nizam Division and won a decisive victory, which secured a flank for the Serbian troops' advances towards

Kumanovo. Subsequently, the Nizam's division withdrew to Veles. Between October 12–13, the Battle of Krupnis took place, in which the 3rd Brigade defeated the Strum Corps and captured the position at the Kresnen Gorge. In the town of Shtip, the predominantly Bulgarian population joyfully welcomed the Bulgarian units and rejected the Ottoman rule.

### **The advance to Thessaloniki**

Since General Mikhail Savov felt unfriendly influence on the combat activity of the 7<sup>th</sup> Rila Infantry Division from the side of the Serbian command, he ordered General Todorov to very quickly organize the combat units of the division and head for the city of Thessaloniki, and the division Demir Hisar had to be overcome as well. Due to bad weather conditions, the movement of the division was delayed. It was not until 22<sup>nd</sup> October that the division began to advance and on 23<sup>rd</sup> October they neutralized the left rear guard, which aimed to ensure the retreat of the Strum Corps, which at that moment was preparing to be transferred by train to Thessaloniki. [9]

At the same time, the Greek army under the command of Prince Constantinos I quickly neutralized the few Ottoman forces at Elasona and Enidze Vardar, and practically the Ottoman combat units were surrounded by the allied forces. On 25<sup>th</sup> October, Prince Constantinos I held special negotiations with Hasan Tahsin Pasha. On 27<sup>th</sup> October, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade entered into battle with the last remaining units of the Strum Corps near the village of Aivatovo, which is located 12 kilometers from Thessaloniki. In the Battle of Aivatovo, all Ottoman resistance was finally broken. On 28<sup>th</sup> October, Prince Constantinos I entered Thessaloniki as the victor. At the same time, Major Georgi Atanasov was joyfully welcomed to the city. Tension arose between the Bulgarian and Greek parts. On 29<sup>th</sup> October, Prince Boris arrived in Thessaloniki and was greeted joyfully by the Bulgarians of Thessaloniki. Thanks to the courage and audacity of the glorious Seventh Rila Infantry Division, after almost a month of fierce fighting, it proved to be one of the most combat-capable divisions during the Balkan and Inter-Allied Wars. It achieved glorious victories for the unification of the Bulgarian lands. [10]

### **The Bulgarian shopi in the Seventh Rila Infantry Division**

The fighting ranks of the Seventh Rila Infantry Division were mostly Bulgarians-shopis people from the regions of Transko, Breznishko, Pernishko, including from the cities with a Bulgarian population – Bosilegrad, Pirot, Tsaribrod and so on. On the page of the State Agency "Archives" in the digital collection "Archives speak" digitized lists of the dead Bulgarian – expatriates from the Trna okolaia have been published. The list is long – 28 pages with names of those who fell for the freedom of Bulgaria. Thanks to these lists, we can learn the names of the heroes who fought fierce battles on the battlefields. [11]

### **The distinguished colonel Haralambi Toshkov**

Colonel Haralambi Grigorov Toshkov was born on 16<sup>th</sup> February, 1868 in the town of Trun. He graduated from the 10<sup>th</sup> grade of the Military School in Sofia. He initially served in the Second Reserve Regiment. He was the commander of a company of the 14<sup>th</sup> Macedonian Infantry Regiment during the Balkan War. After that, he commanded a company from the 54<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment that participated in the battles against the Kingdom of Serbia. After the outbreak of the First World War, he commanded the 41<sup>st</sup> Sofia Infantry Regiment, which was part of the First Sofia Infantry Division, better known in Bulgarian military historiography as the "Iron Sofia Division", which took part in battles in the Romanian campaign and on the Macedonian front in World War I. [12]

### **The personal impressions of an ordinary soldier**

In the book of George St. Georgiev – "One of the First Division. Memoirs of a participant", the author describes Colonel Haralambi Toshkov as: "Slim, bony, tall, with a black mustache and a small sharp beard [...]. Further on, more detailed information is given about the personal

*characteristics of Colonel Toshkov. unsurpassed ardor. Everything strong and captivating had gathered in the quietest, most humble, most humble man. [...] [13]*

Georgi Georgiev also describes the origin of the notable Colonel Toshkov [...] “*This Bulgarian was a Bulgarian. Everything from Bulgaria. Everything about Bulgaria. Although he was from Trančani, and not a Sofia shop, he was a real shop. He spoke to the Shopi as Shopi, because he felt himself, he himself was a Shopi person, because we were Shopi, a Sofia Regiment of Shopi, composed almost exclusively of Shopi, and those who were not, they also felt themselves! The commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Shopi regiment – shop! The commander of the 41<sup>st</sup> Shopi regiment – shop! Regiment for regiment! Shopi for shopi!*” [14]

This is how Georgiev describes Colonel Haralambi Toshkov in his book. In 1920, Colonel Toshkov was dismissed to the reserve. He died on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 1932 in the city of Sofia. Today, his grave is located in the Central Sofia Cemetery, plot № 4. [15] In his home town of Trun, there is still no memorial plaque or bust to attest to the veneration of his memory. Let's hope that this will happen in the future and we will appreciate General Haralambi Toshkov with dignity.

## Conclusion

The combat successes of the Seventh Rila Infantry Division are proof of the great courage and dedication of all officers and soldiers belonging to its units. At the cost of many adversities and bad weather conditions the division reached the city of Thessaloniki, breaking the Ottoman fighting units and their resistance. This is an important proof of the display of high fighting spirit and honor shown during the strategic battles for the Balkan Union. The traces left by Rila Infantry Division soldiers are clearly written in golden letters in the Bulgarian military history.

## Acknowledgments

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Secret annex to the treaty of friendship and alliance between the Kingdom of Bulgaria and the Kingdom of Serbia. CDA. F. 313K. Op. 1, a.e 2236. l. 6–7. Transcript. [See digital copy at: <http://isda.archives.government.bg:84/Process.aspx?type=Document&agid=41&flgid=5092254&ilgid=5107529&aelgid=10947532&dlgid=10640848>.

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## ПО СЛЕДИТЕ НА СЕДМА ПЕХОТНА РИЛСКА ДИВИЗИЯ 1912–1913 Г.

**Резюме:** Създадената с Указ № 88 на цар Фердинанд I Български Седма Пехотна рилска дивизия получава бойното си кръщение по време на Балканската война. Нейните подразделения участват в едни от най-важните стратегически боеве по пътя им към Солун. С цената на много лишения и несгоди по калните бойни полета, Рилици достигат до поставената им бойна задача. Голяма част от тях се доказват и по време на сраженията през Първата световна и Втората световна война. Нейните командири се прочуват в цяла Европа, като едни от най-добрите командири на XX век. Днес в град Дупница в чест на славната Седма Пехотна е кръстена улица. Поставени са също така множество паметни плочи, построени са военни паметници. Те са символи на вечната памет и признателност на българския народ.

**Ключови думи:** седма пехотна, рилци, военна история, сражения, баланска война, балкански съюз

**Assist. Prof. Antony Stanimirov, PhD**  
University of Library Studies and Information Technologies  
E-mail: a.stanimirov@unibit.bg